A Series of (Un?)Fortunate Circumstances
by TheRedDragon173

Summary

Kanda is the smartest guy in school, aloof and cold. Allen is the new kid, playful and mischievous; and something about him just gets on Kanda's nerves. They both have their own pain to hide, hearts hardened by time and cruel people. Will these two become unlikely friends, and perhaps... even more?

Notes

I started writing this work over on Fanfiction.net, and will continue to update there, too. So if you're starting to read this now, you're in for a wild ride, because I already have 48 chapters done, amounting to a little under 57000 words. This fic is very long already, and is nowhere near done. Unfortunately, and I do feel I should warn you of this ahead of time, I am notorious for being very sparse in my updates. (University sucks my life dry.) But! I will definitely finish this work, so if you're up for it, please come along! :)}
Prologue

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I don't own D.Gray-Man. (Obviously.)

I never really considered that things would turn out like this, you know. To me, life was always... pretty meaningless. Get up, train, eat, go to school, eat, do my homework, train, eat, take a shower, go to sleep... I never really thought there would ever be anything to break the monotonous nature of my life. But I guess that’s just how the world works, huh? It lulls you into a false sense of security, and then one day... WHAM! It just punches you right in the face.

All my life, I’d been waiting, without ever even realizing it, for... something. I never thought that there might be someone who felt the same, someone else like me. Not that you’d think the two of us have anything in common. The two of us, we’re like night and day, that damn moyashi and I.

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How is it, that someone so irritating, someone so infuriating, can turn out to be so similar to you? Why does the world have to work in such a way that the one guy in school you want to punch the living daylights out of is the only one who seems to understand you, and the way you feel?

Honestly, if just one month ago you would have told me that I’d end up going out with Yuu Kanda, of all people, I probably would have tried to check you into a mental institution, because obviously something isn’t working right upstairs. But now... I can honestly say that he means the world to me, and sometimes even I still wonder why. I guess that’s just the way things are. They do say the world works in mysterious ways, don’t they? And all it took was one moment in time, one glorious coincidence. Or a series of them, I guess.
“OY! Yuu!”

“Don’t call me that, you damned rabbit!” I yelled at the overexcited redhead. *It is way too early in the morning for this.*

“Did you hear the big news?” Lavi continued, unperturbed, “Apparently we’re getting a new transfer student – from England! How cool is that? His name’s Allen Walker, and he’s apparently some kind of musical genius.”

I sighed, not even questioning Lavi’s well-informed-ness. As annoying as he may be, I have to hand it to him, he does have a knack for finding things out, *especially* if they’re no concern of his. “It just so happens that I did know we had a transfer student coming. It also happens that I really don’t care. Honestly, I really don’t care.” But of course that wasn’t enough to shut him up.

“I wonder if he’ll be in any of our classes? … Hey, Yuu,” he mused, while I growled at him, “are you ok? You look kinda… not ok.”

“I’m fine,” I stated matter-of-factly, “I just had a late night getting all that damn homework done for that fucking AP Chemistry class. Shitty Kamui…”

“Ah man, that’s it? And here I was hoping you were having love troubles or something, and I could take this opportunity to give you some sage advice…”

“If you don’t shut up right this second, I swear I will kill you. And besides,” I scoffed, “what do you know about love, anyway? Last time I checked, you’ve never once had any luck with a girl. Even now, the one you have a crush on is the little sister of a deranged, psychopath mad scientist. How exactly do you intend to give *sage advice*?”

“Yuu, be gentler,” the eyepatched teen whined, “you’re way too mean. No one’s ever gonna like you with that attitude.”

“Who says I want them to?” I snapped. We had finally reached the entrance to the school, and we made our way up the stairs and inside. Honestly, I’d really prefer to ditch the red-headed moron, but unfortunately we live near each other, and our families are friends, so no matter how much I might try to hide, he always finds me. And I’m not a big fan of hiding, so I just sort of have to grin and bear it. Not that I grin – I scowl.

We separated in the hallway to head to our first period classes. He had Journalism, and I had AP English, which he took last year. We’re both seniors, in our final year of High School before reaching that much longed-for beacon of hope, graduation. Lavi says he wants to be a Historian. I have absolutely no idea what I want to be.
“So these are the classes you’ll be taking, and the classrooms are listed right next to them. I understand from your transfer papers that you have completed classes much harder than those offered at this school, so we organized your schedule to make it as challenging as possible, as per your request. And you shouldn’t have to worry about catching up on work that they’ve already done, seeing as how it’s only the second week of the semester. Even the AP kids have barely settled in to their classes. I’m sure you’ll be able to make friends in no time. Do you have any questions?”

“Uuuhhhhh…” I rifled through the stack of papers, white bangs hanging into my eyes. “Is there anyone that I have all of my classes with? It would be nice to stick close to them; they might be able to help me.”

“Well,” the secretary thought out loud, looking through something on her computer screen, “there is one boy – his name is Yuu Kanda.”

“Is he Japanese?”

“As a matter of fact, he is!” The secretary smiled. It looked kind of depressing though – she looked like she hadn’t slept on a week. “Will there be anything else, then?”

“No, thank you for your help, Ms. Lotto.”

“Oh, dear me, just call me Miranda, all the children do.”

“All right. Thank you, and have a nice day, Ms. Miranda.”

“You too…” She waved, smiling in a dazed fashion. Is she ok?

Sighing, I left the Main Office and began to make my way towards the classroom where AP English would be held. A quick glance at my watch told me it was only 7:45, which meant I still had 15 minutes. Hopefully, plenty of time to find the darn place. Why did new schools always have to be so big? I felt a bit of nausea well of inside me, but I breathed deeply, and it went away. *This is nothing but another performance; there is nothing to fear.*

Thanks to the insane nature of my foster father, Cross Marian, not to mention his insane debts, we had had to move, again. Even though I was used to the nomad lifestyle from the time I spent in the circus when I was younger, this move had been particularly hard for me. We’d been in England, in London, for two and a half years, and I had really gotten used to it. Even more than that, I’d grown to love it; the winding alleyways, the bustling boulevards, the creative energy that the city just seemed to produce form absolutely nowhere. I had even begun to think that we would be able to stay. But no, because my Master gambles, and he gambles badly. So we were on the road again, and this time it was America, the land of the free, supposedly. Free from his old debts, my Master seems to hope. But I just feel trapped. Not by him of course. I haven’t seen hide nor hair of him since we arrived. That’s actually why I’m a week late coming to school here. I had to find the house, and
unpack everything, all on my own. And I have a *really* bad sense of direction.

Whatever. New school, new people; who cares? The piano is the only outlet, the only *freedom*, I need. Lucky for me, the people who sold us their house left a grand piano in it. Sure it’s old and out of tune, but that’s a weekend project, at most, and it’ll be worth it, because it’s a beauty.

Finally I arrived in front of the classroom, and found there were already a couple students milling around inside. I stood in the doorway, uncertain. Should I go in? Where would I sit? I wouldn’t want to accidentally take someone else’s seat. So I guess I should wait for the teacher? But what about until then? I’d forgotten how stressful being the new kid could be…

“Hey, Moyashi, get out of the way.”

I whipped around to find myself facing a guy that looked like he stepped straight out of some samurai drama and only bothered to change his clothes. He was (assumedly) Japanese, really tall, well-built, with a long black pony tail pinned high up on his head.

“Hey, are you lost? Or are you deaf? I said *move*.”

Suddenly I snapped out of my reverie. “Who are you calling a *bean sprout*?! I’m not *that* short! And honestly, could you *be* any ruder? We’ve never even met before, and you’re already insulting me!”

“Remind me again why should care? You’re in my way and I want you to move. Also, you’re damn loud, and it’s *really* early in the morning,” he drawled.

Fuming, I stormed into the room, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of moving aside to allow him in first. I turned around and watched him come in rolling his eyes and sit down in the back of the room. Then I found myself faced with a dilemma. I had come inside already, so I couldn’t just leave. But what should I do until the teacher arrived? I didn’t particularly want to just stand awkwardly in the corner, but I didn’t want to approach anyone either. Fortunately, my problem soon solved itself as a green-haired girl in a miniskirt and thigh-high boots made her way towards me.

“Hi! I’m Lenalee Lee. You must be Allen Walker, right?” She smiled kindly at me.

Relief swept through me. “Yes, nice to meet you, Lenalee,” I smiled back, extending a hand in greeting. She shook it with both of hers, and I took an instant liking to the girl.

“I saw your little argument with Kanda – we all did. And on behalf of the class, I would like to relay our awe of you for standing up to him. And on behalf of the school, I would like to ask you not to take it personally, because he’s always like that, and the rest of us aren’t.”

I chuckled, “I’ll bet he’s popular, though.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Because he’s totally got the bad boy charm. Judging from what you’ve hold me, he’s the type that that doesn’t like anyone, but that a lot of people secretly like or admire. And with a body like that, who can blame ‘em?”

Her eyes narrowed. “Not that it’s really my place, but are you gay? Just.. judging by that last comment, I kinda thought…”

I laughed again, “People seem to think that, but no. I am 100% heterosexual.” That was a lie – I was bisexual, and very well aware of it, but no way was I gonna tell *her* that. She may seem nice, but I’ve seen the evil people’s hearts can hold.
Lenalee blushed, “Oh, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” I shrugged, “innocent mistake. Anyway, you said his name was Kanda? As in, Yuu Kanda?”

“Yes, that’s right. But how’d you know his full name?”

“I asked the secretary in the Main Office if there was anyone who had all the same classes as me, and she said he did,” I sighed, inclining my head in his direction.

“Wow, you have Kanda’s schedule? That’s a lot of tough classes. I only have him in two – here and in AP Chem.”

“Cool, then I guess we’ll be together in those two,” I smiled at her, “should make them a bit more bearable.”

She laughed. “Yes, I think so. In fact, I have an empty seat next to me in both classes. Would you like the honor of filling them?” She winked, jokingly.

“Madam, I would love to,” I stated solemnly, accompanying my words with a mock bow. Then, taking her hand and laughing, the two of us went and sat down, at which point she began to fill me in on what they’d done until then. Our conversation was cut short as the teacher entered the room and put us to work, but I knew we would continue talking in the next break. Maybe this school wasn’t going to be so bad…
That damn moyashi… Because of him, I’m pretty sure Lenalee is mad at me now. Which means Lavi will be mad at me. Great, just great. Not that it really matters what they think, it’s just that when Lavi’s unhappy about something, he’s even more of a pest than usual. And that’s really saying something.

Whatever. It’ll all die down in a couple days or so. But I mean, what was I supposed to do? He was showing me up in AP Calculus – I couldn’t have that.

So at this point you’re probably wondering what the Hell I’m going on about, so here goes.

After AP English, my next class is AP Calculus, which I was pretty annoyed to notice the damn moyashi follow me to. Since then I’ve unfortunately been forced to realize that we have every damn class together. Which is, I must admit, sort of astounding. As much as I hate to admit it, that means he must be pretty smart. But that honestly only pisses me off even more.

Anyway, we were in class, doing practice and review problems. Pretty easy stuff. After we were done, we were supposed to raise our hands for the next set. And he finished his problems first. That doesn’t happen. No one finishes before I do. That’s the way it’s always been, and that’s the way I intend for it to stay. Which now means I’m going to have to increase my study time, damn it.

And at the end of the class, seeing as how the beansprout and I were pretty much racing each other with the problems, the teacher called for two volunteers in a contest to solve a problem in front of the class. Now, I’m not usually the active, participates-in-class type, but my pride was at stake. So, the white-haired geezer and I raised our hands and got called out. And he finished first. Not by much, mind you, just a couple seconds. But still.

And afterwards, he just smirks at me. He *smirks*. And what does he say?

“Guess you’re not as great as you thought, huh?”

So I decked him. I got sent to the principal’s office for it, and got detention to boot, but it was worth it. I just suckerpunched that mother straight to the ground. And damn did it feel good. Plus, I’m pretty sure I upped my street cred.

Still, it sucks that Lenalee is gonna be mad at me over this. She’s pretty much the only person whose opinion I actually care about. But no matter what she says, I was in the right. *I was in the right.*

I sighed. I was at home now, doing my homework for tomorrow, and even here that damn kid is on my mind. I wonder why? I guess… it might be because of his arm. I noticed it in school – his left arm is covering in a glove. But I’m probably over-thinking this. And why am I thinking about it anyway?! I should go train – that always helps calm me down. And I have to calm down. I have an entire year left with that brat, or a semester at the very least, so I have to learn to at least tolerate him.
enough that I don’t hit him every day in class. That’ll probably be worse for me than him, as far as
permanent records and college applications go. Honestly, why do things have to be like this? I miss
Alma… And that damn moyashi reminds me too much of him…
“Oooowwwwww…” I groaned, pressing the ice pack clutched tightly in my hand to my chin. *I am soo never going to boast, or egg him on ever again.*

Lenalee sat in front of me, her eyes wide and concerned. “I can’t believe Kanda did that to you. He’s had a history of threatening violence, and he’s not afraid to beat up people who try to hurt him, but this? Just going after someone who didn’t do anything and suckerpunching him in class? I know he’s done crazy things before, but this is just ridiculous! Honestly! He’s lucky he didn’t get suspended!”

“Yeah, well, it wasn’t entirely his fault. I did sorta goad him into it. I had it coming.”

“Still! He does martial arts! He could have done serious damage! He seriously needs to learn to control his impulses!” She said fiercely. Then her eyes softened again, and she petted my hair gently. “I’m sorry. Here I am, going on and worrying about Kanda, when I should be comforting you. Are you gonna be ok? Do you need to visit a doctor?”

I laughed softly, “No, don’t worry. Give it a couple days, and I’ll be completely fine. I’ve had worse,” I added with a smile.

“Really?” She seemed quite surprised, and if anything, even more concerned.

“Yeah. Not punches, per se, but I’ve had some bad falls and accidents and such,” I told her, doing my best to smile reassuringly.

“Oh, well, if you’re sure…” She still seemed uncertain. Suddenly, an idea seemed to pop into her head. “That’s right! Where do you live? Should we call your parents to come pick you up?”

I flinched, but I don’t think she saw. Honestly, I can’t imagine Cross coming to get me. But if they managed to get in touch with him, and that’s a pretty big if, whether he came or not, he’d be *pissed* at me for interrupting whatever date or game or whatever he was in the middle of when they called. If he wasn’t doing anything, Hell, even if he was just sitting at home, bored, he’d still yell. Of course, it wasn’t like I could tell her any of this. So I just settled for, “Nope, I’m fine. I can make it home on my own, I won’t die on the road there” accompanied by a grin and a wink.

Just then a red-head with an eye patch covering his right eye walked in. The other eye was a gorgeous emerald green, and was brimming with what I thought was feigned concern.

“Hey there, you ok, Allen?” The strange teen asked, “I’m Lavi Bookman, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you,” I responded uncertainly, “and I’m getting better; thanks.”

He sat down next to Lenalee and scrutinized my face. I lifted the ice pack off for a moment to give him a better view and he whistled.
“Wow! That is definitely gonna bruise. Yuu really did a number on you, didn’t he?”

“Yeah, that’s for sure,” I chuckled, “but did you just call him Yuu? I was under the impression everyone just called him Kanda.”

“Well, Kanda prefers that, and mostly it’s advisable to go along with what Kanda prefers. But Lavi here enjoys taunting him – I swear he’s turned running away from Mugen into an art form. Sometimes I wonder if he has a death wish,” Lenalee informed me, rolling her eyes at the grinning red-head.

“What’s a ‘Mugen’?” I asked, confused.

“It’s his sword,” Lenalee answered.

“He has a sword? And he carries it around?”

“He has multiple, actually.” Lavi responded, tossing a pen up and down while leaning back in his chair, “because he practices kendo. And he’s pretty good at it – from what I know, he has scholarship offers from 17 different colleges due to his achievements in competitions. He also has an upstanding invitation from the International Kendo Association, as well as both the Japanese and American Olympic Kendo teams. But Mugen’s his favorite. I think it’s some sort of heirloom or something.”

“Wow. You know quite a lot about Kanda,” I told him, raising my eyebrows.

Lavi shrugged. “I make it my business to know a lot about everything. I wanna be a Historian, ya see?” He grinned at me, and the pen he’d been tossing about bounced off his head and onto the ground, from where he retrieved it with a shrug.

“Right. Well, what about me? Do you know anything about me?” I asked grinning mischievously, though inside I was really hoping the answer would be “no”.

Lavi shrugged again. “Not much. You’re from London, you play the piano, Marian Cross is your foster father… That’s about it.”

“I see.”


“Yes; do you know him?” I asked, worried.

“Not really, but my brother Kamui does. He’s our AP Chem teacher. Apparently they both belong to some group of international scholars called the Black Order.”

“Are there members of the Black Order here?” I raised my eyebrows in concern. “Better not tell Cross that – he’ll high-tail it out of town faster than you can say ‘gone with the wind’. He’s not a big fan of the Order – he doesn’t like anything that tries to tie him down in any way.”

“I see. I’ll keep quiet about it then, and tell my brother to do the same,” Lenalee smiled at me reassuringly.

“Thanks,” I grinned, “I’d prefer not to have to move again yet.”

After that we continued chatting for a while, and then eventually ended up leaving the school together. I found that Lavi, though a bit overly energetic, was a pretty cool guy. His taste in music
was good, and he had an interesting sense of humor. I kind of got the feeling that he and Lenalee might like each other – I wish them the best; they’d probably suit each other well.

I got home around 5 in the afternoon, and found the house dark and empty. As my first order of business, I made myself pasta. After that, I did my homework. By the time I was done it was a little past nine, so I took a shower and had myself a late night snack. After brushing my teeth and getting everything ready for the next day, I went up to my room and sat down in front of the mirror with a picture of my adoptive father.

“Hey, Mana,” I whispered, “I had a good day today. I’m pretty sure I’ve managed to make some friends. Lavi seems like a fun guy that I might be able to hang out with, and Lenalee is really nice.” I stared at the silent picture, and felt tears begin to prickle my eyes. “I still miss you though, Mana. I know you told me to keep walking, to keep moving forward, but that’s pretty hard to do without you here.” I waited for a response but of course got none, and with a sigh I replaced the picture on my desk and went to bed, my cheeks still wet with tears.
The Day After

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV
Warning: underage smoking

I just knew this was gonna happen.

Lavi had spent the entire morning bitching at me about my treatment of the moyashi. That damn rabbit… And as for Lenalee… She just glared at me, then swept right past with her chin held high. Jeez… I know I went too far with the moyashi; I shouldn’t have hit him, no matter how much he wound me up. Well… I shouldn’t have done it in class. At the very least I should have waited until the end of the day. But I still don’t see what the big deal is. I mean, so yeah, I punched a kid; but he deserved it! Why should I get punished for it?

I slammed my locker shut irritably, and saw a freshman nearly jump out of their skin. Glancing around, I noticed with a sigh and a roll of my eyes that there was no one within 5 feet of me. My suspicions were confirmed – apparently, the rumor mill was turning, and the story had already gotten around the whole school, despite the fact that the event in question had only occurred yesterday. No doubt it had ballooned, too, into a story about a tragic prince getting beaten up by a ruthless gangster. I really hate people…

I strode through the hallways, watching with some amusement as the crowd of students parted in front of me as if they were the Red Sea, and I was Moses. People always avoided me, but this was sorta new. Actually, I could get used to this… No more struggling to get to my classes on time, at the very least. Combat boots stomping on the floor, I made my way to my AP Calculus class, wondering whether today would be as eventful as yesterday.

Putting my books down, I leaned back in my chair and crossed my arms. My eyes flickered over to the other corner of the room, where the beansprout was being surrounded by a crowd of people. “Che.” I looked away angrily. Just like him… Always smiling, always surrounded by people, always happy. At least on the outside. I glanced back for a moment, then away again. Turning, I looked out the window, propping my head up on my arm as I did so, my curled fingers covering my mouth. Then, realizing that that particular pose was a little too introspective, and not enough Kanda, I crossed my arms again. But my eyes remained fixed on a hawk that circled outside, diving and climbing in the air.

I wish I could be like that. Free to roam wherever I please. Now, obviously I know that the life of a hawk is not all joy. It doesn’t take AP Biology to know that, not that I hadn’t taken it. All creatures had their problems, not only as a species, but as individuals, as well. Alma…

The teacher came in just at that moment. His name is Bak Chang, and he’s hopeless. A total scatterbrain. It’s not that he’s an idiot, it’s just… he usually can’t quite utilize his brain correctly. Like yesterday. I smirked at the memory.

“Kanda! You… you… go sit down.”

“Allen… you go see the nurse.”
Returning to the present, I saw Bak up in front of the class, informing everyone that he wanted to check homework, make sure it was all done. With a long-suffering sigh, I pulled out the papers scrawled full of numbers and operations. When he got to me, he ruffled through the papers, checking my answers quickly.

“Perfect as always, Kanda,” he nodded.

I waited, expecting him to move on. But he just stared at me quizzically and sighed.

“If it all possible, I would like to avoid a repeat of yesterday, ok?” He sighed again, pinching the bridge of his nose with his fingers. “Also, I’d like to see you after class – there’s something we need to discuss,” he then started suddenly, as if realizing something, and continued hastily, “you’re not in trouble; I just wanna talk something over.” And with that, he left, only to begin grumbling when he figured out that the person behind me didn’t have their work done.

The rest of the class passed pretty uneventfully. I think after yesterday, he was trying his best to prevent a situation in which the moyashi and I would have cause to compete, and potentially end up in another fight. Afterwards, as the rest of the class filed out, I made my way up to the front of the room, to Bak Chang’s desk.

“So? What is it?” I asked gruffly.

He studied me for a moment, then stood up and leaned himself against the front of his desk, mirroring my own pose exactly.

“Actually, I was going to ask you that very same question.”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “What do you mean?”

He sighed again; he seems to be doing that a lot recently. Is it my fault? No way…

“Kanda. You’ve never had a lot of friends, and you’re always surly and angry-looking. But I’ve never seen you actually lose it like that.” He looked me straight in the eyes. “I’m worried about you. Is there something wrong?”

I clenched my jaw and breathed out through my nose, keeping my temper in check.

“No. Thank you for your concern, Mr. Chang, but I’m fine.” I continued meeting his gaze; I didn’t even blink. “May I go now?”

He looked at me sadly, but then, with a shake of his head, he motioned that I could leave. With a nod, I acquiesced.

“What am I gonna do with him?” I thought I heard him mutter as he sat back down in his chair, and I left the room.

I stormed through the slowly emptying hallways with murder in my eyes, glaring at anyone and anything that came within my line of vision. I had my lunch period next, which meant I could do whatever I wanted; all of my homework was done, after all. So I left the school building. I went outside, in the back.

It was my favorite places to be during the day. I’d already carefully surveyed the area, and had figured out that it was a blind spot on campus. There were no windows or security cameras from
which I could be seen. Of course, it’s not like I’m the only one who knows this.

“Hey, kiddo. You look upset,” I heard from my right. Turning, I was completely unsurprised to find myself face to face with Tykki Mikk. He was leaning with one shoulder against the wall, smoking a cigarette.

“Just a stupid teacher poking his nose into stuff that’s none of his damn business,” I sighed, placing my back and one foot against the wall.

“Would this have anything to do with the fiasco from yesterday that I keep hearing about?” I looked at him with a wry grin. “That would depend quite strongly on what you’ve heard.”

He laughed and offered me a cigarette, which I gladly accepted and lit.

“Well, the way I heard it, you and a bunch of your thug underlings beat up 10-year-old girl.”

I groaned, “I just knew the story would get distorted.”

“To be quite honest, I did find it kinda unlikely, for a lot of reasons,” Tykki shrugged, “so what really did happen?”

“I suckerpunched the new kid in my AP Calculus class.”

Tykki just stared at me for a moment, mouth hanging open. I’m surprised the cigarette didn’t fall out. Then he just doubled over laughing.

For a moment I glared at him in annoyance, but his laughter was contagious, and I ended up chuckling, myself. “I guess it sounds pretty bad when I put it like that.”

“Are you kidding me?! It sounds hilarious! That is so much better than the version I heard,” he managed, finally straightening up, still grinning, and wiping tears from his eyes.

After that, the two of us stayed there, smoking and chatting for another 20 minutes, when I regretfully informed him that I had to go.

He copied my motions and crushed his cigarette. “No worries; I have class too, remember?”

We waved goodbye in the hallway and made our way to our next classes. I popped in two sticks of mint gum to get rid of the cigarette smell. I was under 18, so I could get in serious trouble with the teachers if they found out, and that would be a real bother. I wondered if Tykki did the same.

Honestly, I’m not too sure how Tykki and I became friends, if you can call us that. We don’t really talk much, but he’s just about the only person I’ve ever met that I can actually get along with. Except for Alma, of course…

I was so lost in thought, I didn’t even notice anyone approaching.

“Eewwwwww… Dude, you smell like cigarettes.”

“And what’s it to you?!” I growled, turning around to find myself face-to-face with the disgusted face of the moyashi. My eyes widened just a smidge. After yesterday, I couldn’t believe he was even able to talk to me.

“Look, I live around adults who smoke, too. Taking more baths can really help with that.”
My eyes narrowed. “I take plenty of baths, thank you very much.” My eyes flickered up to his hair. “But you could do with a few more, yourself. Maybe then you could wash the white out of your hair.”

He glared at me. “It’s natural.”

I rolled my eyes. “Yeah, right. Now, if you’d be so kind as to leave, that would be great.”

“Why should I be kind to you? You punched me, remember?”

“That’s right, I did. And the longer you stay here, pissing me off, the closer I get to punching you again!” I hissed, stepping forward.

Just then, as he was opening his mouth to respond, the bell rang, the door right next to us swung open, and students began filing out. Catching sight of the two of us, squared off with each other, they immediately began to whisper, pointing.

“Che. Saved by the bell, moyashi,” I growled.

“Don’t assume I needed saving, BaKanda,”

“… What did you just call me?”

“Ba-Kan-da,” he articulated, seeming quite pleased with himself.

“Oh, that is it!” I was just about to pounce at him when our AP Chemistry teacher, Kamui, suddenly appeared between us.

“Is there a problem, gentlemen?” He asked, light glinting off the frames of his glasses.

The two of us glared at each other, but replied with simply “No”, and strode past him into the classroom.
After all the excitement of the first two days, I was pretty surprised to reach the weekend without another incident. Apparently Kanda decided I wasn’t worth his time and effort. That, or he just doesn’t wanna get into any more trouble because of me.

Anyway, things definitely went uphill for me after getting punched in the face. It turns out, I was right about Kanda being pretty popular. And because he normally doesn’t give people the time of day, the fact that I actually managed to stir up the Ice Prince has made me go from “freaky new kid” to “mysterious, cool guy” in just the course of a week. It looks like I picked the right person to piss off. I honestly feel like I could maybe learn to like this place now.

Of course, all of this is not to say that Kanda and I are getting along, or that “fame has gone to my head”, as they say. I honestly don’t think I’m ever going to be able to be anywhere within 5 feet of the guy without the two of starting into a screaming match that will probably eventually broil down to a full-fledged fist fight. And I wouldn’t say I’ve become popular, either, just accepted. And that is so much more important.

Lenalee asked me today if I wanted to go to a party tonight, but I turned her down, telling her that I wanted to fix our grand piano. And that’s how Friday night finds me on the floor of my living room, tools and things scattered all around me while I attempt to tune the darn thing. It’s pretty frustrating work, but I know it’ll be worth it in the end.

Not that I know what sort of pieces I should practice, really. My old piano teacher in London, Noise Marie, obviously didn’t follow me here. We exchanged Skype addresses before I came, but with time differences and such, it’ll probably be pretty difficult to actually talk face-to-face. And giving me piece titles through e-mails just isn’t the same. Maybe I’ll record my playing, and send the recordings to him. Hopefully, he’ll be able to help me out somewhat like that. Still, it would be better to find myself a new piano teacher here, though that may be difficult.

Most piano teachers have ridiculously strict rules about the way you comport yourself and even what you wear when you play the piano. Marie wasn’t like that. He accepted that I refused to take off my left glove, or ever wear short sleeved shirts. He never asked why it was – he just accepted my limitations and let them be. Most people wouldn’t; they would ask, and keep asking until you told. I guess having a disability makes a person more accepting towards others. Marie went deaf after an accident when he was younger. It was only a few years ago, 20 years after the original accident, that he was able to get surgery which restored his hearing. And yet, despite his deafness, he still managed to become one of the most esteemed pianists in the entire world. Getting the chance to learn from him was truly an honor.

Hours passed, but eventually, by 11 p.m., I’d finally managed it. Feeling quite pleased with myself, I cleaned up the mess I’d made, and sat down to play. I let the emotions of the past few weeks wash over me, and just let them spill out onto the keys. Before I knew it, I was running around to find the blank sheet music pages, and filling them in with the melodies that my fingers etched out. When I’d finished, and played my new composition through 7 times, just to make sure it was absolutely
perfect, at least for the moment, I looked up at the clock. My eyes widened. It was 5 in the morning; the sun as already coming up!

Getting up, I groaned as I stretched. I hadn’t even realized it while I was playing, but I’d stayed up all night, and the lack of sleep began to take its toll. Deciding I would shower once I woke up, I flopped down on the couch, and promptly fell asleep.

I woke up 10 hours later from a strange dream, which I proceeded to write down in my Dream Journal. I’d started keeping it 6 years ago, when I realized how many of my dreams seemed to center themselves around the same figures and situations.

Generally, they appeared like vague memories, from what almost seemed to me to be a previous life. The dreams tended to involve large, floating monsters, and a group of people (me among them) who had to fight and destroy them. Occasionally I also saw weird people, too, with grey skin, who also appeared to count amongst my enemies. Well, sometimes. At other times I treated them like friends. I don’t really understand why.

But today I hadn’t dreamed of monsters – I’d dreamed of lotus blossoms, and a tall, dark samurai. I swear he looked almost like Kanda. Honestly, if he’s appearing in my dreams now, I’ve been spending way too much time thinking about him. Though, come to think of it, I’ve seen the samurai in my dreams before. He’s almost always there, actually; supporting me from the shadows. I guess I’m just associating him with Kanda because Kanda looks like he belongs in some sort of Japanese drama about the Tokugawa Shogunate. That, or in a kimono at an anime convention.

Still, it was a nice dream. It left me sorta sad, but at least I didn’t have to relive the night I lost Mana in my dreams again. I really hate those nights.

Sighing, I decided I’d get my homework done today, so that I’d have Sunday free. But first, a snack.
“I’m home!” I called as I stepped through the door. There was no answer, obviously – there never is. Kinda makes me wonder why I even say it. Sitting down on the chair near the door, I proceeded to remove my shoes and put them away. I then made my way past the entrance hall and into the living room, where, with a sigh, I dropped my book bag and slumped down onto the couch.

My eyes roamed over the room. Everything was exactly as I’d left it that morning. Which means no one’s been home, I realized. Don’t know why I’m surprised…

With a roll of my eyes, I pushed myself up and proceeded to make my way into the kitchen. Soon enough I was cooking soba.

Soba was my favorite meal. It reminded me of home, a bit, and my family. Not that I’d really ever known them. My parents died in a house fire when I was 4, and I was brought up by old friends of theirs. That’s how I met Alma. Alma…

I scowled. You are not going to cry. You ran out of tears years ago, remember? Realizing the soba was finished, I sat down at the table to eat. I then cleaned up afterwards. It’s better to wash the dishes right after you eat, that way you don’t have them weighing on your mind all day.

Alma had thought differently. He had believed in living in the moment, having fun now, and leaving responsibilities until they damn near beat your door down. But maybe it was better that way. He hadn’t lived long, but at least he had thoroughly enjoyed the time he’d had…

Alma’s death… I felt my heart rate speed up, and my breath began to come in shallow gasps. I gripped the counter as I slowly slipped to the ground. Nononono! Stop thinking! STOP STOP STOP! Quick, think of something else; ANYTHING! I glanced around in my state of near-panic and noticed a star-shaped magnet on the fridge. The sight of it reminded me of the tattoo that the damn moyashi had over his left eye. Who even gets a tattoo on their face, anyway? And he’s under 18, isn’t he? What kind of parent/guardian lets their kid get a facial tattoo?! I mean, dying their hair white, or wearing steampunk clothes is one thing, but tattoos are permanent! I mean sure, I have one, too, but that’s different! Mine’s on my chest, not on my face!

It came as a bit of a shock to realize that I’d managed to avoid having an anxiety attack by thinking of the young geezer. Sighing, I got up off the ground and made my way towards my room. When I was like this, when I was feeling this unbalanced, other than kendo, very few things could actually help. And the others… well, let’s just say they’re things I’d prefer to avoid.

I ended up spending a grand total of 4 hours in the dojo. I was actually pretty lucky to find a house with a traditional dojo in it in a suburb in the US, but apparently the guy who lived here before me was a Japanese nut who ended up moving to Japan, fulfilling his dream. Good for him. Honestly, people amaze me sometimes. How far they’ll go for something so stupid…

Not that he didn’t go far… I clutched my chest and told myself to breath slowly. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out. With a sigh I left the dojo, and made a beeline for the bathroom. A quick shower was enough
to raise my tension level even higher, as there’s really nothing you can do in a shower except think. So afterwards I hurried to get my homework done. I was lucky I didn’t have much, and what I did have was pretty easy. I’d study on Sunday; right now, I needed my cure.

After everything was done and put away, I made sure all the doors were locked, all the windows were shut, all the blinds were drawn, and all the lights were off. Then, in the darkness of my room, I lit a candle, and with the relief building inside me before I even lit the joint, I felt my mouth curve into a shaky smile.

Now… Off to dream land…
The weekend had come and gone. I’d played the piano for the vast majority of it, reveling in the feeling of being surrounded by music. I played pieces from all different eras and composers, and a fair few that I just came up with on the fly. Sure, I had to do my homework and study a bit, but for the most part, the weekend had been marvelous. The fact that Cross still hadn’t made it home only made it all the better.

And now it was Monday, and I was sitting in the AP English classroom, waiting for the bell to ring. Lenalee had alerted me via text message that she wasn’t feeling well, and wouldn’t be coming today, and had asked that I take notes for her. I had, of course, gladly acquiesced.

I glanced up to notice Kanda walking through the door. I frowned, expecting my quiet morning to go all to Hell. But nothing happened. He went straight to his seat, pulled out his stuff, and leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed. I noticed that his shirt was pretty tight on him – it displayed his 6-pack perfectly.

Blushing slightly, I turned away quickly. Why did the worst types of people always have to look the best? It just wasn’t fair! It also wasn’t fair that I had to be attracted to that body type. Suddenly I froze. Attracted to him? Oh no, I wasn’t going down that road. I’d been there, done that, and I knew how it would end. Kanda was the guy who’d punched me for showing him up in a math class. Who knows what he’d do to me if he thought I might like him? (Well, I mean, the Devil might know – I’m pretty sure Kanda’s his offspring.)

Luckily my train of thought was interrupted by the ringing bell and the teacher. After that, I was too busy taking notes to think about Kanda.

Lunch was enjoyable. I had been quite pleased to find the week before that Lavi, Lenalee, and I had the same lunch period, so we were able to sit together. Incidentally, Kanda had the same lunch period, too, but I’ve never seen him in the lunch room.

“Hey, Allen!” Lavi waved at me from the table, grinning, as I walked over. I was carrying 3 platters piled high with all sorts of different food. The lunch system here is pretty cool. There’s a down payment every month, and after that, you eat however much you want each day. And the food’s fresh, too. You order it from the cook, Jerry. I think he likes me, because I eat a lot.

I sat down, and got to work. Lavi raised an eyebrow.

“Hungry again, Allen?”

“Always,” I answered, after swallowing a fish fillet whole.

The amount I eat tends to freak people out, but they get used to it after a while. Honestly, I don’t
really get why I’m so hungry all the time, either. I mean, I eat as much as an elephant, but I never gain a pound. Still, not gonna question it. I guess I must just have a really strong metabolism.

“Hey, have you seen Yuu-chan today?”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “Kanda? Yeah, I have AP English with him, as well as everything else. Why?”

“He didn’t answer any of my texts over the weekend.”

“Does he usually?”

“Well, he tends to send me a message somewhere along the lines of ‘Shut up, baka usagi!’ but I didn’t even get a ‘moron’ out of him this time.”

“Isn’t that a good thing? Honestly, I don’t know how you can stand him.”

“Most people don’t,” Lavi grinned, “but I’ve known Yuu for years. And sure, he’s a little rough around the edges, but he’s a good person at heart.”

“Are we really talking about the same person here? The dude who punched me in math class?”

“Surprisingly; yes!” Lavi laughed, “Seriously, though, he’s not so bad once you get to know him.”

“How can you be so sure?” I pressed, doubtful.

“Because he saved my life once.”

“What?!” My mouth fell open in shock; luckily it was empty in that moment.

“Yeah. I dragged him into the city to go clubbing, right? Honestly, though, I’m pretty sure the only reason he came was to escape his doting foster father, Tiedo. But anyway, we were at a club, and I started hitting on this gorgeous blonde girl, who turned out to be the girlfriend of a very bad-tempered drug dealer. So the guy came up to me, and he and his cronies were gonna beat me up, but then Yuu beat them up! Now sure, you could argue that Yuu just plain likes picking fights, but I think he did that to protect me.

“So even if he is pretty cold, his heart’s in the right place,” Lavi smiled at me encouragingly, “You should try talking to him again. Just, this time without the pride. That tends to tick him off. Then again, anything can tick him off, so…”

“I get it. But I don’t think the two of us are ever going to get along.”

“Well, who knows?” He was silent for a moment. “I still think there’s something wrong with him, though.”

“Hear, hear!”

Lavi rolled his eyes. “That’s not what I meant. I mean he seems… off, somehow. Honestly, it was the fact that he punched you that finally made me notice it, but it’s been getting worse for some time now.”

“So he hasn’t always been this crazy?”

“Believe it or not; no! One time when I was at his house I actually found a picture of him when he was around 8 years old with another boy, and they were laughing. He started yelling when I asked
him about it, though…”

“Huh. I can’t really imagine Kanda with any expression other than a scowl.”

“Well, I mean, he does scowl a lot. I bet he’ll have forehead lines by the time he’s 25.”

I laughed at that, “Yeah, probably.” We ate silently for a while, and then I spoke up again. “Do you wanna do anything this weekend?”

“Sure!” Lavi’s mouth split into the widest grin I’d seen so far. “Are we talking about a party?”

“Well, I was thinking more along the lines of hanging out at the mall or something, but…”

“Oh, no, the mall’s cool, too! They have an F.Y.E., a Spencer’s, and a Hot Topic, plus a bunch of other stuff.”

“Are those your favorite stores?”

“No – that’s Half-Priced Books. But they are basically the only places other than Halloween stores where you can get eye patches.”

“Right. So… Saturday cool? Maybe around 1?”

“Yeah, sure! I’d say to invite Lenalee, too… but her brother’s kinda crazy. Still, we could try it.”

“Why not?” I smiled.

After that, we went on to talk about literature and our favorite authors. I found out that Lavi did AP English last year, and he offered to help me out with anything I didn’t understand. Really, if this keeps up, I might actually learn to like this place better than England.
I hate this place. Honestly I do.

There’s nothing here worth going on, nothing here worth living for. Then again, somehow I doubt there would be a reason anywhere else, either. Ever since Alma died… Ever since then, I’ve had no will, no desire to live. But I could never allow myself to give up, either. That’s for weaklings. And besides, his sacrifice… I can’t just waste it like that…

I breathed in deeply. It’s only Tuesday. You can’t smoke during the school week. I groaned, hitting the back of my head against the wall. It was my lunch period and I was outside, smoking, in my usual place. Tykki wasn’t there, and I was sorely wishing it wasn’t a cigarette between my lips, but something else…

I finished smoking the cigarette and crushed it with my boot, then stared introspectively at the burned-out cigarette butt. Damn it, I wish these things weren’t so unhealthy. I’d definitely be a chain smoker then. As it is, I only have 1 or 2 a week, when I really need a break. That’s why I tend to do it in school. At home, there are other methods of calming myself down, but here…

I sighed. I probably ought to apologize to the Moyashi… Wait a minute, why did I think that? He’s in the wrong, not me. He goaded me into punching him, and he deserved what he got. I glanced around, noticing the ever-darkening sky above me. Looks like it’s gonna rain… Just like that night…

I gasped, clutching my chest and gritting my teeth. No! Don’t think about it! Think about the Moyashi! With his irritating smile and obnoxious care for other people. I grimaced, realizing again who that annoying little brat reminded me of. I’ll bet that’s why I can’t stand him – he reminds me too much of Alma…

Except Alma had never looked like he had something to hide, like he had something weighing down on his very soul. Honestly, though, I highly doubt anyone else notices it. The only reason I can see is that I’m the same way. Sure, the type of mask we use is different, but it’s still a mask. He probably has his own pain…

Damn it; who cares! Pain is meant to hide; society teaches us that from the very beginning. He can handle it; and besides, I’d better straighten myself out before I go around playing at being the Good Samaritan. Honestly, I chuckled remorsefully, who could I possibly help, when I can’t even manage to save myself?

Just then I noticed that my phone was vibrating, and with a sigh I picked it up. I’d never admit it out loud, but secretly I was glad of the distraction.
“What?” I growled impatiently into the receiver.

“You-kun, my darling boy! How are you?” The voice on the other end instantly set my nerves on edge.

“I am not your boy,”

“But of course you are! A pupil is like a son, after all. And I am your adoptive father, even if not your real one. I care for you as a father cares for a son!”

“Yeah, sure. Get to the point. I’m in the middle of my lunch break,” I interrupted, knowing the professions of ‘fatherly love’ would go on until I stopped them.

“You,” Tiedoll continued, much more somberly, “I need you to come home this weekend.”

“Why? What happened?” I felt worry beginning to worm its way through me. Tiedoll is never serious.

“Daisya is gone. I just received word. The soldiers who came to inform us left not ten minutes ago.”

For a moment I felt the world tilt, as if the ground was opening up below me, or the sky was falling down on top of me. I sank to the ground, unable to remain standing.

“…What…?”

“You…” I could hear the tears in his voice. “The funeral is this Friday. I’ll call the school, and tell them to let you go home, and to let you stay away the rest of the week.”

I felt a headache begin to build and nausea begin to rise inside of me. Not good. The world seemed to be spinning, but I was sure it couldn’t be. Or at least, it shouldn’t be. But maybe the whole universe was upset at Daisya’s death?

“I’ll call you later, and I’ll buy you plane tickets,” Tiedoll promised me, “You… do you want to talk?”

I pulled myself together a bit, pinching the bridge of my nose. “No. And don’t call me; just send a text. I… I need some time to myself.” I already knew what I needed tonight, regardless of how unhealthy it may be.

“All right, Yuu, but I’ll call you in the morning.”

“Ok. Bye.”

“Good-bye, You-kun.”

After the line ended I stood up and leaned back against the wall. You know what you need… Taking a deep breath, I dialed. After 3 rings, they picked up.

“Yo, Kanda. What’s up?”

“Where are you?”

“At home; I decided to skip school today.”

“Well, I’m going home right now. And Tykki… I need you tonight.”
For a moment there was silence on the other end. Then:

“I’ll be at your place in 2 hours.”

And with that he hung up.
The Way He Feels

Chapter Notes

Allen POV
Author's Note: The chapter title is a reference to the song The Way She Feels by Between the Trees.
Warnings: homophobia; self-hatred; offensive language; cutting/self-harm

It's already Saturday. I was standing in front of the mirror, putting gel in my hair and combing it back. My fingers danced over the drawers that contained my makeup collection, considering. Quickly I glanced back at my reflection. Tight indigo skinny jeans with chains hanging off of them went well with a black, skin-tight, long-sleeved shirt. I also planned to wear a white leather glove on my left hand, and brown combat boots. With a grin, I reached for the Urban Decay Electric palette, pulling out a pot of Inglot black gel eyeliner while I was at it. It was only after I'd found my foundation and eye shadow base, and was pulling out Sugarpill false lashes that I stopped.

Dude, could you be any more gay?

I leaned over the sink and clutched the edge of the counter, looking at my reflection, and suddenly I felt like crying.

Were you thinking that you looked good? You just look like a fag. A worthless, pathetic freak. Remember your arm? Do you think anyone would still like you if they saw it?

I drew in a slow, shuddering breath, barely managing to hold back the tears from falling. Opening my eyes, I looked at my face in the mirror. I look broken; like the first word will make me fall apart. I clenched my hands into fists, screwing my eyes shut and pulling my eyebrows together, breathing slowly. I opened my eyes again, staring angrily at my reflection. Stop. Don’t do this. Those days are gone; you have a chance to be yourself here, to be who you want to be.

I straightened up and unclenched my fists. Then, with sadness and regret, I put my makeup away again.

As I made my way towards the mall (I was walking, of course), I pondered the last time I’d seen Kanda, mostly because it was the first thing that had come to mind after my little episode in the bathroom earlier today.

It was on Tuesday. I had been making my way out of the lunch room when, as I rounded the corner, I walked straight into the wannabe samurai.

“Sorry,” he muttered, then practically ran away.

I stayed rooted to the spot for at least a full minute. I had just literally run into Kanda, and he had apologized to me.

That was the last time I’d seen him all week. It wasn’t until I asked Lavi on Friday if he knew why Kanda wasn’t at school (technically I asked if he’d finally been expelled), that he told me Kanda had
been given the rest of the week off because he needed to go to his brother’s funeral a state away.

That had shocked me. Not only because it made me think of Mana, but because it made me realize that however much of an annoying bastard Kanda may be, he was human too. I’ll bet that time I ran into him happened right after he got the phone call; that’s why he seemed so different from the way he usually is. Despite myself, I’d found myself thinking that I should get him a sympathy gift or something. But then I realized that Kanda would take that as pity, and that would probably just piss him off. Still, maybe I’d try to be nicer to him when he got back – the poor guy deserved it.

I finally arrived at the mall, and made my way to Hot Topic, using the directions Lavi had given me. We had agreed to meet in the dark recesses of the store. Slowly I made my way through the aisles. At the makeup stand I glanced around quickly before hurriedly looking through it, feeling inexplicably guilty, somehow. The Edward Scissorhands makeup bag looked adorable, and I was just dying to try the L.A. Cosmetics eye shadow. True, the price was suspiciously low, but every once in a while you can find really cheap stuff that works amazingly. Also, yay for purple hair dye and hell yes for eyeliner.

“Hey, Allen! Whatcha lookin’at?”

I whirled around, barely managing to look nonchalant, even though I felt panic rising inside of me at the sight of Lavi. Thank goodness all those years of playing poker have helped me learn to control my facial expressions.

“Oh, nothing, really. Just kinda looking. I’ll never understand how girls use all this stuff. I mean, what’s the point anyway?”

“The point is to look even more amazing than we already do,” Lenalee answered with a grin, “though, I admit that not even all of us girls know how to use all of this stuff. I use nail polish and eyeliner, but that’s about it. I have absolutely no idea how people put together those amazing eye shadow looks.”

I do, I wanted to say, but I’d already missed my chance when I’d dissed makeup earlier.

“Well, I don’t know about makeup, but I know I want to check out those belts over there,” Lavi grinned.

After that, we spent the rest of the afternoon wandering through various stores, trying on and trying out all sorts of different stuff. We had lunch, too, in the food court. Lenalee and I had Chinese, while Lavi stuck with Subway. Towards the end of the day, Lenalee dragged us into a Sephora. I did my best to seem uninterested, while in reality, I was eagerly checking out the price of the Urban Decay Ammo Palette. At $34, it really wasn’t that bad. I decided I’d come back after Lavi and Lenalee left, and buy it then.

After Sephora, we sat down for coffee at Starbucks. While Lavi and Lenalee discussed the annoyance of the “plus tax” thing (which I completely agree with), I let my eyes wander around. Suddenly I gasped.

“Allen, what is it?” Lenalee asked, looking over, then following my happy gaze. “A piano store?”

“Oh, that’s right, you can play the piano, can’t you, Allen?” Lavi asked.

I ducked my head, embarrassed. “Well, yeah. Sort of.”

“Really? That’s awesome!” Lenalee smiled, “The only thing I play is soccer. I’ve always been a bit jealous of people who could play instruments.”
I glanced at her hesitantly, “Well, I mean, I play more than just the piano. I could give you some lessons, if you’d like.”

“That would be amazing, Allen!” She seemed genuinely happy about my offer, and it made me feel good. “Lavi, why don’t you try something, too?”

“Thanks, but no thanks. Metal smithing is the only sport I need.”

“Woah, you can work metal? That’s incredible!” I gazed at him admiringly.

“Thanks! I’ve been doing it since, like, forever.”

After that, we chatted for a bit longer before Lenalee stood up with a sigh and informed us that if she didn’t leave soon, her brother would probably go crazy. Lavi offered to walk her out, and I said my goodbyes to them, saying that I still wanted to check out the piano store. I waited until they were out of sight, then dashed off in the direction of Sephora.

I ended up buying a $22 brush set as well, which put me over $50. The lady at the counter asked me with a smile if I wanted a complementary 45 minute make-over. She informed me that I could have it now, or reserve a time later. I deliberated for a second, then decided that I wasn’t going anywhere tonight anyway, so why not?

The guy who was the makeup artist on duty asked me if there was anything in particular that I was interested in trying. I told him to make it flashy, but other than that, I didn’t mind. By the time he was finished, I looked like a drag queen, and I loved it. I knew I just had to reproduce this look at some point in the future, so I asked him for a full list of products used. He acquiesced with a grin and laughed, telling me that he wished all of his subjects had skin as perfect as mine. I joined in, chuckling, pleased at the compliment.

Afterwards, I went back to Hot Topic and bought the purple hair dye I’d been looking at earlier. The cashier told me I looked amazing, even better than earlier. I felt a small glow of pride to know that this complete stranger accepted me, even thought I looked better as myself, rather than someone else.

But I should have known it wouldn’t last.

Like I said, I looked like a drag queen. Now, I personally love looking that way, decked out in powerful eye shadow shades and striking lipsticks, but in my pleasure at looking the way I wanted to again, I’d forgotten that the world in general isn’t so fond of such things.

As I was walking home, I passed a guy who looked at me in disgust.

“Faggot.”

I stopped walking, feeling for a moment like I couldn’t breathe, like I’d just been punched in the gut. Then, with a shudder, I began to sprint for home. As my feet pounded the pavement, tears leaked from the corners of my eyes, and I thanked everything in the world that it was dark already, and that I didn’t meet anyone else. Gasping for air, I tripped twice, but I just pushed myself back up and kept running until I reached my front door. With shaking hands, I pulled out my keys and turned the lock. I was in such a hurry, and in such a state, that I almost forgot to lock the door behind me. Clutching the stitch in my side, I darted up the stairs and slammed my door behind me, leaving my newly bought makeup thrown haphazardly onto the couch.

My breath came in short, labored gasps, both from the exhaustion of the sprint home and from the tears that I could no longer even attempt to hold in. Growling in frustration, I tore my glove off, and pulled my shirt over my head the moment after, tossing it into a corner.
Panicked, I ran to my sock drawer and reached deep inside, searching for the little golden box I kept hidden away in the back. Pulling it out, I sank to the ground and opened it, the need overpowering me as light from my ceiling light reflected off of the glinting pieces of metal in the container.

Then, with a sigh of relief from the deepest parts of my soul, I pulled one of the blades across my already scarred left arm, and watched the blood drip to the floor.
Family and Friends

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV
Warnings: funeral scene; hints at ptsd or anxiety; hints at underage drug use

I knew it was gonna be bad, but not this bad.

The funeral was open casket. All I could think was that Daisya looked like he was still alive, like he could wake up at any moment. And he had to, he just had to. It wasn’t until they prepared to lower the casket into the ground that I finally managed to regain my senses.

“No! Stop that!” I yelled, pushing away one of the workers. “You can’t take him! He can still wake up!”

I felt strong arms grip me. “Kanda, please calm down. Daisya is gone.”

“No, Marie, you’re wrong!” Even I could tell that I was acting hysterical, but I just couldn’t stop. Tears were flowing from my eyes. “Daisya! Wake up!”

But Marie had turned me around so that my face was in his shoulder, and he held me strong as I continued to cry. I hadn’t even thought I still had tears left to shed. The two of us stood there for long after the funeral ended, silent in each other’s arms. Tiedoll stood with us as well. Our family hadn’t been big to begin with, and we had all lived in different places all over the globe, but we had been close.

As my sobs slowly ceased, I remembered Daisya. Daisya, who had played soccer all his life, who had even wanted to be a professional soccer player, until he decided in 10th grade to go into the military, instead. But whenever he came home, we’d always get together and play his favorite sport. Well, he and the others would. I always sat grumpily under the trees. But Daisya understood. He would smile at me, covered in sweat, and run his hands through my hair, much to my irritation. He would laugh, and I would glare, but then smile when he turned away. That was the nature of our relationship. He may have been a pain at times, but he had been family, and I had loved him. We all had.

After the funeral was over, we had dinner together as a family, but we didn’t speak much. All of us felt the absence of the liveliest member of our group too strongly.

I took a plane home on Saturday afternoon, and called Tykki again the moment I got out of the airport. He promised to meet me at my place at 6.

“Hey, Kanda.”

“Hey Tykki.”

He looked at me with concern in his eyes. A smaller shape darted out from behind him and hugged me.
“We’re both sorry, Kanda,” the little purple-haired, dark-skinned girl around my waist told me with sad eyes. She’d moved so fast she’d even dropped her cherished pink umbrella with the pumpkin on top.

“Thanks, Road,” I murmured, hugging her back.

“Sorry, man, I know you wanted it to be just me, but I’m kind of watching her today,” Tykki shrugged apologetically.

“It’s fine,” I shrugged back, “come on in, you two.” I knew he probably hadn’t had much of a choice in the matter. Road Kamelot was Tykki’s relative in some way, though I couldn’t quite remember how. From what I could tell, the relation was pretty distant, but their family kept close. Tykki often had to babysit her even though she was only a year younger than us, because her father was a complete nut with a daughter complex and seemed to think she was unable of even taking care of herself alone. Personally though, I think she’s one of the most mature girls I’ve ever met, despite the fact that she looks (and often acts) like she could be in Middle School.

Road and Tykki followed me into the kitchen, where Road set about fixing tea, and raiding my candy stash while she was at it.

“Geez, Kanda, do you even eat this stuff? I swear this is exactly the amount I left in here last time, and that was almost 3 weeks ago.”

“Che. Of course I don’t eat it, you noisy brat; it’s there for you.” I tried to look and sound annoyed, but the content of my words obviously gave me away. Road giggled as she hugged me around the shoulders, then sat down to a giant lollypop.

“You’re so cute when you pretend to be irritated,” Tykki chuckled.

I glared at him for a moment before just leaning back into my chair and looking away.

“You know,” I began, “this is the kind of relationship I had with Daisya as well.”

“Oh?” Tykki pulled out a cigarette and lit it, turning away. I could tell he didn’t know how to talk to me about this.

“Yeah… And come to think of it, this is how I am with anyone I consider ‘friend’. I never seem to be able to say the right words… until it’s far too late to say them at all.”

Tykki glanced back at me, then turned away again, offering me a cigarette, which I took gratefully.

“Geez, you two, at least open a window or something,” Road complained, striding over to the kitchen window and throwing it open, apparently having decided that Tykki and I probably weren’t liable to do it ourselves. Turning back to us she continued with a sigh, “You do realize your lungs are gonna turn black, right?”

“And your teeth are gonna rot from all those lollypops,” Tykki shot back.

But I looked away, feeling a shot of guilt strike me. This body is not only mine; I have to live for him, too. I have no right to harm it in anyway. Alma… I pulled the cigarette out of my mouth and balanced it on the ashtray, rubbing my forehead. My eyes were shut tight, and I breathed deeply.

I felt a small hand touch my shoulder, and I flinched back, slapping it away. I’m certain my panic showed on my face, and Road’s eyes widened a bit.
“Kanda, are you ok? Should I bring you more tea?” She gazed at me earnestly from honey-colored eyes.

“No. I’m fine,” I responded, turning away, then reiterated, “I’m fine.”

“Alma again, eh?” Tykki was gazing at me out of the corner of his eye, still smoking.

I whirled around to glare at him. “Shut up!”

“Take it easy, dude. I’ve got your cure,” he sighed, pulling a little bag filled with green leaves out of his jacket. “The crop was finally ready. Sooo…” He stared at me fixedly, raising an eyebrow, “you ready to relax and forget all your worries?”

I could only give in and nod.
Monday morning found me wondering whether I could possibly pass off bandages on my arms as a fashion statement. I eventually decided on probably not, and went with a looser top under which the wrappings would be less apparent. Besides, I thought morosely, using something as a fashion statement, despite the fact that I’m a guy? That’s like painting a bull’s-eye on my back. If anything could make them think I’m gay, that would. Honestly, as if my clothes and hair aren’t sufficient to do that in and of themselves.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror. Cutting myself up on Saturday had helped, but it hadn’t been nearly enough. I was at least calmer, though. Seeing my own face and body no longer set me instantly on the verge of tears. Still, in a week at most, I’d be back to where I was before. My eyebrows drew closer together. Recently… it seems as if the cuts aren’t tiding me over as long any more, even though they get deeper every time. I clenched my fists. I’m falling faster… sinking into the darkness of my own soul…

With a sigh, I straightened up and finished getting myself ready. Soon I was on my way to school. I made it into my AP English classroom with 20 minutes to spare, so I pulled out my phone and plugged in my ear buds.

When you feel my heat

Look into my eyes

It’s where my demons hide

It’s where my demons hide

Don’t get too close

It’s dark inside

It’s where my demons hide

It’s where my demons hide

I closed my eyes and began to let my fingers run through the motions; I’d played this song on the piano more times than I care count. I stopped the moment I heard the door opening, though, and looked up to see who’d entered.

Much to my surprise, I found the intruder to be Kanda. Remembering my earlier musing, I decided to
try being nice. “Hey,” I mumbled with a wave of my hand.

For a moment he seemed angry, but then he relented, and gave me a short nod of greeting before turning away and sitting down.

I felt inexplicably pleased, somehow. Sure, a bob of the head wasn’t exactly much, but coming from Kanda, it felt like an affirmation, or sorts. I’d just been acknowledged by the Ice Prince, and even if he still didn’t like me at all, at least he no longer seemed like he wanted to kill me. Maybe, just maybe, Lavi had been right about him? Maybe… we could even become friends?

I snuck a quick peek at the moody samurai from the corner of my eye. He was looking at a paper with the sort of intensity a would-be psychic might use to try and set it on fire. And he looked totally pissed off. I suddenly felt a swell of pity for the poor little piece of paper; what had it ever done to Kanda? Then I realized that was ridiculous and pulled my attention back to my own stuff. I took the ear buds out and put my phone away, deciding I didn’t really want to play the invisible piano with Kanda there.

I had lunch with Lavi and Lenalee, as per usual. I was actually just starting on a BLT sandwich when Lavi said something interesting.

“Hey, hey! So you’ll never guess what happened this morning! Kanda actually talked to me!”

“What about?” Lenalee stared at Lavi in shock.

“I don’t know – random stuff. The point is that he actually responded with more than just a ‘che’ or a ‘leave me alone, baka usagi’.

“He calls you a ‘stupid rabbit’?” I raised an expressive eyebrow and pulled a confused face.

“Yeah; no idea why, though. But hey, wait – do you speak Japanese, Allen?” Lavi seemed as animated by this discovery as by Kanda’s unusual actions this morning.

“Uhhh… well, Cross and I spent some time in Asia, especially India and Japan.”

“Awesome!” Lenalee smiled at me, “You didn’t spend any time in China, did you?”

“A little, but not nearly enough to truly experience it,” I shrugged ruefully.

“Oh. Too bad.”

“But, speaking of Kanda… I agree that he seems to be acting a bit unusually,” I remarked nonchalantly. “Honestly, he actually greeted me this morning.”

“Seriously?!” Both Lavi and Lenalee stared at me in shock.

“Just last week the two of you were still at each other’s throats!” Lavi nearly shouted.

“What exactly happened?” Lenalee questioned me, leaning forward eagerly.

“Nothing much,” I shrugged, “I just said ‘hey’ to him when he came into the classroom this morning, and he nodded at me. Call me crazy, but I swear it was a greeting,” I insisted.

“Even from a normal person that can count as a ‘hello’, so coming from Kanda…” Lavi grinned, “Seems he likes you after all.”
“Yeah, right,” I retorted, then mused, “But maybe he doesn’t outright hate me anymore. Even *that* would be a huge improvement.” I looked back up at Lavi. “But I wonder what’s gotten into him, that he’s being so nice – by Kanda standards, I mean.”

Lenalee sighed and shook her head. “Are you two really that thick? His brother just died! Even Kanda has emotions, regardless of how good a job he does at hiding them. I bet he’s been effected by the ordeal.”

“You’re probably right, Lenalee,” Lavi affirmed, “I don’t know much, but I am aware that Kanda was pretty close with both of his brothers.”

“Does he live alone? I mean, going through a loss like that… he shouldn’t be going home to an empty house.” I felt sadness well up inside me as I said the words. *Mana…*

“Yes, he lives alone. But he’d never let go of enough of his pride to tell someone that he was lonely, or accept somebody else’s help, much less ask for it,” Lenalee sighed sorrowfully.

Lavi raised an eyebrow. “I’m not so sure. He gets along pretty well with Tykki Mikk. *He* might be able to help Kanda somehow.”

Lenalee looked utterly horrified. “Kanda hangs out with Tykki Mikk?”

“Yes…” Lavi seemed utterly bewildered by her reaction.

“Lavi, for such a smart guy with such a great memory, you can be pretty slow sometimes. Tykki is a *drug dealer.*” Lenalee emphasized.

“What?” Lavi scoffed. “There’s no way that’s true. Tykki’s family is made entirely of cops. Literally every member goes into law enforcement, as regular police officers, crime scene investigators, lawyers, FBI, or other similar occupations. Well, except for a few that became doctors instead. And they have a *very* good reputation for being perfectly straight people – most of them haven’t even ever had a speeding ticket. In fact, they’re so well-respected that they’ve earned the nickname of the ‘Noah Clan’, after the righteous man that the Christian god chose to save from the biblical flood. I highly doubt Tykki would be able to get away with dealing drugs in a family like that.”

Lenalee seemed both shocked and embarrassed. “I didn’t know that. I guess I’ve been listening to too many rumors.”

“But then, that’s actually pretty good, isn’t it?” I asked, causing them both to look at me. “If this Tykki is from such a respectable background, he’s probably pretty dependable. That sounds like exactly the type of friend Kanda needs right now.”

Both Lavi and Lenalee nodded. Then, with a grin, Lavi launched into an anecdote about how he found Bak Chang getting beaten up by a blushing Fo earlier. I laughed along, well aware that he was trying to lighten the mood. But deep inside, I was still dwelling on Kanda, and wondering why I couldn’t seem to get the darn guy out of my head.
What the bloody Hell was I thinking? Actually being polite to the Moyashi? And nice to the baka usagi? Jeez, I must be losing it! I stormed through the halls on the way to my locker. Thankfully, the day was finally over. Also, the whole “suckerpunch incident” still hadn’t been completely forgotten, so I made pretty good time. Actually, I wonder why the Moyashi seems to have forgotten earlier than anyone else? I mean, he is the one I punched, I smirked. Then I realized, that’s probably exactly why. He’s one of only a few people that really knows what happened. Most everyone else has only heard ridiculously inflated rumors.

It didn’t take me long to pack my bag and get ready to leave. But just as I was heading out the door, a familiar (and annoying) redhead caught up with me.

“Hey, Yuu,” it screamed with an enormous stupid grin plastered on its face, “What’s up?”

“Don’t call me that, baka usagi, because I swear I will slice you in two.”

“Ha ha ha…” Lavi laughed nervously, “Please don’t. Anyway, I was wondering, can I come over on Friday?”

“No. Why?”

The teen shrugged slightly. “Nothing much. The panda geezer’s gonna be away, and I want to hang out with someone.”

“And why does the role of ‘someone’ have to fall on me?”

“Because we haven’t hung out in forever!”

“Exactly. I have no intention of breaking my record now.”

“But Yuu! It’ll just be for a couple of hours! I promise I won’t be a bother.”

“Che. That’s impossible,” I growled, “You’re already bothering me.”

“Please! Come on!” He turned to me with an imploring puppy dog eye.

“Che.” I turned away. We’d reached my house, and I began to move away from him. “I’ll see ya,” I threw back at him over my shoulder. Let him take that however he wants.

After I got inside, I went through my typical routine. Or at least, I started to, until I was rudely interrupted by a letter in the mail. What the Hell?

I sat down at the kitchen table to open it, and found it to be an invitation to the state kendo tournament in two months. The end of November, huh? No sweat. Honestly, these things are boring.
No one can win against me.

I got up and began to make jasmine tea. It was only when I sat down again that I realized; with all the commotion of the past few weeks, I hadn’t trained in 10 days. I slumped back in my chair, shocked. Then, I got angry. This thing I’m doing with Tykki… It was never meant to go this far. None of it was supposed to affect me. I was going to remain a perfect student and a perfect swordsman; make sure no one ever noticed what was going on. But now I’m skipping practice, and acting nice to people I hate. This ends now.

I nearly broke the teacup, I brought it down on the table so hard. From now on, I’m going back to the way I was before. I’m going to train 4 hours every day, and study for my classes. I can’t let that Moyashi beat me. And I can’t allow anyone to realize what’s happening. With that decided I stood up and began to make my way to my room. I would change into my training uniform and then start with laps. Once I determine to do something, not even a hurricane can change my mind.

I’ll be honest – it felt good. It felt really good. I trained until 7 (about 3.5 hours), and then meditated for an hour. Afterwards, I made myself soba, and studied and did my homework after I ate. It was around 11 by the time I finally got to bed. But I felt better than I had in months. Somehow, doing the things that I had always done had almost managed to reawaken the old me.

I’m not really much of the ‘lie in bed and contemplate your life’ type, but tonight, I found myself doing it anyway. That talk I had with Tykki last weekend seems to have unhinged me a bit. Honestly, if there’s one way they’ll know for sure something’s up, it’ll be that I start being nicer to people. I can’t change anymore. And besides, I don’t want to.

If I open myself up, and let people in, that’ll just be setting myself up for disaster. They’ll leave me, just like Daisya. Just like Alma. Alma… Alma the kind, Alma the perfect, Alma the one who stuck with me even though I was a jerk to him to begin with. Alma was my world.

And that’s why I can never allow it to happen again. My world fell apart and I rebuilt it, painfully, with steel and malice. But if it were to fall apart a second time, I know I wouldn’t be able to rebuild it. I would crumble to ashes along with my walls.
The Devils Are Inside the Walls

Chapter Summary

Allen POV

Author's Note: If the title of the chapter, "The Devils are Inside the Walls" is familiar, it's probably because it's a quote from Harry Potter. In the Goblet of Fire, when Sirius talks to Harry using floo powder, he says "I'm saying the devils are inside the walls! Igor Karkaroff? He was a Death Eater!" If you recognized the quote, nice job!

Warnings: graphic depictions of emotional and physical child abuse; ptsd; internalized homophobia

So I think I may have just imagined Kanda’s greeting after all. Because the next morning, I smiled and said “Hey!” and that ass responded with “What do you want, baka moyashi?” And the same pattern continued for the rest of the week. Lavi said that he had kinda sorta obtained an invitation to Kanda’s house for Friday, but with the way ‘Yuu-chan’ had acted every day after Monday… Well, let’s just say he wasn’t too sure it was still standing. I wonder what happened…?

At any rate, with the full-fledged return of the Ice Prince, the girls seemed to go into some kind of frenzy. They would whisper in huddled groups as he passed by in the hallways. And even the guys seemed jealous. I wonder what they like about him? Honestly, what’s so good about that wannabe samurai? Just cause he has a six-pack and wears skin-tight shirts…

It was Friday, and I hurriedly made my way home from school. I’d managed to get a part-time job at the Hot Topic in the mall I’d visited with Lavi and Lenalee. (Where the Hell else would they actually hire me, looking like this?) I really enjoyed it though. Not only did I get a discount, but people didn’t look at me weird. In a place like that, where everyone’s a bit unusual, the hair and tattoo goes pretty much unnoticed. Plus, I do enjoy helping people. I mean sure, it’s tiring to stand on your feet all day, but in some ways, retail can be pretty fun.

I made it in on time and then worked my shift. It passed pretty much uneventfully. Although, I did get to chat with one of my coworkers, the one who’d complemented me on that tragic Saturday. She’d made me feel good about myself then, and I found out she was pretty good about doing that in general. She was a really cute little gothic Lolita with spiky purple hair, whose name turned out to be Road Kamelot. We talked for quite a while about a whole range of topics, and eventually even steered towards that one particularly horrifying topic.

“So…” she began after double-checking that the store was empty, “that make-up you had on the other day… Did you do it?”

“No,” I shrugged, trying to make it appear nonchalant. But inside I felt as if some monster was twisting my guts into knots.

“Oh. Damn,” she sighed, leaning onto the checkout counter in obvious disappointment. “I was really hoping it was you. See, I have virtually no talent for stuff like that. I mean, sure, I can do the basics; eyeliner, smoky eyes, ect. But that’s about it. It would have been cool to have a friend that could concoct a look like that for me.”

I clenched my fists for a moment as I waged an inner war. Should I tell her? I glanced over at her...
again. So far I’d found no reason to distrust the laid-back little girl. Feeling in a corner of my mind that I was making a huge mistake, I blurted out,

“Well… I mean, it was a different make-up artist that did that particular look for me… but I can do stuff like that too…” I trailed off and turned away, squeezing my eyes shut and gripping my left arm tightly with my right. Oh no… what have I done?!

“Wait, seriously?!” I opened my eyes to find Road grinning and practically bouncing in excitement in front of me. “Could you do my make-up for me sometime?” She looked at me with eyes filled with eager anticipation.

Feeling a deep sense of relief begin to displace the fear, I nodded with a small smile. “Sure; why not?”

“Yes!” She squealed. “Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU! Here, let’s exchange phone numbers!”

It honestly didn’t take long for me to get swept up in her pace. But I didn’t really mind.

All in all, it was a good day. So I was humming a tune under my breath as I entered the house around 8 pm.

Then I notice the red trench coat on the coach.

I felt as if the very air had been knocked out of me. I had to physically lean against the wall for a full minute to regain some semblance of control over my body. Pushing my sleeve up to my elbow, I thrust the fingers of my right hand into my left arm, and slowly dragged my nails over the thick scabs, feeling the pain wash over me as the wounds broke open. I pulled my sleeve down again and took a deep breath, calm washing over me along with the ache. My fingers still shook a little though, as I untied my shoes and softly set by bag down in a hidden corner behind a bookshelf.

Slowly I made my way through the house, which no longer seemed like home to my eyes. I didn’t dare speak, lest I arouse the anger of the beast that had entered my sanctuary. As I entered the kitchen I felt my breath catch again, and I gulped.

“Master,” I murmured, inclining my head in a terrified half-bow.

“Stupid apprentice! Where the hell have you been? I’m hungry! And where is the liquor?”

“There is no liquor,” I stated after a steadying breath, “as I am under 21, and therefore unable to buy it. What would you like me to cook?”

“Cook?! At this time of night? I’m hungry now! If you don’t have any food prepared, then forget it. That’s not why I came back, anyways,” the man stated, standing up from the chair he’d been reclining in.

“Then what did you come for, Master Cross?” I asked, beginning to back away.

“For money, idiot apprentice. You do have money, don’t you?” There was a dangerous gleam in his eyes, and I gulped again.

“Yes; yes, of course,” I nodded, reaching for the cabinet. I opened the cupboard door and pulled out the tea pot in the back. Reaching into it, I grabbed a roll of bank notes and drew them out, offering them to the red-haired monster that stood before me.
Cross took the money and began counting. “$1200?! All you have to offer is a measly $1200?”

I paled in fear. “I… I’m sorry…”

“Idiot apprentice!” I made no move to block the punch that landed on my chin and knocked me to the ground. Instead, I curled into a ball as the towering demon continued to kick me with his thick-soled boots, screaming profanities.

Finally, finally, he stopped, informing me that he’d be back in two weeks and there had better be more waiting for him then. I stayed where I was, vaguely hearing the front door slam somewhere far away.

**Uh oh**… I thought, realizing that not only did my limbs feel like lead, but my eyesight was beginning to blur as well.

Through the hazy fog of my consciousness, I heard a voice begin to sing a beautiful melody, full of sadness.

“Maria…” I managed to whisper, before the darkness claimed me.
“Hey, Yuu!”

I took one glance at the bubbly redhead, and immediately slammed the door.

Except, of course, he just had to catch it before it closed completely.

“Aww… You-chan… That’s mean!” Lavi looked at me with what I can only assume was intended to be a puppy dog eye.

“Don’t. Call. Me. THAT.” I hissed back at him, sliding Mugen’s blade through the door.

He began to back up, laughing nervously. “Sorry… Sorry… really!”

I continued to glare. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“It’s Friday.”

“It’s also the end of September. So?”

“You invited me over on Monday!”

“I did no such thing.”

“Yuu… come on… let me in? Please?” Another ‘puppy dog’ look.

I sighed. “Che. Fine.” Leaving the door open for him, I made my way inside the house, towards the kitchen. As much as I may hate to admit it, Lavi’s been here enough that he knows his way around the house. I could hear him scramble around to take off his shoes and jacket, then do his best to catch up to me.

Without saying anything, I made Jasmine tea, then poured two cups of it, sliding one of them unceremoniously towards the intrusion. He nodded his thanks with a smile and I turned away with a “Che”.

“Kanda… Are you ok? You seem a bit… off-kilter.”

“I’m fine. What business is it of yours, anyway?”

“I’m your friend. And so are Lenalee and Allen. So stop trying to push us away.”

“Why the Hell would I care about that moyashi?”

“You can’t fool me. He bugs you too much; there’s gotta be a reason. So…”
“Che. None of your business.” I turned away angrily. Alma…

Lavi sighed. “Fine. So… what do you wanna do?”

“You’re the one who invited himself over. You decide.” I did my best to hide the polite meaning behind the rude words. Not sure how well it worked, though. As much as I hate to admit it, Lavi’s pretty smart.

“Then… you wanna spar? It’s been ages since we trained together,” Lavi suggested.

I grinned. “No problem.”

All right, I’ll admit it – sparring with Lavi was a lot of fun. He has a fighting style that’s completely different from any other I’ve ever encountered (probably learned it from his grandfather, that Old Panda), so training with him really helps me branch out from the typical kendo forms. We ended up spending about 3 hours in the training room. Afterwards we both took showers (this house has 3 full bathrooms).

I finished showering first (HOW – I’m the one with long hair, not him), and decided that this was still my house, and I could be as casual as I wanted, so I threw on a pair of sweatpants over my boxers and let my hair fall over my back and chest. I prefer letting it air-dry, and that means any shirt I put on will only get wet. I then made my way down to the kitchen.

“Well, well… Don’t you look delectable.”

I whipped around to find myself face-to-face with Tykki. I cocked my head to one side and furrowed my eyebrows. “How did you get in here?”

Shrugging, Tyki responded with, “You’re front door was unlocked.” He shot me a smirk. “And even if it hadn’t been, I would have picked the lock.”

I sighed. “Fine, whatever. I do have a guest, though, just so you know.” I knew that that sentence was enough to warn him to stay away from the topic of drugs.

“That’s rare. Is your guest the reason you’re only half-dressed?”

I set the kettle on the stove to let the water boil. “Yes and no. Tykki. Lavi and I just spent 3 hours sparring. A shower is definitely required after that much exercise.”

Right on cue, Lavi stepped into the kitchen, eye widening when he noticed Tykki. He was dressed just like me, shirtless. Tykki is never gonna let me hear the end of this.

“Yuu? There’s a strange man in your house.”

“He’s not… Well, I guess he is pretty strange. Lavi, meet Tykki Mikk. Tykki, meet Lavi Bookman.” I threw their introductions over my shoulder, as the water had finally come to a boil, so I had to set about the preparations for the tea.

“Why didn’t you tell me you had company planned for tonight, Yuu-chan?” Lavi asked, after shaking hands with Tykki. I noticed he brushed his hair fiercely over his right eye. He must not have his eye patch on.

“Because I didn’t. Tykki just invited himself in – much like you. Except he didn’t even have the common decency to ask permission before entering my house. And baka usagi?”
“Yes?”

“Don’t call me that.” I glared at him, twirling a carving knife around my fingers.

“Ha… ha… You wouldn’t, would you?”

“Killing you would get me in serious trouble. But a slice or two…”

Lavi hid behind Tykki, looking absolutely terrified. Tykki merely chuckled.

“Come on, lay off the poor kid. He may be an idiot, but he’s a good boy.”

“What makes you think that?” I grumbled.

“He’s friends with you, isn’t he?”

I didn’t turn around to face them, because I could feel a slight blush settle across my features. I quickly calmed myself, though, and brought the tea over to the table, serving it.

“Ooohhhh… Smells like mango!” Lavi grinned.

“It’s mango-peach, baka usagi.”

After that we sat in relative silence, preoccupied with the tea. After drinking a cup, I stood up. “Are you two eating here or not?” I did my best to sound irritated. They both nodded and thanked me, and I turned to the refrigerator, beginning to pull out ingredients. While I made miso soup, I listened to them chatting with each other. They seem to be getting along quite well. I hid a smile at the fact that my two friends were getting along. Maybe this isn’t so bad… Almost like a family…
The first thing I noticed was the cold. Then came the pain.

“Aaahhh…!” I half-cried, half-gasped, as I slowly sat myself up, leaning against the wall. My whole body ached, and I noticed that there was blood splattered on the ground around me. My thoughts were still a jumbled mess, but I knew one thing – I needed to get to the piano.

With great effort, and many stops on the way, as my numb body occasionally just decided to give out, I gradually made my way towards the grand piano in the living room. I thanked all the stars that it was unharmed. I’d feared that in his fit of rage, Cross might do something to it. But it was fine. There was even a pencil and blank music sheets lying on top of it. I sighed in relief when I finally managed to sit down on the chair in front of it, leaning back for a moment to rest.

Then I opened my eyes, and began to play. I could still hear the music in my head, I just needed to get it onto the paper. As I continued to figure out the words and notes, I realized; it was a hymn! I continued what I was doing for another 5 hours, when I sat back, content. I tried to stretch out my back and arms (they were cramped from being in such a confined position for so long), but immediately stopped as pain shot through me.

I think I’ll call it The Grave’s Maria: Magdala’s Curtain.

I played the piece through a few more times, just to make sure I’d gotten it right, imagining a full choir and orchestra playing around me. I’m sure it would sound magnificent that way. Eventually I managed to make myself stand, and begin the trek towards my room. Once there, I almost collapsed again. Climbing up those stairs had been excruciating.

I went over to my desk and pulled out a manila folder with The Grave’s Maria written across it in curling, cursive, feminine script (my handwriting, unfortunately). It was full to nearly bursting. I put my new piece in it, taking the opportunity to look through some of the older ones. Carte Garte, 14th Melody, Lala’s Lullaby, Twins’ Song... Each and every one was a work written by Maria. Maria is a spirit. At least, that’s what I assume. Every time Cross beats me unconscious, I hear her singing in the distance just before I pass out. The music I get from her is my very best. I guess it’s true what they say – pain really is the greatest muse. Though honestly, I don’t like taking credit for these; I feel like I’m not the one that wrote them – I’m just the messenger. That’s why I don’t show these to anyone.

Though Marie did catch me playing the 14th Melody once. He told me it was the most stunning piece he’d ever heard, that it was filled with a sense of loss and hope that most composers couldn’t capture with an entire orchestra, much less a single piano. I thanked him for the complement, of course. Even if I didn’t view the piece as mine (and I still don’t), I couldn’t exactly tell him where I’d gotten it. After that, he always asked me whether I’d written something new. The only other time I’d relented and let him in on a song was when I heard Lala’s Lullaby. All of Maria’s pieces are masterful, but that one remains my personal favorite.
I looked up at the clock on the wall. Noon. With a sigh I got up. My shift at Hot Topic started in 3 hours. I still needed to clean up, eat, and get there, which was gonna be a chore when my whole body protested my every movement. But with Cross’s threat looming over my head, I didn’t really have a choice.

It was not a fun day. No position was comfortable, and all I wanted to do was lie down and sleep some more; forget the world. Plus, it was a Saturday, which meant that the mall was full of people, which meant no breaks. My one stroke of luck, if you can call it that, was that my shift wasn’t together with Road. She has a penchant for hugs, and she’s pretty sharp, too. I’m sure she’d have noticed something was up. (Though, if I think about it, I was also pretty lucky that Cross didn’t do any real damage to my face. I was able to cover up the bruise on my chin with make-up.)

After my shift finished, I headed over to the piano store. I’d talked to the owner a couple days back, asked him if they needed help. He asked me to play a couple pieces, to test my skill level. I chose Chopin’s Nocturne in A-flat major, Op.32 No.2. He told me that was all he needed, and hired me as a part-time piano instructor. One of the perks was that I got to use the pianos in the store when they weren’t occupied by customers. Don’t get me wrong, the piano I have back at the house is great, but there’s still a difference between professional and average home pianos. Plus, the atmosphere is entirely different here. I took one of the pianos in a back room and began to play.

Lacrimosa dies illa
Qua resurget ex favilla
Judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce, Deus:
Pie Jesu Domine
Judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce, Deus:
Pie Jesu Domine
I groaned as I stretched.

Both Lavi and Tykki had ended up spending the night. We’d had fun, I think. We watched a bunch of horror flicks. The two insisted it was to ‘get into the Halloween spirit’. But honestly, Lavi and Tykki spent a lot of the time arguing; I couldn’t figure out whether they liked each other or not. Either way, it’s not like it affects me. Anyway, they didn’t leave until around 10 am this morning. To see them go out the door was a huge relief. Geez, don’t those two know the meaning of ‘overstaying your welcome’? But I guess that to others sleeping over for a night at a friend’s house might not count, and I’m pretty sure they realize that to me, being in my presence for more than 5 seconds can count as ‘overstaying your welcome’.

Once they were gone I set about cleaning up the house and making myself lunch (soba). After that I meditated for a little while, then proceeded to do my homework and study up a little. I had an AP English test on Monday, and though I’d undoubtedly study tomorrow as well, I’m trying to turn over a new leaf. And it’s never a bad idea to be ahead.

Around 6 pm I decided that I’d go to the mall. Hopefully by this point the annoying day crowds had disappeared. There were multiple crafting stores in the mall, and I needed to get myself a new set of oil paints. I will vehemently deny it to anyone who asks, especially to Master, but I actually enjoy painting. It calms me down, somehow.

By 7 I was in the mall, and by 7:30 I was ready to leave. I’d gotten my paints, and some new brushes, as well. I’d deliberated on a new canvas, but then I’d remembered that I had a bunch still lying around at home. On my way out I passed a piano store and stopped dead, looking towards it.

I recognize that melody.

Marie had played it a few times. He told me it was composed by one of his students, a real virtuoso. And even I had to admit it was gorgeous. It was haunting and sorrowful, and seemed to touch the listener’s very soul. Glancing around, I noticed that other people had stopped to listen as well. I changed direction, entering the shop.

What the Hell is Marie doing all the way out here? And why didn’t he tell me he was gonna be in town? I wondered to myself as I followed my ears through the store, eventually rounding a corner and entering the room the playing was coming from. Not even glancing at the pianist, I growled out,

“What are you doing here, Marie?”

The playing immediately stopped and a voice gasped, “Ba-BaKanda?!”

My head immediately whipped up, and my glare fixed itself on the white-haired boy sitting at the piano. “Moyashi? What are you doing here? How do you know Marie’s song?”

“It’s Allen, BaKanda!” The kid yelled back, but then his expression changed to shock. “Wait, did
you just say Marie? As in, Noise Marie?”

“Che. Who else?”

“H-How do you know Marie, Kanda?”

“He’s my older brother, obviously. How do you know him? And how do you know Lala’s Lullaby?”

“Marie was my piano teacher back in England. And I know the Lullaby because I was the one who wrote it!” He paused, seeming to search me with his silver eyes. “How do you know it?”

“Che. Marie used to play it all the time. He said it was a work of pure genius.” My eyes widened. Did I really just say that? I rushed to fix my mistake, “His words, not mine,” I reiterated, looking away.

“Oh.” I glanced back at him, and noticed that there was a slight blush on his cheeks, and a small smile on his lips. He also tucked his hair back behind his ear in embarrassment. Cute…

I whirled away again. No! Not cute! Annoying! That’s right – he’s an annoying brat who thinks he’s better than anyone else, even me! I couldn’t help myself though, I glanced back. He was standing at the piano, seeming to consider what to do. I turned my back to him and walked away, stopping for a moment in the doorway.

“Finish the song. You were playing well.”

And with that I left. I didn’t look back to see what face he made, but the melody followed me out as I left the store.

When I got home I felt irritation overwhelm me. I was fucking nice to him again! Damn it, why does he have to remind me so much of Alma…?

With a sigh I sat down on the couch then looked around. I noticed the picture Lavi had asked me about a while back – a photo of Alma and I, laughing into the camera. Things were so different back then. Back then… Back then, I still believed I might be happy one day.

“Che,” I growled, getting up again.

I paused for a moment, indecisive. I’m trying to turn over a new leaf… Then I shrugged. Oh well… The point isn’t to stop smoking, just to stop it interfering in my daily life. And my homework’s done and everything, so I guess… Why not? Having made my decision, I headed for my room in order to leave reality.
I stared at my reflection in the mirror.

“Finish the song. You were playing well.”

I saw a blush grace my features as Kanda’s words echoed in my head. Even said in his gruff voice, it was a complement, no matter how you looked at it. And especially because it was him. Coming from Kanda, a statement like that was practically a love song.

I struggled to stop the grin from a appearing, but failed miserably. Until I touched my cheek and had to pull my hand away with a curse; I’d almost forgotten about the bruise on my chin. With a resigned sigh, I began to get to work on removing the cover-up. After the make-up was gone, I took a shower, hissing as the water caused my scars to sting. Strangely enough, I’d always found that showering or bathing was the most painful part of the self-harm process. I wonder why…?

After I was finished, I got dressed in loose-fitting pajamas, and then proceeded to make myself dinner. After a quick look around the kitchen, I decided on Borsch. While making the stew, I multitasked, using the time when it didn’t require my immediate and undivided attention to work on my homework. After I’d eaten, I continued studying. If I was gonna get the money Cross wanted from me, I was gonna need to take on more jobs, which meant I’d better take advantage of study time while I had it. After all, I couldn’t possibly let my grades drop; that was like losing. (To Kanda.) Besides, studying proved a suitable distraction from the soreness in my body. It wasn’t perfect, but at least it was something…

At around midnight I finally decided to call it a night. As I was heading for the stairs, I noticed the piano out of the corner of my eye. Feeling inexplicably guilty, I walked over to it, having decided I’d play Lala’s Lullaby one more time before bed.

Monday morning came way too early, if you ask me. But it was a school day, and it had come, so there was nothing I could really do. 8:45 am found me sitting in the AP English classroom, running over my notes one last time before the test. I’d barely been at it for 3 minutes, though, before I noticed a grumpy samurai stride into the room.

“Hey,” I called hesitantly, wondering whether he might respond. A very convincing voice in the back of my head was telling me this was a bad idea, and that Kanda’s kind words the other day had just been a part of his seemingly characteristic mood swings.

Much to my surprise, however, he actually muttered something that sounded suspiciously like a “Hey” back, nodding towards me as he did so. Then he sat down and took out his notes, obviously wanting to get in a couple more minutes of cramming before class started. Figuring he was probably right, for once, I decided to copy him, and get back to studying.
Lunch found me sitting with Lavi and Lenalee, as per usual.

“So… You’ll never guess what happened this morning,” I began.

“You mean, other than an absolutely horrific AP English test?” Lenalee asked.

“Yeah,” I answered, giving her an apologetic look. “Kanda greeted me again, and this time he even managed a ‘hey’ beside the nod!”

“Really?” Lenalee immediately perked up. “How unusual of him!”

“Oh, that’s not the only unusual thing he’s done of late,” Lavi interjected with a smug grin. “Last Friday, he let Tykki Mikk and I sleep over at his place.”

“What?!” Both Lenalee and I nearly screeched.

“What did you guys do?” I questioned, raising a disbelieving eyebrow. “Beat him unconscious and tie him to a chair?”

“Nope. I spent about 3 hours with him in the training room. Then Tykki popped up while we were in the shower, then Kanda made us food, and then we watched horror movies until 3 am. And in the morning, he made pancakes. Tykki and I didn’t get out of there until around 10.”

“Has he lost his mind?” Lenalee seemed genuinely concerned.

Lavi merely shrugged. “If this is what happens when Kanda loses his mind, I say it should stay lost.”

We all sat silent for a bit, eating. After a while, something occurred to me. “So… Tykki Mikk. What did you think of him?”

“He seemed like a cool guy,” Lavi mused, “I mean, a bit perverted, maybe, but still pretty cool.” Then a slight frown covered his face. “Though, he can be a bit annoying. Honestly, once you get him talking, he never shuts up.”

Lenalee and I chuckled. “Sort of like you, then?” She teased.

“Exactly like me, actually,” I mellow voice spoke up from behind Lavi.

We all looked up to find a tall, tan, black-haired, honey-eyed, beauty-marked male looking down at us with a grin on his face.

“Tykki!” Lavi exclaimed.

“Hey, kiddo! Sorry about butting in; I was just passing when I overheard my name.”

I gestured to the seat beside me, thinking that he looked vaguely familiar. “Wanna sit down?”

“Sure,” he shrugged nonchalantly, elegantly seating himself beside me, straight across from Lavi.

I knew I was being rude, but I couldn’t stop staring. Why is he so familiar?

“Like what you see, boy?” He smirked at me.

I turned bright red. “No! It’s just… I think you might look like someone I know…”

“Sounds like you’re coming on to me,” He laughed, giving me a Cheshire grin that immediately
made me realize who he reminded me of.

“Road!” I gasped.

“Huh?”

“Sorry… But… ummm… Would you by any chance be related to a girl named Road Kamelot?”

“What…? You know Road?” He seemed genuinely surprised.

“Yeah. We work together.”

“Huh. Interesting. And your name is…”

“Oh, sorry. I’m Allen Walker.”

“Walker… Where have I heard that name before…” He paused for a moment, thinking, and then burst out laughing. “Holy crap! You’re the new kid that Kanda punched in AP Calc!”

“Yeah, that’s me…”

“Huh. Small world.”

“How long have you known Kanda, Tykki?” Lenalee asked, reminding me that she and Lavi were there. I felt completely embarrassed. I’d gotten absorbed in my conversation with Tykki, and left them out. Stupid Allen…

“Since he was about 10. We met just a little before the Alma incident.”

This time all three of us looked at him funny. “Alma?”

His eyes widened. “You… don’t know about Alma?”

We all looked at each other and shook our heads. Even Lavi seemed out of the loop.

“Shit. He’s gonna kill me.”

Lenalee leaned forward. “Please, what is an Alma?”

“Not what but who,” Tykki muttered with a sigh. “Look, I know you, Lavi, and Kanda’s spoken about you guys too, Allen, Lenalee. So… on account of the fact that you’re Kanda’s friends and I’m assuming you won’t leave me alone now that I made the mistake of bringing it up, I’ll fill you in, on one condition.”

We all nodded eagerly.

“You don’t bring it up to Kanda. Ever. He’ll know I was the one that told you, and I’ll be rewarded for that by ending up dead in a ditch. You got me?”

We all nodded, both in acceptance and agreement.

“Ok, then look. Alma was a childhood friend of Kanda’s. They basically grew up together. But Alma died when they were both 10 years old. It kinda left Kanda with a hole in his heart. It was after that that he started closing himself off towards others.” Tykki leaned back a little. “Now, don’t get me wrong. Kanda was never open and loving; it just got a lot worse after Alma passed away. Something tells me that there’s probably more to it than I know about, but he won’t tell me anything.
Every time the subject comes up, he starts yelling.”

Lavi’s head shot up. “The photograph!”

“Huh?” Tykki looked at him with furrowed brows.

“Once, I found a picture in Yuu-chan’s house of him when he was around 8 years old, grinning at the camera along with a purple-haired boy with a birthmark on his nose. When I showed it to him, and asked who it was, he started yelling. Was that Alma?”

Tykki nodded, “Sounds like him, yeah.”

We all sat in silence for a bit, contemplating what we’d just learned. Except for Tykki – I’m pretty sure he was wondering whether Kanda would torture him first, or just kill him right away.
“YOU TOLD THEM ABOUT ALMA?!?!?!?”

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. So let me paint you a fucking picture. The stoic, noble, and really fucking pissed off samurai Yuu Kanda has the treacherous bastard Tykki Mikk pinned to a wall by his neck with a sword. Tykki, terrified for his life (and rightly so) appears to be begging for some sort of forgiveness, his arms raised in a gesture of ‘innocence’.

“K-Kanda! Please stop! Look, it was an accident, I swear!”

“What the fuck do you mean, ‘it was an accident’?” I growled.

Tykki was staring at something over my shoulder (presumably my inner demon) as he stuttered his fake-ass excuse. “They’re your friends! I-I figured they knew! Es-Especially that Lavi kid – he seems to know everything!”

“So???” I continued to beam my murderous intent into his eyes. He gulped.

“So… It just slipped out! I’m sorry! I swear it’ll never happen again! And… and besides! I barely told them anything. A-All I said was that you and Alma were childhood friends, and that he died! That’s it! I didn’t even tell them how!”

“You swear?”

“Yes. Yes. I swear.” He insisted, attempting to nod, then reconsidering.

I glared at him for another minute, watching him sweat. Then, with an irritated sigh, I let him go and sheathed my sword.

“Forget it. You’re not worth going to jail over.”

I stormed off into the kitchen, and heard him follow hesitantly. The two of us were in my house – after the events of earlier, I had invited him back to my place, and cornered him the moment we got in. I gritted my teeth in an irritated growl. Why did Tykki have to be such a blabbermouth?

“Kanda?”

I turned to find myself face-to-face with Lenalee. “What?”

“Why didn’t you tell us? We’re your friends! We could have helped you!”

“Huh?”

“After everything, going to Daisya’s funeral… It must have been so hard! Why didn’t you ask us for
help? Don’t you realize we’re here for you?”

“Lenalee, what the actual ever-loving fuck are you on about?” I snapped, totally lost.

“I’m talking about Alma!”

That stopped me dead. “What… do you know about Alma?”

“I know you cared for him,” she began with sadness in her voice and eyes. “And I know you still miss him.”

“Who told you about Alma?” I asked, opting to pretend to be polite for the moment.

“It doesn’t matter. We know now, and we want to help.”

“We? Who’s we?”

“Lavi, Allen, and I.”

I took a deep breath. Ok, think, Kanda, think. Who knows about Alma, and knows Lenalee and...

Lavi. Damn it, Tykki... I didn’t even attempt to continue the conversation with Lenalee. I just stormed off, looking for blood.

“Ummm… Should I still be in fear of my imminent annihilation?”

“Depends. Are you staying for tea?”

“Depends. What’s the right answer?”

I sighed. “Yes.”

He sat down. I busied myself with the tea, deciding on a simple green. I need to calm down. Once everything was ready I plunked his cup down in front of him and sat down with mine, as well. Despite everything, I guess it’s a good thing I’ve known Tykki for so long. He can read the hidden meaning beneath my words, and I can read the hidden meaning in his.

“Should I be worried about poison?” Have you forgiven me?

“Killing you would be a pain.” Sort of.

“Well, sometimes I deserve it.” I’m sorry.

“And sometimes you don’t.” Apology accepted. “But if you weren’t such an idiot, you’d never deserve it.” Just don’t do it again.

“I know. I’ll remember that next time.” Agreed. I really am sorry.

We shared a look that proved we’d both understood.

“Well,” Tykki began, finishing his tea, “We can’t do what we usually do to make up, seeing as how it’s a school night, but you wanna do something anyway? Sparring, maybe?”

“Aren’t you afraid I’ll hurt you?” I questioned with a smirk.

“Nah. And besides, I need the practice. No one else is as good as you,” he smirked back.
We fought for 2 hours. Once we’d finished, I made tea again, and we made small talk while we drank. He left a little after 6, and as he walked away from the house I yelled after him:

“The blade isn’t sharpened, you know!” And with that I slammed the door.
All throughout AP English, I felt as if someone was watching me, with every intention of cursing the life right out of my body. When I finally dared look, I found myself gazing into the bottomless black pits of Kanda’s eyes. At that moment I could have sworn that somewhere in their depths I saw the red glow of the Hellfire I had the sudden fear was going to consume me. I gulped. *What the heck did I do…?*

When the bell rang I made a beeline for the door, and managed to get away. Though somehow, I couldn’t help feeling like I was a trapped mouse and Kanda was a panther, just biding his time, letting his prey squirm under the gaze of the inescapable predator and the situation’s inevitable end. Near the end of AP Chemistry, I broke out in a cold sweat. Lunch was next… Could I escape?

As it turned out, I couldn’t. Before I even realized what was happening, I’d been pushed out a side door and pinned to a wall, Kanda’s hand covering my mouth. *If I weren’t in fear of my life right now, this might actually turn me on… No! Wait! Bad Allen! Bad imagination! Kanda is totally off limits!*

“Hey, Moyashi,” the demon growled in my ear, making me start, then shudder as he continued, “I have a bone to pick with you.”

“W-What is it?” I managed to respond, as he’d removed his hand. “And it’s Allen, BaKanda! Or are you too stupid to remember it?” *Shit. Probably should have thought that one through.*

His eyes narrowed. “Today is *not* the day to mess with me, baka moyashi. Now – what did Tykki tell you?”

I was a bit taken aback. Whatever it was I’d expected, it wasn’t this. Remembering what I’d heard from Tykki yesterday cooled my temper immediately, and so I answered calmly and honestly:

“He told us that you were childhood friends with a guy named Alma, and that Alma died when the two of you were 10 years old.”

“That’s it?” He seemed suspicious of my answer.

“Yes.”

Kanda released me and looked away. “Right, ok then. Now get out of here, Moyashi.”

But I didn’t move. Alma was obviously a sore spot for the Kanda, and I couldn’t help feeling a sort of kinship. Childhood trauma; the loss of a loved one… *Mana…*

“I… I know how you feel,” I murmured.

“No you don’t,” he retorted.
“I lost my father,” I blurted after a moment, watching him from the corner of my eye.

“So I’ve heard. Cross Marian disappears pretty often, and always turns up in the arms of a woman half his age,” he snorted. There was a deep-seated anger in his eyes. *He thinks I’m making fun of him...* I realized, somewhere through the red fog of my own rage at his response.

My voice shook as I hissed back, “*That man* is not my father. He’s my foster father, nothing more, you *ass.*”

Kanda’s eyes widened a bit as he moved towards me again. He looked like he was about to say something, but I didn’t wait – I pushed him away and stormed off, enraged. To make the allegation that *Cross* was my father wasn’t just insensitive, it was cruel. That man was a blight on the face of the earth, and deserved to die in a hole.

While I stomped my way through the halls, I began to calm down. Kanda had no way of knowing what Cross was like towards me. *Kanda’s just like me... He has a lot of pain inside, and he deals with it by pushing others away. Where I put on a fake smile and act like nothing’s wrong, he acts like an annoying bastard to prevent people from even wanting to get close.* I passed a window and looked at my reflection. *That’s it, isn’t it?*

Still, I thought with an irritated sigh, *just because we’re similar, doesn’t mean we can get along. No matter how I look at it, he’s still an ass.*

“All right, spill. Which one of you told him?” I asked, seating myself at the table with Lavi and Lenalee.

“Actually, I’d be curious to know that, too,” Tykki stated coolly as he sat down beside me. “Seeing as that person nearly cost me my head.”

*Where the Hell did he come from...?* I wondered; I hadn’t noticed him come up at all.

“Told who what?” Lavi asked, eye open wide.

“Kanda about me telling you guys about Alma,” Tykki responded.

“That was me,” Lenalee confessed, seeming completely unembarrassed, “but I didn’t tell him it was you.”

“Well then, you underestimated his intelligence, because he figured it out right quick.”

“And how did he react?” Lavi leaned forward, curious.

“I just told you – he nearly took off my head.”

“And mine!” I interjected.

“Well, I’m sorry about that. But I still feel that this is something that he needs to talk to someone about. Bottling it up can’t be good for him. Now at least if he wants to talk, he knows there are people he can go to.”

“You know, I don’t really see that happening, Lenalee,” I laughed in disbelief.

“I agree,” Tykki nodded.

“But...” Lavi’s eye glinted as he thought out loud. “Maybe a little alcohol could lighten him up! The
Old Panda’s away this weekend as well. What do you say? A party, my place, this Friday, 8 pm. Well?” He looked around at us eagerly.

“Sure, I’m in,” Tykki grinned.

Lenalee put a finger to her chin in thought. “Actually, I do believe that could work. My brother’s being dragged off for the whole weekend on some Black Order business. I might be a bit late, but…”

I considered my work schedule. My shift at the piano store lasted until 6 pm, and my Saturday shift at Hot Topic didn’t start until 3. “I have work, so I might be a bit late too, but I can make it.”

“Awesome!” Lavi fist-pumped the air.


“Sure, who?” Lavi shrugged.

“Road Kamelot. She’s a relative that happens to be friends with both Kanda and Allen.”

I nodded in affirmation, grinning. “She’s pretty cool.”

“All right then! It’s a party~!”

“I’ll get Kanda to come,” Tykki smirked.

“How?” I wondered out loud.

“Oh… I have my ways…”
Apologies Are Difficult

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV

Warnings: mentions of underage smoking, drinking, and drug use

Damn it, why do I have to feel so guilty about what I said to that stupid moyashi? He should have been clearer! It’s no wonder I misunderstood! I sighed in annoyance as I finished the last problem of my AP Chemistry homework, stretching my arms. Then I got up with an irritated growl as I heard the doorknob jiggle. As I neared the door I could hear some sort of clicking near the lock.

“Hello, Tykki,” I sighed, opening it for him.

He got up from his spot on the ground, looking slightly embarrassed. “Hey…!”

Suddenly a small purple form jumped into my arms. “Kanda…!”

“Hello, Road,” I responded with an almost-smile, glancing up at Tykki. “Did he drag you along to make sure I wouldn’t kill him?”

“Yes and no! But that’s for later; do you have candy?”

I nodded and led her inside, leaving Tykki to close the door and trail after.

Once in the kitchen I proceeded to make sour cherry tea, while the two sat down. Well, actually, Tykki sat down; Road hopped up again a moment later to open a window, as Tykki had already pulled out a cigarette. While she was up, I placed the candy bowl in front of her seat. She gave me a quick kiss on the cheek as a ‘thank you’ before she sat down to work. We waited for the tea in a companionable silence. Both Tykki and Road can talk a lot, but they also know how to appreciate silence, and I like that. Finally, I poured the tea into cups, putting a pot of honey down in front of Road. The added a rather generous helping to her tea.

“So…” Tykki began, “Lavi’s holding a party this weekend…”

“Absolutely not!” I snapped.

“Aww… Come on, Kanda! I’m going, too!” Road whined, sending a pouty face my way. Damn it, this is why he brought her…

“Why should I have to go?”

“Because you need to get out of this house,” Tykki responded. “All you do is attend school, study, practice kendo, and smoke pot. Even as your dealer, I think you need to get out more. Being stuck in here can’t be good for your health.”

“Because cigarettes, pot, and alcohol are?”

“You smoke at most 2 cigarettes a week, marijuana is used in medicine for a reason, and you drink about twice a year.” He leveled his gaze at me. “And you eat well and exercise more than anyone I
know. Trust me, your health is in no real danger.”

“Che.” I rolled my eyes. Touché.

“Come, on, Kanda, just this once,” Road begged.

I heaved another sigh then gave in. “Fine.” Then I had a thought – something I definitely should have thought of earlier. “Who else is gonna be there?”

“Just us, Lavi, Lenalee, and Allen,” Tykki shrugged, “Nothing major.”

Uggghhh… Crap. After what occurred today, being in close quarters with the moyashi is gonna be really awkward…

“Kanda? You ok?” I noticed that Road was looking at me in concern. Damn her and her ability to read people’s emotions…

“Yeah, well, uhhh… I kinda… had a talk earlier with the moyashi… It… didn’t end well…” I muttered.

“Did you punch him in the face again?” Tykki chuckled, raising an eyebrow.

“No, but I think I might as well have…”

Road sighed. “All right, spill. What happened?”

Crap, that’s right, she’s friends with him! Damn it, this just got sooo much messier. There was nothing I could really do though, considering I’d brought it up. So I just gave in and told them what had transpired.

“Hmmm… So you misunderstood him, and ended up insulting him? Doesn’t seem that serious…”

Tykki said with a shrug.

“Tykki, are you an idiot?” Road questioned with a roll of her eyes, “The topic was Allen’s deceased father. Of course it’s gonna be a touchy subject for him. It’s like someone insulting Alma in front of Kanda! Though, I admit Allen seems a touch less likely to physically harm the individual who made the mistake of doing so. But anyways. The similarity of their situations is exactly the reason he brought it up, to show Kanda that he really does understand, and isn’t just saying it.”

“Right. Sorry.” He turned to me. “So what’re you gonna do?”

I glared at my teacup. “I don’t know. Road, what do you think?”

Road sighed again – I seem to be causing her to do that quite often as of late. “I think you need to apologize. Look, Kanda… We both know this isn’t easy for you. Tykki and I have been your friends for so long that even when we argue, we never have to physically say the 2 magic words. Or one contraction and one word – however you prefer. But Allen doesn’t know you that well. If you want him to forgive you, you’re gonna have to spell it out for him.”

I nodded resignedly. That’s what I was afraid of…

“Don’t worry. I’ll talk to him tomorrow at work, and you can go apologize on Thursday. Sound fair? That way, it’s taken care of before the party.”

“Che. Whatever.” Damn. I guess there’s no getting out of it now…
“Hey, so guess what?” Tykki asked us (rhetorically, I presume), after a few minutes of silence, in order to ease (what he thought was) the tension (I think), “I saw Bak Chang kiss Fo today! And she hit him so hard he got knocked out!”
Discoveries

Chapter Notes

Allen POV
Warnings: hints of ptsd; internalized homophobia; Kanda has a mouth, and Allen sort of does, too

“Allen~!”

I grinned as Road threw her arms around me. The tiny girl seemed to love physical contact. It wasn’t in any way romantic or sexual; it was just affectionate. She’s sort of child-like in that way. Honestly, it’s no wonder people assume she’s younger than she is – she already looks like a middle schooler, and her character just makes her appear even younger. Though she’s not nearly as childlike once you get to know her. She shows a remarkable amount of tact and acceptance, and sometimes I feel like there’s a vicious vein in her in, too, when it comes to defending her friends.

“Hey! What’s up?”

“Well… I was wondering…”

“Yes?”

“You told me you’d do my makeup sometime, right?” She put her hands together and smiled up at me encouragingly.

“Yes…” We hadn’t discussed it since then, though…

“So… Do you think you might be able to do it this Friday? For the party?”

“…Sure. Though, we’ll definitely be late, then. My shift at the piano store doesn’t end until 6,” I informed her apologetically. I still felt an undercurrent of nervousness talking to Road about makeup. Even though she’d given me no reason as of yet to distrust her, I know full well how cruel people can be.

“Yay! Thank you, Allen!” She squealed, actually going so far as to kiss me on the cheek after she’d caught me in her bear hug.

I blushed a dark shade of crimson. “Road!” But as she twirled away happily, I couldn’t help but smile. Then I had a thought that just popped my bubble all over again.

“R-Road?” I began hesitantly.

“Hmmm?” She responded, turning back to me.

“Would you mind… keeping the makeup thing… just between us?”

Her eyes softened as she laid a small hand on my arm. It was my left, and so a barely managed to stop myself from flinching back.
“Of course I’ll keep it a secret. But you know…” She murmured, staring earnestly into my eyes, “I don’t think it’s anything to feel ashamed of. Makeup is an art form. Even if there are some assholes who’d judge, I don’t think any of your friends are like that.”

She smiled at me encouragingly, but I pulled away. “No. I… I don’t want them to know.” I clutched my left arm, looking away from her.

“Like I said, I won’t tell. I’m just saying that maybe you should have a little more faith in people,” she suggested with a shrug, laying her hand on my shoulder (the right one this time, thank goodness). She kept it there for a few seconds before moving away to help a customer.

Is she right? Should I maybe try… putting my faith in people again?

The next afternoon found me in front of the bathroom mirror, pots and pallets of makeup littered over every available surface, interspersed with eyeliners and makeup brushes. It was around 6, and I’d already spent more than 2 hours plotting and planning what kind of look to create for Road. And I was finally done. My eyelids were black, the undereye was purple, and there was a faint green shimmer in the inner corners. My lips were a purple-black ombre, the contouring was done in purple, and the blush was maroon. Powerful, dark, and super awesome, if I do say so myself.

After putting all my makeup supplies away, I went downstairs to get myself a drink. (I’d eaten earlier, so that I wouldn’t have to mess up the artwork on my face.) Sitting down to a glass of orange juice (with a straw), I sent Road a quick text.

Figured out what sort of look to do for you tomorrow. Make sure you’re wearing either purple or black!

 Barely a minute later I got a reply.

Can do! Thanks so much, Allen! You’re awesome! ♥

I smiled a bit at that, then proceeded to begin my homework. I was just finishing up the final problem on the AP Calculus worksheet when I heard a hard knocking at the front door.

For a moment I froze. Cross isn’t supposed to be back until next week! When the knocking came again I pulled myself together and headed for the door. Hesitantly, I peered through the peephole to find… Kanda. I blinked. What was Kanda doing at my house?! Then, remembering that I was supposed to open the door for a guest, I unlocked it and pulled it open.

“Hey, Kanda,” I greeted him quizzically. “Come on in.”

Kanda meanwhile was looking at me as if he’d just seen a ghost. Then he seemed to mentally shake himself and he stepped through the entryway, taking his shoes off neatly.

“You can put your coat on the rack,” I informed him, then continued, “Would you like something? Tea, maybe?”

He hung up his coat and nodded, then followed me inside, sitting down at the table as I made tea for him. We remained in complete silence until the tea was done and we were both sitting down. I felt like there was definitely tension in the air, but I still couldn’t for the life of me figure out what exactly Kanda Yuu was doing in my house. I didn’t dare ask, though.

“So… Moyashi…”
“It’s Allen, BaKanda!” I snapped. \textit{Did he come here just to annoy me?}

“Right.” He sat there in silence for a while, looking into his teacup. He seemed to be deciding what to say, or how to say it. After a quiet 2-3 minutes, he finally spoke up. “I don’t do this often, you know.”

I stayed silent, wondering what the Hell he was talking about.

He looked away from me, as if deliberately avoiding my gaze. “I realize… that I might have said something… uncalled for. On Monday, I mean.”

Was he blushing? It almost looked like he might be. \textit{No way. That’s gotta be a trick of the light. And wait a minute… Was he actually attempting… to apologize?} I stayed quiet, waiting with baited breath.

“So anyway… Yeah, sorry.”

I barely even heard the last word, but despite that, I’m 100% certain it was there.

“It-It’s ok,” I began uncertainly, then steadied my voice a bit, “You didn’t know.”

There was silence again for a while, a lot more comfortable than before.

Finally he got up. “Well, thank you for the tea, and I’m sorry for interrupting. I can tell you were busy… I’ll go now.”

“Wait!” I almost reached out after him, then reconsidered. “I wasn’t doing anything, really.”

He stared at me in confusion, one eyebrow raised. “…You weren’t going anywhere?”

I shook my head ‘no’.

“But then… what’s with the makeup?”

“What make-…” I felt my breath catch, like Cross had just kicked me in the stomach again. Slowly I raised a shaking hand to cover my mouth. My eyes widened. \textit{I’m still in the makeup I planned for Road! How the Hell did I forget about that?}

“Moyashi? You ok? You seem a little pale…”

That shocked me right out of my reverie. “Kanda! Please! I’m begging you, please! Don’t tell anyone!” I’d covered my whole face (or as much as I could) with my hands, and was getting very close to bursting into tears. A desperate idea struck me and my head snapped up. “I’ll do anything!” I could feel the first tear begin to roll down my right cheek, and there was no way to stop it.

Kanda just stared at me in what I’d almost call confusion. Then he glared. “Stop crying! Jeez… Do I look like some sort of gossip monger?” He shook his head and looked away. “Besides, it’s nothing to freak out over, is it? So you like art. Who the fuck cares?”

I was shocked. Kanda, of all people, was… ok with me? Ok with… \textit{this}?

“Damnit, I hate idiot crybabies,” Kanda hissed, then left the room.

It took a moment for it to register that he was leaving. But the moment it hit me I jumped up and ran for the door. He was just about to open it when I got there.
“Kanda!”

He turned back to face me. “What?”

I smiled brightly, though I’m sure it looked horrible, as my makeup was probably running all down my cheeks.

“Thank you!”

He stared at me for a moment before practically dashing out the door, slamming it behind him.

*There really must be something wrong with the lights in this house. For a moment there, I could have sworn he was blushing…*
Winding Down and Winding Up

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV
Warnings: Kanda has a mouth [so nothing]

Stupid, stupid, stupid! Damn it, he’s just an annoying little brat! Why does he have to affect me like this?! I stormed home with a fury in my steps. I didn’t encounter anyone, which is a really good thing, because I probably would have pushed over anyone in my path like a steamroller. I was seriously not amused.

Damn it, it’s not my fault! The makeup just made him look good. That’s it! That is the only reason. There is no way that I actually think that baka moyashi is cute! I growled as I unlocked the door and entered the house. After shedding my coat and boots, I ran up to my room to get changed, then sat down on the back porch, in the spot I typically use for meditation.

Calm yourself. He is nothing but a dumb brat, unworthy of your attention or irritation. Calm yourself...

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Picking you up, of course!”

I glared. It was 6 in the evening, and I had been in the middle of meditating. Despite that, Tykki Mikk was now standing in front of my door with a really fucking annoying grin on his face.

“I reiterate, as you seem to have drunk and smoked away too many of your brain cells to understand. What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Kanda…” Tykki sighed in what appeared to be deep disappointment. “Lavi’s party? It’s today.”

“So?”

“So… You promised you’d come. You promised Road you’d come,” he reminded me, pointing at my chest.

“It starts at 8. That’s 2 hours from now.”

Tykki sighed again, then shouldered his way past me and into my house. He took off his shoes and coat in the entryway, then began moving through the rooms, obliging me to follow after. He led the way into my room and headed immediately for my closet.

“I want to make sure you’re properly dressed,” he informed me, attempting to open the door.

I stopped him and glared. “I know I can’t get rid of you, and Road would be upset if I killed you, but don’t touch my stuff. I’ll put something on, and then you’ll decide whether or not you like it.”

I didn’t even wait for the affirmation, just made my way in, looking around my walk-in closet. Not
wanting to waste any time, I quickly selected dark blue skinny jeans and a gray t-shirt, then walked out.

“Too plain!” Came the immediate reply.

So I walked back in and tried something else. It took me more than 45 minutes to find something that was suitable for Tykki. Apparently, that was low-cut, skin-tight, black leather pants, and a skin-tight, sleeveless, dark blue shirt with a lotus pattern running vertical up the back. I also had a studded belt and black, studded combat boots. I wore my prayer beads around my wrist. (Tykki hadn’t been able to convince me to get rid of them. He had eventually accepted the situation with a grumble of “at least the white matches the lotus pattern”). He had also wanted me to wear eyeliner, but that was where I put my foot down.

When we got to Lavi’s house, the baka usagi opened the door with an irritatingly huge grin and a loud “Hello!” He chatted happily with Tykki while leading us towards the kitchen. It was only 7:45, so we were the first ones there, obviously. The two of us placed the food and drinks we’d brought down on the table. (What? I am aware of social niceties, even if I don’t usually pay attention to them.)

“So! Tykki, guess what!...”

I did my best to ignore their conversation from the moment it started. In order to facilitate this, I wandered out of the kitchen and through the rest of the house. I’d forgotten how many books they have. Any librarian would be jealous. I stopped in front of a door marked ‘Library’. What the Hell is the rest of the house, then? Pushing the door open just a crack, I entered the room, and looked around, dumbfounded. Ok, forget what I said earlier. This place is not a librarian’s dream, it’s a librarian’s nightmare. The entire room was filled with books. The shelves were packed to bursting, so what hadn’t fit was piled in enormous columns and large hills. What if they want the book on the bottom…? I even saw ‘tables’ made with a piece of wood balancing atop ‘legs’ made out of books. Yikes…! Still, at least it’s quiet. With that thought in mind, I found myself a nice, secluded corner with an armchair in it. Obviously, the armchair had books on it, but I placed them on the ground then sat down. I wonder if I can get away with staying here the whole night?
Allen POV

Clothing/Make-Up References: 1) Road's outfit: I based it off of Ekaterina "Katja" Kurae from Seikon no Qwaser. 2) The make-up Allen applies on Road: Check out the Fatale Makeup Look from YouTube user BiohazardousBeauty. She's also a blogger, and she is a genius when it comes to make-up. Her work is absolutely beautiful!

Warnings: hints at internalized homophobia

“Allen-kun~!”

At 7 in the evening on Friday, I opened the door to find a gorgeous little goth-lolita girl standing in front of me.

“Hey, Road! Come on in!” I smiled. “You look amazing.”

“Thank you!” She giggled.

She really did look wonderful. She wore a black, sleeveless dress that fell to about her knees. The skirt part of it bubbled out, obviously held up by an awful lot of layers of tutu. She also had on black stockings and Mary Janes. Her hair was the usual wild, spiky mess of purple.

I led her to the kitchen and asked if she wanted anything to eat or drink, but she just shook her head. So, I got to work on the look. Personally, I’m not a big fan of face products. I feel that no matter how careful you are, it only ever looks good from a distance. This means that the face routine I use (both on others and myself) is pretty short. In about an hour, we were set to go. The black and purple eyes with the slight green shimmer went fantastically with her hair and outfit.

“Isn’t you going to put on any make-up, Allen? Like, some eyeliner maybe?”

I shook my head. “Road… I already told you… I don’t really like doing it in public.”

“I know. But it would go really well with what you’re wearing.”

I shook my head. “Road… I already told you… I don’t really like doing it in public.”

“I know. But it would go really well with what you’re wearing.”

Don’t I know it. I had on a red button-up shirt and black skinny jeans, accompanied by a studded belt. I planned to wear black combat boots on the way there.

“Come on…!” She begged. Suddenly her face lit up. “We can tell them I made you do it! Or better yet, that I did it! Tykki has no idea how hopeless I am with makeup; he won’t know! No one will! Come on!”

Kanda will… I deliberated for a little while longer. But Kanda already promised he wouldn’t tell, and I don’t think he’d bring it up or contradict what Road and I say…

“Fine,” I stated with a nod of my head, and rushed back to the bathroom to line my eyes, Road jumping up and down with excitement behind me.
“Moyashi-chan!”

“Boy!”

“…Please don’t call me that.”

When we got to Lavi’s house we were greeted by the hyperactive redhead and the grinning Noah. Lavi had on dark green skinny jeans and a v-neck black shirt. Tykki was sporting black skinny jeans and a black shirt, silver bangles, and eyeliner. *Looks like I’m not the only one.*

“Come on in!” Lavi grinned, ushering us inside. Following his lead, Road and I made our way to the kitchen, where we found Lenalee mixing drinks.

“Hey, guys! What cocktail should I start y’all with?” She laughed, tipping an imaginary cowboy hat. Her dark blue, flared mini skirt looked gorgeous on her, especially partnered with a pair of thigh-hi stockings. Her shirt was loose with a large boat neck that somehow brought out her flawless figure perfectly. I could see Lavi nearly salivating in the background, and Road practically danced her way over.

“Hi!” The small girl smiled, “I’m Road Kamelot!”

“Hey! I’m Lenalee Lee! Nice to meet you. I’m sorry I didn’t introduce myself right away; I was hoping one of the boys would be the gentlemen and do the introductions, but…”

Road giggled as she hugged the taller girl around the middle. “Well, I don’t know about Lavi, but Tykki sure doesn’t have enough manners for that.” She glanced over at the table covered with drinks and snacks. “Allen, you should probably put the stuff there.”

“Oh, right,” I responded, setting down the liquor and food we’d brought. I’m not a big fan of alcohol, for obvious reasons, but it was a party, so I figured I had to at least pretend. Besides, you don’t go over to someone else’s house without a gift. I glanced around. “Where’s Kanda?”

*Crap. Why did I have to ask that? Now it’ll seem like I was thinking about him!*

Lavi looked around in shock. “Actually, where *is* Kanda? He came with Tykki; he even brought food. Where the Hell’d he go?”

Road sighed as she let go of Lenalee. “I’ll go find him.”

“Should we help?” Lenalee questioned.

But Road just shook her head. “If he’s off and disappeared, you guys are *not* the ones who ought to find him.” And with that, she floated away.
“Kanda. You realize how unsociable you’re being, don’t you?”

“Who cares? I didn’t want to come, anyway.”

“But you still did. And as a guest, there are certain social niceties you must obey. Like not running away from everyone.”

“I’m not running away,” I hissed indignantly.

Road leveled her eyes at me.

“Oh-huh…”

*That make-up seems familiar. The color scheme, the flawless blending…*

“Who did your make-up?”

“Don’t change the subject. You’ve never been interested in my make-up before.”

“That’s because most of what you wear is average at best.”

“Kanda! That’s mean!”

“I just mean that you tend to stick to eyeliner. I’ve never seen you wear flashy eye shadow like this. So who did it?”

“That’s a secret,” she winked. “And you are coming back to the party with me.”

*Now who’s changing the subject?* With a sigh I got up and followed her out, knowing this whole thing was gonna be bothersome as all Hell.

When we got to the kitchen I realized everyone had already arrived, and had even started drinking. Tykki was smirking at Lavi, who was talking animatedly at him. Moyashi and Lenalee looked on and listened with mild interest. Road left my side and attached herself to Lenalee’s waist, something that the pigtailed girl seemed to take in stride. I ended up pouring myself a cup of sake while leaning on a counter next to the moyashi.

“So…” I whispered into his ear, “Road’s make-up… That your handiwork?”

I watched with some amusement as the moyashi’s face was covered in a terrified blush. He seemed lost for words.

“Whatever. I don’t care. Just remind her to tell whoever did it that they should go professional.” I
downed the sake and poured myself another cup. Leaning back against the wall, I noticed that Moyashi was still blushing, though now he seemed more pleased than terrified. I quickly turned away.

“Let’s play Poker!”

I gritted my teeth at the shrill sound of Lavi’s voice. How can a person be so irritating?

“Why?” I hissed out, pinching the bridge of my nose.

“Because I want to,” Tykki grinned at me, “and later we’ll all be way too drunk to do so.”

“I wanna play!” Road trilled, excited.

Even Lenalee and the moyashi seemed to be game, so I really had no choice. We all sat down and Lenalee dealt the cards.

Now don’t get me wrong. I’m not opposed to poker because I’m bad at it; in fact, I’d say I’m pretty good. I just don’t like being forced to interact with people. So, to be perfectly clear, it wasn’t poker I was opposed to – it was the whole party.

Half an hour into the game, I was struggling to maintain my Poker Face. I only had pants and underwear left, and everyone else was already in their underwear. Lenalee was fine though – she had remained as the dealer – lucky her. (Did I mention that Lavi intended us to play Strip Poker? Probably not, because I didn’t know until far too late.) Everyone was out except me – and the (apparently not so baka) moyashi. That bastard was fully dressed, and grinning as innocently as an angel. Pretty deceiving, if you ask me. Honestly, I knew there was something off about this kid.

“Oh! Royal Straight Flush!”

That did it. I flipped. Literally. I flipped the table and dove at him, tackling him to the ground. “There is no way you’re not cheating!” I screamed in his horrified face. But before I could search him for the cards I knew he had to have on him, I felt two strong pairs of hands grab me and pull me off.

“Easy there, boy,” Tykki laughed, “The kid’s good. That’s all there is to it.”

“Yeah,” Lavi agreed. He and Tykki exchanged glances. “Hey, what say you we play Truth or Dare? There’s no way to cheat at that.”

“I’ll bring in some drinks,” Lenalee offered. She made her way to the kitchen with Road trailing behind her. A few minutes later we’d all been sat down in the living room. I sat alone on a small couch, a bit removed from the rest of them, shooting death glares at the opposite wall.

Damn Road! If it weren’t for her, I’d be long gone!

“Che,” I grunted, crossing my arms. We’d all gotten dressed again, but I had a feeling things wouldn’t stay that way. We were gonna play Truth or Dare, after all.

“OK! Moyashi-chan will start, seeing as he won the Poker Game!” Lavi announced with a clap of his hands.

I wondered vaguely if staring at the wall long enough could make it burst into flames.

“Don’t call me that!” Moyashi growled at Lavi, giving him a glare that (I hate to admit) actually
managed to pull me out of my sullen wall-glaring. The usagi seemed terrified. But the white-haired kid’s eyes were already roaming the room. “Lenalee. Truth or Dare?”

Lenalee considered, then nodded as she responded, “Dare.”

“I dare you to French-kiss Lavi,” the Moyashi grinned. Either he had the lamest sense for dares in the world, or he was playing matchmaker.

Lenalee hopped up with a grin and sat down next to Lavi, and proceeded to make out with him. I did my best not to be repulsed by the sight, as they both seemed to be pretty into it. After about 20 seconds Lenalee looked back at the moyashi.

“That good?” After receiving the affirmative she rose and crossed the room so she could sit next to Road again. Lavi seemed oddly unaffected. Her eyes wandered over the small crowd, calculating. With a grin, she pointed at Tykki.

“Tykki. Truth or Dare?”

“Truth,” he answered without hesitation.

*Is that really a good idea?* I wondered. *What if she asks him something about illicit activities? I know there are a lot of rumors about Tykki and his relationship with drugs. Then I almost rolled my eyes. If that happens, he’ll lie. Duh. A game is not important enough to make him risk everything.*

Tykki was in luck, though. Lenalee’s question was pretty straightforward. “Have you ever kissed a boy?”

Tykki grinned, and I hoped desperately that no one noticed his eyes darting quickly in my direction. “Of course I have. Honestly, why wouldn’t I have?”

The comment got (what I assume was) the intended reaction. The moyashi stared. Lavi laughed, blushing. Road examined her fingernails, gave me a quick wink, then went back to looking at the shimmering purple on the ends of her fingers. Lenalee was still grinning like an idiot when she sat back down. I recalled once having caught her reading *The Tyrant Falls in Love*.

Tykki threw an arm around Lavi and asked him with a grin, “Truth or Dare?” Lavi blushed as hard as Lenalee, though I think their reasons were mildly different.

“T-t-truth.”

“Have you ever had sex?”

Lavi turned as bright as his hair, and I rolled my eyes. *Typical Tykki.*

“No.” Lavi whispered out, his voice heavy with something I couldn’t really identify.

“Perfect,” Tykki smiled wickedly.

Lavi turned away quickly. “Yuu-chan! Truth or Dare?”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Fine. Truth or Dare?”

I took a few seconds to consider. Lavi could probably cook up some pretty horrible dares, so…
“Truth.”

He grinned. “Tell the truth! What’s your sexual orientation? I’ll bet you’re asexual!” He nodded to himself, seeming satisfied.

I resumed glaring at the wall. “This game is stupid.”

“Come on, Kanda! Answer the question!” Tykki looked like he was doing everything he could to keep from laughing out loud.

“No.”

“Come on! Be fair, Kanda!” Road called, giving me her best puppy-dog eyes. *Damn it.*

“Fine. I’m gay, happy?”
For a moment I was frozen in shock. We all were. Well, except Road and Tykki. Tykki had doubled over in the laughter I guess he’d been doing his best to hold in since the moment Lavi had asked his question. I don’t think it’s really that funny, though. Am I missing something between them…?

Road seemed completely calm.

After a few seconds of silence (except for Tykki’s laughter, which I could tell was taking all of Kanda’s limited self-control to prevent himself from stopping in a very permanent fashion – the guy looked even more murderous than usual), Lavi ended the silence.

“You’re gay?!” He practically screamed it, eye and mouth wide with shock.

“Yeah. Got a problem with that?” Kanda’s eyes narrowed into slits. Made him look a bit like an attractive Lord Voldemort.

“N-No,” Lavi stuttered, then calmed down a bit, “Not at all. I’m just… surprised. Honestly! We’ve been friends for years! I tried to set you up on dates! With girls! Now tell me, what was the point in all that? Nothing! If I’d known, I wouldn’t have wasted my time with women; I would have tried to hook you up with a dude!”

“And that’s exactly why I didn’t tell you. I knew you would be a million times more annoying if you knew.”

Kanda’s voice and expression were deadpan, and I’m not surprised. Lenalee was looking as if she were in heaven. Is she a fujoshi…? I glanced back at Kanda. But if he’s gay… Does that mean he’s available? Then common sense returned. No! Not good! Kanda is as off-limits as any other guy! No one can know! It’s bad enough that Kanda knows about the make-up. If he knew I were bi, he’d be disgusted!

I watched as a relative calm fell over the group again. Kanda glanced around.

“So… Are we gonna keep playing this dumb game? Or can we switch over to the alcohol?”

In the end, we played another 3 rounds, then gave up. We spent the rest of the night drinking, and Tykki eventually dragged Lavi away from the group into the kitchen. They never did make it back. In the morning, they wandered out of one of the rooms with their clothes and hair completely messed up. No one asked. For a while, at least.

But when Kanda started yelling that if we didn’t get to the kitchen he’d throw out the pancakes and orange juice he’d prepared we all made a mad scramble. Kanda’s threats were not to be ignored. And his food turned out to be really good, not to mention his hangover cure. I’ve got to ask him what went in it. Maybe if I can make it, Cross won’t be as angry in the mornings.
When we’d all finished and were sitting around drinking tea, Lenalee asked the question.

“So… Lavi, Tykki. What happened last night?” She honestly looked way too chipper for the time in the morning – it was kind of creepy.

Lavi blushed, and Tykki grinned. “Nothing much. We just made out.”

Lavi gaped at him. Obviously they had not discussed what they were going to say.

“So are you two going out?” Road piped up, seeming quite pleased at the idea.

“Would you like to?” Tykki asked, turning to Lavi with an inviting and hopeful smile. And as if they were alone and there weren’t 4 other people staring at them.

“Uuuhhh… Well, ok.” Lavi himself seemed surprised at his answer. Lenalee and Road high-fived. I was amazed at how quickly Lavi had been sucked into Tykki’s pace. And I wasn’t the only one.

“Remind me again how long you two have known each other?”

“A week,” replied Tykki calmly. “Come on, Kanda, lighten up! High School is about experimentation! I like him, he likes me… If it works, it works; if it doesn’t, it doesn’t. That’s all there is to it.”

Kanda just rolled his eyes. And caught me staring at him.

“What’s wrong, Moyashi? My face too beautiful for you to keep your eyes off of?”

“It’s Allen, BaKanda!” I shot back. “And no, I was actually wondering why your hair’s so long. Isn’t it in the way? I could cut it off, it you want. Maybe give you a topknot?”

The table went deathly silent. Kanda glared at me. “And I could dye yours in exchange.” His eyes flickered up to my messy white hair. “Whatever salon you went to has the most colorblind hairdressers in the world. It’s atrocious.”

I was just about to retort when Lenalee cut in. “Hey, I gotta go. I know it’s only 11, but I’ve already gotten 36 texts and 25 calls from my brother.”

After that the tension diffused a bit while we got our stuff together, cleaned up, and said our goodbyes. As I made my way home, all I could really think was:

*He may be an ass, but he’s got a fine one.*
Isn't that always the way it works?

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV
Warnings: Kanda has a mouth [so nothing]

Remind me again why teachers enjoy group projects so much? Honestly. All they are is a ridiculous waste of time. 9 times out of 10, 1 person does all of the work, and everyone else just sits there. Are they somehow not aware of this? Surely, things couldn’t have been that much different in their own school days? Or do they prefer to just ignore their own painful memories of failing at dividing the work up evenly so that their students will succeed where they failed?

I doubt you need much of an explanation as to where this particular tirade came from, but since I am seriously pissed off, I’m gonna give it to you anyway. So here goes.

Mondays are never exactly the highlight of my week. I hate dealing with people, and Monday means I have nothing to look forward to for the next 5 days except steadily rising blood pressure, an increased yearning for cigarettes, and the eternally present desire to use the Chemistry Lab equipment to create a neutron bomb.

So at 7:50 a.m., I sat down in the AP English classroom, waiting for the teacher and the rest of the students to arrive. The baka moyashi was first. He gave me a hesitant wave, and I nodded. After that, he sat down looking quite pleased with himself. I watched him out of the corner of my eye, mildly concerned. The kid looked like he’d been through the ringer; there were deep shadows beneath his eyes, and he looked like he could fall asleep standing up. I jerked my eyes back down to the paper I was gonna hand in today. Why should I be worried about him?

When Reever Wenhamm got in, I wondered whether everyone had had a bad weekend. Wait, that’s right, he spent it with Komui… Mr. Wenhamm is basically the only teacher in the whole school (possibly the only person in the entire world) who can actually control Lenalee’s mad scientist of a brother. I wonder how he does it…?

“All right, class, we’ll be starting a new project today. You’ll find the details in these packets.” He grabbed an enormous pile of papers off of his desk and began to pass them out. “This is going to last all year, and will cover changes in writing styles, popular topics, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and basically anything else you or I can come up with, relating to all of the required reading materials for this class. It will serve as a third of your grade, so make sure it’s good. Before you complain,” he raised his hand as well as his voice to be heard above the angry mutters, “this will help you, too. Done correctly, the completed project will serve excellently as review material for your AP Exams in May.” There was a spatter of reluctant nodding throughout the classroom.

I sighed. Why is everyone making such a big fuss? When you signed up for an AP class, you signed up for a lot of work. Suck it up!

But Reever wasn’t finished. “In addition, to make it easier on you, you’ll be completing the project in pairs.”
Wait, what?!

“To avoid any complications or awkward situations, I’ve selected your partners for you, based on what I’ve seen so far of how you interact with each other in class. I’ve done my best to put you all with partners who I think you can work well with, and who can help you bring out the best you have to offer.” He glanced around. “I also tried not to fit anyone with the people they talk with most during class, to limit distractions.” This last statement elicited both groans and chuckling amongst the students.

*He’s picking our partners? I have a bad feeling about this…*

“Lenalee, you’ll be with Rohfa. Shifu, you’ll be with Rikei…”

And so it went. I felt a mixture of irritation and apprehension growing inside of me. *If he does what I think he will, I swear I’ll kill him.*

“Allen, you’ll be together with Kanda. Maosa and Kie, you’ll be working together. You, Chaoji, will be with Eishi…”

*And he fucking did it!* I felt rage boiling up inside me. *How dare he! ‘Bring out the best in us’, my ass! He’s just having fun!*

Reever finished reading off the partners, and continued explaining the project.

“Now, obviously, this project is far too big to do in-class. Especially since we do actually need to move forward with the material. I would suggest doing the various parts of the project parallel to our classwork. Regardless of how the works will be categorized later, the best way to do it would probably be to complete the sections on each book as we get to it in class. However, I will make things just a tiny bit easier on you by allowing you a bit of class time. This Friday you’ll get 45 minutes, half of the class. Next week you’ll get the full 90 minutes, after that 45 again, and so on and so forth. Get the picture? Today I’ll give you the next 10 minutes to meet with your new partners and discuss preliminary things, like discussing how to divide up the work and exchanging contact info, etcetera. Also, during that time, I want all of you to hand in to me the papers that were due today.” With that, he sat down at his desk.

I immediately got up and stormed over, throwing the essay down in front of him. “Switch my partner,” I growled.

“Sorry, Kanda, but that ain’t gonna happen. I chose those partners for a reason.” He didn’t even look up, just began to read over my work, and I stomped back to my seat. It wasn’t long before I found my sullen introspection interrupted by the moyashi.

“What?”

“Well, we’re partners, so… here.” He handed me a piece of paper with his cell number and e-mail address. Reluctantly, I gave him my own information in return.

“So,” I began with a sigh, “how should we do this? I suggest as little contact as physically possible.”

“I agree, BaKanda,” he spat. “How about you do one book, and I do the next? Then we can look over each other’s work. I wasn’t here at the start of term, so you do the first one, and I’ll do the second. Sound fair?”

I gave him a curt nod and he left.
That night I got home in a whirl of irritation, and smoked a cigarette in the back yard. I’d already had one during lunch which made this my second in one day. *If I’m not careful, I really will get addicted to these damn things.*

As I finished the cigarette and went inside, I couldn’t help but think, *This whole project would be so much simpler to do alone. Instead of just writing it, I’ll have to correct the crappy work of an idiot, and a proud one at that. Damn it, I swear I’m gonna kill Reever.*
Of all the people I could have been partnered with, it just had to be Kanda, didn’t it? Almost 30 people in that class, and I have to be partnered with the only one that hates my guts. Mr. Wenhamm is definitely crazy. And I don’t think I’m the only one who believes that. A lot of people looked pretty damn concerned when he announced that Kanda and I would be together, me among them. I think I’ll be lucky to survive this year with my head still attached to my body.

Lunchtime couldn’t have arrived earlier if it tried.

When I got to our usual table, I was surprised to find Tykki sitting next to Lavi. Then I remembered that they were dating, as of Saturday, and felt like an idiot.

“Hey, guys.”

“Hiya, Kid!” Tykki grinned.

Lavi smiled, too. “Allen! Still alive, I see! I’m amazed Kanda didn’t kill you right away!”

I wasn’t exactly surprised that Lavi knew. Lenalee was already there, after all. “Well, I’m not. If Kanda wants to kill me, he’ll do it in a dark alley and dump my body in the river, with cinder blocks tied to my corpse to weigh it down. He won’t do it in a place with 30 witnesses.”

“That’s kinda morbid,” Tykki chuckled.

“I watch Dexter.”

“Right,” he grinned. “Hannibal, too, no doubt?”

“And a whole range of other detective-y shows.”

“I’ll keep out of your way, then,” Lavi said, giving a nervous laugh. “After all, the best person to hide a body is one who knows how to find one.”

That night found me in a seedy bar in town, playing poker for money.

I’d finished my homework before I came, and had made sure to disguise myself well. It really is a good thing I learned how to do special effects makeup.

I’d been playing in different bars and clubs, in different disguises, for a week now, and I have a feeling it’s not gonna stop any time soon. With the combination of work and gambling, I’d already managed to scrounge together about $2500, but since I had to pay for my own living expenses, as well as Master Cross’s Sin Money, that was nowhere near enough.
So I played. I’m good at gambling, and it’s a great way to make money quick. Only problem is, you have to be careful about not winning too much. If people realize you’re cheating, things can turn real ugly. The only reason I dared to be so obvious when playing against my friends is that I knew they wouldn’t hurt me. Well, OK, Kanda would have, but the others stopped him in time.

“Call! Four of a kind!” I placed the cards on the table, and looked around at the rest of the players. There were groans and mutters, but no one opposed my taking the money in the center of the table. I did a quick tally in my head. I’d just earned about $500, and that was more than enough for one night, especially considering that the bar I was in wasn’t too big, and the other players looked pretty dangerous. So I collected my winnings and excused myself from the game, feeling distinctly relieved that no one got up with me.

I exited the bar and breathed in the warm night air. It was the end of September, but the weather was still pleasantly warm. You could already feel a bit of the fall chill creeping in, but it was nothing a thin jacket or long-sleeved shirt couldn’t handle.

I made my way quickly towards home. Even though my homework was already done, it was still already around midnight on a school night, and I did want to get some sleep. I was so busy mulling over whether or not I may need to go over my AP Calc homework again (I wasn’t sure I’d done one of the proofs quite right), that I forgot where I was, and suddenly found myself grabbed and thrown up against an alley wall.

“Give me all your money,” a hooded man hissed, and I felt the barrel of a gun press up against my stomach.

My breath caught. I doubted there was going to be any reasoning with the man – his breath stank of alcohol. And that meant that even giving up the money I had might not guarantee me safety. Plus, if I lost the money, that would make my situation even worse with Cross.

A wild idea crossed my mind. What if I tell him I don’t have any? What if I just… let him shoot me?

A strange calm seemed to creep over me at the thought. Everything would be so much simpler then. No more Cross, no more beatings, no more pain. No more thinking about… well, about anything, really. It could all be over, just like that! And the best part, whispered a small voice in my head, is that no one can blame you. It wasn’t your fault; you were attacked.

I felt the gun press into me harder, and I gasped, feeling my heart rate speed up. As if the organ was trying to make up for the time it felt it wouldn’t have the chance to see…

“I said, gimme your money, kid!” Growled the man.

“I… I don’t have any…” I whispered.

“What?”

“I don’t have any!” I stated, much more strength in my voice this time. “I don’t have any money, so you might as well just shoot me and get it over with! Otherwise, I’ll call the cops!”

Something about the thought of everything finally coming to an end had given me a strength I didn’t know I had, a strength to egg on the man I knew for sure would kill me. I closed my eyes. Yes, I realized, this is it. It’s finally over…

But then I heard dull thunk, followed by the rustle of clothing and a thud. I realized the man was no longer in front of me, and opened my eyes.
Sure enough, he was on the ground, passed out. And standing next to him, swinging a lead pipe, was none other than Yuu Kanda.
“What the fuck were you thinking, you damn Moyashi?!” I yelled, making him jump back a bit, terror written all over his face.

“I… I-I… I don’t know…” His arms had come around to encircle his stomach, and he was slouched over staring at the ground. I noticed he had started shaking, too.

“Fuck, honestly. Threatening him with calling the police?! Of all the stupid…!” I growled, exasperated, my hand rising unbidden to my forehead. Damn it! This moron's gonna give me a headache!

My words didn’t even appear to register. He just kept mumbling.

“What… what was I doing? I… I don’t know…”

I sighed. As much as I wanted to remain angry with the baka moyashi in front of me, seeing him looking so pathetic just made me unable to maintain my outraged front. The brat was obviously in shock, and I needed to get him home. Unfortunately, I didn’t exactly know where “home” for him was. And I somehow doubted he was in any state to inform me. Still, worth a shot.

“Oy, Moyashi. Where do you live?”

It was as if he couldn’t even hear me. He was still staring into the middle distance, shivering, with his arms wrapped around his middle. I signed again. (Why does this baka moyashi always make me sigh like this?) Then, pulling out my phone, I dialed a number, quietly willing the other party to pick up.

“Hello! It’s pretty late you know. Is this a booty call? And who are you, anyway?”

“Road, it’s me,” I answered, relieved. “And no, this is not a booty call,” I added as an afterthought.

“Then what is it? Are you bringing me candy?”

“Not tonight, no. I need your help.”

“Oh?”

“Do you happen to know where the baka moyashi lives?”

“You mean Allen? Yeah, I know. Why?”

“’Cause I just knocked unconscious some asshole who was threatening him with a gun, and he doesn’t really look like he’ll be able to get home alone.”

“Holy shit! Is Allen okay? Is he hurt?”
“Physically he’s fine, but emotionally… not so much. Pretty sure he hasn’t seen a gun before. Anyway, could you give me his address, then?”

“Of course. But why not let us come get you? It won’t be a problem.”

“No way. You guys are a cop family, right? I don’t want to get involved in that shit. Besides, I think he needs to be alone right now, or at least not with a whole crowd of strangers asking stupid, intrusive questions. And anyway, this isn’t exactly a neighborhood kids should be hanging around in,” I continued, glancing around me, “especially at this time of night.”

She didn’t seem too fond of the idea, but Road eventually acquiesced and gave me the moyashi’s address. I stowed my phone away with another sigh. This night had been a tiring one for me, and it didn’t seem like it was over quite just yet.

“Oy, Moyashi. Can you stand?”

He just looked at me, fearful.

“I thought not,” I sighed again. (Seriously, what is up with all the sighing? I am literally driving myself up the wall.)

So I bent down and picked the brat up, princess-carrying him back to his house. I got the very strange feeling he was Snow White, and I was the Prince. But if that were true, he was out of luck, because I sure as Hell wasn’t gonna give him the “kiss of life”.

…Well, probably not.

… Nope, definitely not.

Once we got to his place I carried him in the door and set him down on a chair in the kitchen, then proceeded to make tea. Nothing calms a person better than tea. When I glanced back at him I noticed something else: the corner of a thick wad of bills sticking out of his pocket.

What the fuck?! Less than an hour ago, he was being threatened at gunpoint and told to fork over all of his cash. Why didn’t he hand it over? Is he in serious money trouble or something? I shook my head. Whatever. Not my problem.

As he began to sip the tea, the moyashi seemed to begin to regain his senses. I noticed the first thing he did was make sure the money was still there, and then shove it deeper into his pocket. I sat down opposite him.

“So. Not that it’s really any of my business, but what were you doing out there tonight?”

He looked away. “It’s not important.”

“Whatever,” I shrugged. Then I got up. “Anyway, if you don’t need me anymore, I should probably get going. I’ll get your schoolwork for you tomorrow if you don’t come.”

Surprise covered his features. “You… You’d do that for me?”

“Che. Obviously. Otherwise I wouldn’t have offered. Besides, it’s not exactly going out of my way, is it? We have all the same classes, after all.”

“Thank you, Kanda.”
“Che. Whatever. It’s just school work.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about.” I heard the squeak of a chair, and turned to find that he’d pushed himself to his feet, then watched as he walked over to me, slightly unsteady. He gripped both of his arms tightly at the elbows, and stared intently at the ground. Or into the middle distance again. I’m not quite sure. Then, quite suddenly, he looked straight into my eyes. “You saved me tonight. Thank you.”

I had a feeling there was more to his words than the plainly obvious, but I couldn’t figure it out, and it didn’t seem like he really wanted me to know the other part anyway. I just nodded. “Anytime,” I informed him, smirking softly.

He grinned back at me with eyes that looked on the brink of tears. Then, as if on impulse, he dashed forward and put his arms around my waist. For a moment, I didn’t know what to do, but then, almost unbidden, my arms found their way around him, too. The embrace couldn’t have lasted more than 5 seconds before we pulled apart. But we still couldn’t really look each other in the eye afterwards.

It was only later, as I made my way home through the dark that it occurred to me that I should have been pissed off by the fact that the damn Moyashi had hugged me. But instead, I’d hugged him back. I wonder why…? Whatever. Must be Alma’s influence… All things considered, that doesn’t seem too hard to believe. He is so like Alma, after all, that damn Moyashi…
What just happened?

I was sitting in the bathtub, surrounded by bubbles, having cleaned up on autopilot, when the events of the night finally struck me, and I felt something akin to panic strike me. In an effort to calm myself and quiet my screaming mind, I took a deep breath and slipped back, submerging my head beneath the water. The silence pressed on my eardrums, muffling the sound of The Dresden Dolls playing in the background. But my mind still wouldn’t quiet down.

So I reemerged from beneath the water, gasping. I pushed my hair out of my face with my left hand, then brought the appendage down in front of me for examination. The skin, where it was still visible, was deathly pale, just like the rest of my body (no way to get a tan when you have to keep yourself covered). Except of course for the areas that were covered in pink or brown flesh, left over scar tissue. But I honestly don’t think anyone would even notice those things – they would be too absorbed in the multitude of wounds, most scabbing over, but many still open. A mixture of revulsion and pleasure filled me.

I know I’m sick, and I know it’s sick, but I actually like the scars. The intricate patterns they trace, the delicate colors they possess, the meaning and emotions held by each individual gash. Not that I can tell all of their stories. There are so many, I can’t even really tell you when I made most of them, much less why. I can only really give a general summary of the feelings that lead to my self harm. The exception being the deepest lacerations. (That’s a 25 cent word.) Those ones take a lot more energy to keep clean, to help close. I even have scars that I’ve personally stitched shut. After all, the hospital was never really an option. No way Cross would have taken me, much less footed the bill.

Still, sometimes I horrify myself. Every once in a while I manage to view my body with an outsider’s perspective, and I realize just how ugly the scars are, how repulsive. And I take I sick sort of pride in that, and that I’m the only one who can see the beauty in the darkest depths of a human soul.

Well… I guess I’m not the only one. I spend enough time on Tumblr and the rest of the internet to know that there are plenty of other people like me. Some estimates suggest that 1 in every 5 people have a mental illness, and one in every 10 “young people” self harm. So I’m definitely not alone. It still feels like it, though.

I wonder if Kanda is like this, too? The thought crossed my mind, completely unbidden, and I actually laughed. Kanda? Self harm? No way. He’s way too proud to destroy his body the way I do. Still, though, he’s got more than enough reason to, what with Alma and his family life. I wonder how he deals with it all?

Thinking about Kanda returned my though process to the events of just 2 hours ago. He really was like a knight, wasn’t he, the way he just swooped in and saved me? I sank deeper into the bath again. But why did I even need saving in the first place? What was that? I’ve known how unstable my
mental state was for a while, but I’ve never before actually considered it...

Suicide.

That’s what tonight was, wasn’t it; a suicide attempt. I mean, sure, it wasn’t the way people normally go about it, but that’s definitely what happened. Back there, when that man was threatening me, all I wanted was for it to end. For everything to end.

But did I really want to die?

Honestly, that... sounds wrong somehow. I sat up a bit, began running the fingers of my right hand over the scars on my left arm, a nervous habit I’d picked up at some point or another.

I guess... I guess it wasn’t so much that I wanted to die, more that I didn’t want to live anymore.

Don’t want to live anymore.

“I don’t want to live anymore.”

I tried saying the words out loud, and found I couldn’t really peg them as a lie. Does this make me officially suicidal, I wonder? Or just another depressed teen who can’t really find their place in the world? I kept pondering those questions as I got out of the tub and dried myself off. Afterwards, I dressed quickly for bed, and made my way over to my dresser, drawing out the tiny golden box hidden in the back of the drawer.

Just because I have escaped death tonight, doesn’t mean I don’t still want to cut. In fact, with the panic and leftover adrenalin still thrilling through me, I need my blades more than ever.

The next morning found me in AP English, hopped up on 5-Hour Energy and extra strength coffee. All I really wanted was to stay home, but the missed classwork would be a pain to make up later. And what with the fact that I still had to make more money for Cross, I just could not afford to lose that time. When I walked in I noticed Kanda was already in his seat. If he was surprised to see me, he didn’t give any indication. He did give me a nod of greeting, though, which I gratefully returned.

I remembered vaguely that Lavi had once mentioned Kanda saving him from a bunch of thugs. My faux-energy powered brain wondered vaguely whether that was Kanda’s MO: heartless samurai on the outside, superhero clad in black on the inside. Maybe he was Superman? He did look the same in both forms, after all. Still, I don’t think Kanda would appreciate being called that. Too much man in stupid underwear on the outside wearing horribly clashing colors.

Oh, I know! I’ll bet he’s really...

Batman.
Considerations and Calculations

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV
Warnings: Kanda has a mouth; references to prostitution

I’m vaguely surprised that the moyashi even turned up today. Although I guess it’s not that weird, come to think of it. If he’s in serious money trouble, he probably can’t afford to waste time he could spend working making up missed classwork. Speaking of, I wonder how exactly he got his hands on all that cash he had with him yesterday. I mean, he was in a pretty shady part of town. Surely he’s not… selling his body or something?

I looked over at him out of the corner of my eye. We were sitting in our AP World History class, waiting for our teacher, Fo, to come in. The woman usually comes late, but woe to anyone who gets here after her – she has one Hell of a temper.

The moyashi looked even more depressed than usual today. He also seemed gaunter, somehow. Actually, now that I think about it, he had been pretty light to carry, though I hadn’t paid much attention to it at the time. Looking at him now, I guess he would be the type that people would pay money for. He is attractive, in his own lost, alternative teenager way. I mean, his shoulders are thin, and his hair thick and silky. And his eyes… their light grey looks like the snow on an early winter evening. Combined with his deathly pale skin, he looks completely ethereal, like a gust of wind could easily blow him away.

Suddenly my thoughts ground to a halt. Why the fuck am I thinking about the damn moyashi again? Jeez, it feels like he’s the only thing that’s ever on my mind nowadays. Damn brat, taking over my thoughts, too, as if he doesn’t interfere enough in my real life.

“All right, brats, get out your textbooks, we’re starting!” Fo stormed into the room, slamming the door behind her, immediately jolting me out of my reverie. She looked even more pissed than usual. I wonder if Bak tried to kiss her again? Is that why she’s so red in the face? (Not that anyone would ever point it out to her; they’d be risking death if they tried.)

She started the lecture with her usual zeal and attention to detail, not to mention typical fast-paced delivery of the material. From that point on, it was completely impossible to worry about anything else. The way Fo sets up the class, any detail or broad topic she even vaguely alludes to in class can turn up on a test, regardless of whether or not it’s in the textbook, which we always have to make sure to be caught up in reading. Even Lavi pays attention. Speaking of which, this is the only class we have together this semester. Which is not always a good thing, but his occasional spewing of random historical information has already managed to score me a few extra points on tests.

The class passed by quickly, the way it always does. Fo is honestly my favorite teacher. I guess it’s probably because her attitude reminds me a lot of Road; harsh but fair, quick to point out mistakes but also quick to help correct them. The only times she ever really blows a fuse are when people ask really stupid questions, but that’s pretty rare – this is an AP class, after all.

After class I made my way over to my locker in order to get my stuff together; put away what I didn’t need, grab what was necessary for tonight’s homework.
“Kanda? Can we talk?”

I turned around to find none other than the moyashi standing in front of me, looking both determined and nervous. I also realized he wasn’t looking directly at me, but at some point over my shoulder. It kind of pissed me off.

“What is it, baka moyashi?”

“It’s Allen, BaKanda,” he hissed, eyes narrowing, and glaring straight at me now.

“Don’t call me that,” I warned.

“Then don’t call me Moyashi,” he retorted.

We both stood there, glaring at each other. Finally I sighed, raising a bored eyebrow. “Was there anything in particular you wanted from me today?”

“Yes,” he answered automatically, collecting himself, “I want to talk about our AP English project. We ought to meet this weekend to discuss it.”

I frowned. “Why?”

“Because, it’s best to get working. We’ll both get a rough draft of our particular book done by our meeting, and then we’ll switch. Next week, along with switching rough drafts of analyses of the next 2 books, we’ll hand back our each other’s revised drafts. Anything we disagree on, we can discuss then, and incorporate as best we can into analysis. That way, every three weeks, we’ll have 2 reports completely done, 1 two-thirds done, and 1 one-third done.”

I hated to admit it, but it wasn’t an altogether bad idea. Still, no point agreeing completely. “That won’t work; we won’t be able to finish every book in time.”

“I’ve already worked that into my calculations. If we adjust our schedules and do more work over Thanksgiving, Winter, and Spring Break, as well as the longer weekends in between, we should be able to get everything done with time to spare.”

I gave him a short nod to indicate I’d accepted his argument. “So when and where shall we meet?”

“Saturday afternoon at my place? My shift at work is on Sunday this week.”

“Fine. 3 sound good?”

“Perfect,” he smiled. Cute…

“All right, I gotta go. See you later, Kanda,” he grinned, waving as he left.

I almost waved back.
The week went by in a blur after that. The combination of steadily piling school work (because of the AP classes) and long hours spent working both in Hot Topic and bars meant I had literally no free time. It also meant I was constantly tired. Still, I’d managed to put together about $3500. If I gave Cross $2500, then I should be able to live off of the rest, and maybe have a little spending money besides.

As I walked through the halls towards my locker at the end of the day on Friday, I vaguely wondered if thinking like that made me masochistic in a way. I mean, I know very well that the more money I give Cross, the less angry he’ll be. Still, a different part of me argued, no matter how much you give him, he’ll never be happy. Even worse, he’ll expect more than that amount the next time he comes around. Actually, that last thing kind of makes me want to give him less than $2000. $1500, or $1700 perhaps?

I sighed as I grabbed the textbooks and other materials I would need over the weekend. Then, with rising apprehension, I began to make my way home.

The first thing I did after walking in the door was begin to prepare a meal. For myself, too, but mostly for Cross. Last time he’d been even more pissed because there hadn’t been anything to eat. Or to drink, but there’s nothing I can really do about that. After everything was ready, I made my decision: $1700 it was. I placed the amount in the same place I’d dawn the money from the last time, and hid everything else carefully. Clumps of $25 in separate places, so that even if he manages to find one, he probably won’t be able to find the rest. Even better, he won’t know there is such a thing as “the rest”. Everything done and dusted (literally – Cross couldn’t stand anything dirty), I headed off to Hot Topic with a leaden heart.

I arrived back at the house at 8 pm, just like two weeks ago. For about 3 minutes I just stood in front of the door, hand on the knob, unwilling to open it. Like a child shutting their eyes from the sight of a monster – as if not seeing was enough to make it disappear.

What if I don’t go in? The thought crossed my mind. I could just leave... Join a traveling circus, like I did with Mana. Or just hitchhike far enough away that my life will never find me again, to some place in the middle of nowhere. I could just start over.

>And then what?< hissed a scathing voice from another corner of my brain, <What are you gonna do then, moron? Work in a bar or at a cash register for the rest of your life? Somewhere they don’t ask for short sleeves? Because remember, no one would ever want to hire a freak. You couldn’t even
sell your body, looking like that! <

Shut up! I spat back. It'd be better than being here!

The other part of me stayed silent, but it didn’t have to speak. Nothing would change if I left. I’d end up used and abused, worn out and hopeless no matter where I was. Besides, with Cross’s connections, chances are he’d find me, and that’s a level of bad I don’t even want to consider.

I squared my shoulders and took a deep breath, then stepped inside.

Inside the door, I noticed the red coat, in pretty much the exact same position it had been in two weeks ago. Taking deep, calming breaths and doing my best not to cry, I put my stuff away and headed for the kitchen.

“Hello, Master,” I murmured, bowing my head a bit.

He glared at me.

“Idiot apprentice! It’s about fucking time you turned up! I’m hungry! Where’s the food? Where’s the wine?”

I gulped and suppressed a shudder of fear with difficulty. “Th-there is no wine, because I am underage, and I can’t buy alcohol here. But I have plenty of food.” I watched him wearily, awaiting his reaction.

“You have food? Well then? What the fuck are you doing just standing there? Prepare it!”

His yelling was getting steadily louder, and I hurried to do his bidding, heating up the food in the fridge. I put it in front of him within minutes, then stood back, watching him eat. He scarfed down the entire meal in under 15 minutes.

“Fucking disgusting. Whatever. Where’s the money?”

“Here,” I murmured, getting out the $1700 from the cabinet, and handing it over to him. I watched him begin to count.

He glared at me again. “This place is filthy. Clean the fucking plates!”

I scurried to grab them, and then began to soap them up in the kitchen sink, turning my back to him as I did so. Big mistake.

I didn’t even sense him, I just saw everything go black for a moment, then tilt as the ground rushed towards me as I fell down.

“$1700? You fucking think this is enough? Damn whore!”

His voice sounded vague, fluctuating. Like there was a bad connection. Everything he said seemed… muffled, somehow. And through everything, I could feel my head pounding. Something dripped down onto the floor in front of me. Bright and red, I knew what it was even in my hazy state.

Blood. From my head? I looked up at my Master in time to see his boot come forward, slamming into my stomach. I slipped from my sitting position to lying on my side. Again and again, he slammed his combat-boot clad feet into my body.

“Do you hear me, idiot apprentice? Next time I come, there better fucking be more!”
Suddenly I felt myself lifted. He’d crouched down and grabbed my shirt to pull me up to face him. “Next time, I want at least $2000. And if you can’t make that much, then I’ll give you to some people who’ll help you. Understand me?”

Even though I could no longer even see him clearly despite him being less than a foot away, his words still registered, and fear, terror, horror like I’d never experienced before clawed at my intestines.

“I’ll be back in 3 weeks.” With that, he threw me back into the counter, and darkness finally covered my eyes.
What the fuck am I doing here this early, anyway?

Road was the one who called me this morning, telling me to check up on the moyashi, because apparently she thought something had seemed wrong with him the last night, and he wasn’t answering his phone. I tried telling her it was probably nothing, but Road is majorly overprotective about people she cares for, so no such luck.

And that means that it’s 11 am on a Saturday, and I’m standing outside the house of the most irritating person on the planet.

Honestly – why is it always me?

I made my way up to the door and stopped. The door was ajar. Something about that immediately raised warning bells. The moyashi may be an idiot, but he’s not so careless as to leave his door open. Carefully and quietly I snuck through the door.

Inside everything was quiet. I noticed his backpack had been laid by the couch, out of the way. Slowly, wearily, I made my way through the house towards the kitchen.

“Shit.”

There was blood everywhere. I felt a wave of nausea wash over me as I remembered another night full of blood…

Gripping the countertop to steady myself, I made my way over to the small figure lying on the ground. I checked his pulse and was relieved to find that it was there. Faint, but there. I pulled out my cell and dialed, waiting for the person on the other end to pick up. Three rings did the trick.

“Yo, Kanda, what’s up?”

“Tykki, listen to me. Can you reach Neah at all?”

“You know he’s not here that often, right?”

“Yes, but this is an emergency.”

“Hold on, I’ll try to get him on the other line.”

“Hurry.”

I glanced back at the moyashi. Neah would patch him up, I was sure of that. The man was a genius. After that disastrous night, Neah was the only doctor I’d ever trusted. No hospitals, not ever again…

I suppressed a shudder, and felt relief to hear Tykki’s voice on the other end again.
“I just caught him. He says ‘anything for you’.”

“Great. Thank you, Tykki. Could you give him the line?”

“Sure.”

“Hello, Kanda. What’s wrong?”

This is what I like about Neah. He’s smart and reliable, and doesn’t waste time beating around the bush. He just asks what the matter is and then does his damndest to fix it.

“Hey. I’ve got a friend here, he’s bleeding pretty badly. It looks like a head wound, but probably from last night, not this morning. Can you come over?”

“Of course. The address?”

I gave it to him, then heard the line beep again.

“Kanda? You good?” Tykki again.

“I’m fine. Thanks a lot, Tykki.”


“Bye.”

I looked back at the moyashi, then sank into a crouch. My eyesight blurred. The white hair turned purple, the tattoo disappeared, a birthmark appeared on his nose. Blood everywhere…

I took a deep, shuddering breath.

“Kanda?” The voice was ragged and soft, but it shocked me out of my reverie immediately.

“Don’t move. You’ve lost a lot of blood, idiot Moyashi.”

“…Not my fault…”

“I called a doctor, he’ll be here soon.”

“You did what?!” He jerked forward, panicked.

“Didn’t I say not to move? He’s not from the hospital, just someone I know.”

He sank back, and silence engulfed us.

It took Neah 10 minutes to arrive, but when he did he got straight to business. He looked the moyashi over carefully, then made his diagnosis.

“That head wound is pretty bad. It needs stitches, at least 3. Also, you may have a concussion, which means you’ll need supervision for the next 2 days, at least. Kanda can stay with you. You also have a few cracked ribs, but none broken.”

“Wait, what do you mean, I can stay with him?”

Neah turned towards me. “You told me he was your friend. You seem like the obvious choice.” He turned back to the moyashi, looking him straight in the eye. “These aren’t the types of wounds you
get from a mugging or a break-in. This is the type of thing that people keep secret. Still, you ought to know: by staying silent, you protect the one that did this to you, give them the chance to do so again.”

The moyashi looked away, his eyes glistening, hands clenched into fists. Neah’s eyes widened for a moment when he saw that. I wonder why? He turned around quickly. “Kanda, could you please give the two of us some privacy?”

I nodded, secretly glad to be getting out of the blood-washed kitchen. Too many bad memories…

I wandered through the house, then sat down in front of a grand piano. It was a truly beautiful piece, and the positioning in the room was perfect. Actually, the décor of the entire room was well-designed. I think I’d like to paint this someday… Maybe at a time when sunlight is streaming through those big bay windows…

My fingers trailed aimlessly over the keys. Marie could make this instrument sing, and so could the moyashi. They possessed the talent to turn a giant wood-and-wire construction into an angel, whose voice could captivate anyone.

“Kanda? Could you come back now, please?” Neah called.

I made my way back into the crimson kitchen, clinging desperately to my self-control. Don’t panic. Don’t panic. Don’t panic. The irony smell filled my nostrils, and made me want to run away. It’s not the same… He’s alive this time…

“Kanda. Allen is pretty badly injured. I can stitch him up, but it’ll take a while. I’ll lead him up to the bathroom to work on that. Do you mind cleaning up in here while we’re away?” There was an unspoken question in his eyes. Can you do this? Are you OK?

I nodded, and set to work after they left. It took all I had not to faint at the mixing smells of blood and cleaning solution. Brought back too many memories…

I felt a sudden upswell of rage. That fucking Moyashi! If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t be in this mess! I wouldn’t spend all of my damn time reliving memories I’d much rather forget! Before he came, the flashbacks didn’t come as often!

I finished and got up, deciding I’d clean the dirty plates, then make some tea. That would help everyone. After about an hour, Neah came back down, supporting the moyashi, and then sitting him down in a chair. I poured both of them tea.

“OK, you two, here’s the deal. Kanda, Allen needs to be watched over for a while. I would prefer it if you stayed with him. Allen, if you have any problems, call me immediately. I’ll give you my number in a minute. Also, I guess I should have told you earlier, but I am a licensed medical professional. I work in a nearby hospital as a surgeon. I have contacts in a lot of fields who’d be more than willing to do me favors, and are very good at keeping secrets. That’s what our entire profession is about really; healing people and keeping their secrets quiet. So if you ever need help of any kind, give me a call.”

The moyashi just nodded, and I agreed as well with a resigned sigh.

“Neah, do you have more time? If I’m gonna stay here all weekend, there’re a couple of things I need to grab from home.”

“Sure, no problem. There’s a couple more things I’d like to discuss with Allen, anyway.”
I already knew what was coming, and I almost called out to Kanda not to go, but then I reconsidered. I was causing him enough problems as it was, and I shouldn’t irritate him any further. So I just watched as he left the room, and listened to the door shut behind him as he exited the house.

“So, Allen, would you like to talk about it?”

“No.” I know I was blunt, but the whole situation terrified me. A man I didn’t know had found out about my self harm. Worse, he’d guessed the cause, or at least a part of it.

“I understand. It must be difficult for you.”

I didn’t say a word.

“But I’m only trying to help. You know,” he told me, “I used to know Cross, back before everything went to shit.”

That jolted me out of my reverie. He didn’t seem like the type to swear. And had he just said he used to know Master Cross?

“What do you mean?”

“Marian was never really a great guy, but he didn’t used to be quite the drunkard asshole he is today. There was a woman he loved very much, Magdala. When she died, a large part of him died with her. This is not,” he looked at me sharply as he insisted, “an attempt to brush off what he has done. I just think you should know.

“Allen. Listen to me, please. You will never get better if you remain with Cross. But you can keep yourself from drowning. Here’s my number, so if anything comes up, just call. I promise I’ll do whatever I can.”

I just nodded numbly, taking the card he’d given me. It wasn’t like he’d said anything that I hadn’t known, but hearing the words from someone else’s mouth really brought it all home. I would be lucky if Cross didn’t kill me. Staying here was not the way to recover. But then what was? Where else could I go?

Neah was still staring at me concernedly. “Are you sure there isn’t something you’d like me to do?”

For one wild, fleeting, glittering and brief moment, I imagined that maybe there was. What if Neah could take me away from here? What if I could spend the rest of my life living in a place where I was safe; with him, maybe? And I’d see Kanda every day, and maybe even Marie from time to time. Maybe the black-haired ass and I could lead a better life together – overcome our problems with each other’s help?
And then my thoughts ground to a screeching halt. *Did I really just envision a perfect life with Kanda? I am definitely losing it. And besides, how am I ever going to leave Cross? I’m pretty sure that it’s impossible. He’d find a way to keep me, and make my life even more of a living Hell than it is now.*

“No,” I answered, and even to myself my voice sounded hollow, devoid of all hope.

Neah frowned understandingly. “I know you’re in a very difficult situation, Allen, but please at least think it over. And if you ever need anything, anything at all, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

I nodded as I heard the door open, and the thud of combat boots being thrown down, then the swish of a person’s clothes as they moved through the house towards the kitchen, towards us. In seconds, Kanda had rounded the door. He glanced between me and Neah.

“Am I interrupting?”

“No, Kanda; you’re timing’s perfect,” Neah smiled.

Kanda nodded and sat down. “I brought all of the stuff I’ll need over. I’ll sleep on the couch.”

“Ah, no, that’s not necessary! There’s a guest bedroom upstairs…” I trailed off, wondering why suggesting it made me nervous. Maybe because he’d be only a few rooms away?

“If someone comes in again, they’ll come through the door. So that’s where I’ll be.”

“They won’t come again for another 3 weeks,” I informed him without thinking.

Kanda’s eyes narrowed, and I realized what I’d just said. Panic began to build inside me, but he let it go.

“Che, whatever. If you’re sure, I’ll take the guest bedroom then.”

Neah seemed positively delighted. “We’ll just leave it at that, then, shall we? And now, though I’m sorry to say this, I have to go. My shift at the hospital starts in an hour, and I have a few things I need to do first.” He turned to me. “Allen, it was very nice to meet you – I only wish our encounter had occurred under more fortuitous circumstances.” Then he turned to Kanda with a smile. “It was great to see you again, Kanda. Just know for the future that you can call me even when your friends aren’t experiencing a medical emergency.” And with that, he left.

I realized after he was gone that Neah was a lot like Cross – he filled a room. Except, of course, that Neah filled the room with positive energy, while Cross filled it with fear. It really made me miss Neah’s presence. After all, with him gone, Kanda and I were alone. And that whole situation was about 7 levels of awkward.

Though I admit Kanda didn’t seem too unnerved – only pissed off. But since that was him on *any* given day, it didn’t really mean anything.

He sighed. “When was the last time you ate, Moyashi?”

I suddenly realized how hungry I was. “Ummm… yesterday afternoon?”

He nodded, and then swept past me towards the refrigerator and cupboards. A part of me was mildly irritated by how he just made himself at home, using my kitchen as he liked without even asking for permission. Then I realized with a flush of shame that he was cooking for *me*, just one more kindness that he (barely) complained about.
I sat and watched him cook in a pleasant haze – Neah had given me painkillers, and they were starting to take effect. Through everything, I realized I was glad Kanda had found me. And also that right now he looked less like Batman, and far more like Snow White – hurting on the inside, but putting the pain aside for the sake of others. But who, then, is the Wicked Witch?
All of my memories, keep you near

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV
Author's Note: The chapter title is a reference to the song Memories by Within Temptation.
Warnings: Kanda has a mouth; hints at ptsd

How the fuck did I get myself into this mess?

The moyashi and I were sitting at his kitchen table, discussing our AP English project. Turns out, he’s not as stupid as I’d thought. Not that I’m gonna tell him that. But we actually manage to agree on this sort of thing – funny, when you think about how opposite our personalities are. Or maybe we’re just too similar to get along? I mentally shook myself. Nope, definitely not. We are complete polar opposites. Just like Alma and I were, back in the day…

And there I go again, thinking about Alma! Seriously, this pain-in-the-ass white-haired brat is a danger to my mental health! How can two people be so similar? And yet so different?

I glanced over at him, brows furled in concentration as he read through one of the pages, making notes in the margins.

Alma had problems, sure, I mean, everyone does… But somehow… I feel like the Moyashi’s issues run much deeper. His secrets are probably far darker.

And I’m thinking about him again! I sighed, This is going to be a long weekend…

The rest of the day actually managed to pass relatively quickly. We did have a couple arguments, but I’m honestly surprised there weren’t more. We pretty much just did our homework, then ate dinner. It was nothing major, just pasta, but he insisted on helping. I think he was trying to prove something, the idiot. Like, “see, I can manage”. Honestly, did I ever say he couldn’t? It’s only pasta, after all.

While he went to shower, I sat down in the living room and turned on the TV. And what the fuck has to be on? Fucking CSI, that’s what. I turned it off immediately, taking deep, shaky breaths. But even with my eyes closed, I could still see the red splattered up against my eyelids.

I leaned back into the couch, eyes still scrunched shut, pinching the bridge of my nose. Somehow, I felt like I could still smell the blood. And hear the shrieking of metal…

I opened my eyes and sighed. Honestly, being so close to the moyashi had really brought back those old memories. All the horrible things, but also the better memories… the things I had completely forgotten about. Like the first time we met. I almost smiled at the memory.
I had escaped the watchful gazes at the house rather easily, and made my way through the woods behind it, towards the cave I knew to be hidden in the middle. The “cave” wasn’t really a cave in the traditional sense – it’s a rocky overhang high above a large pool. Stalactites and stalagmites do grace the floor and ceiling, but the layer of earth that once kept that natural wonder locked underground had collapsed in one part long ago, making it accessible from the surface. The pool was fed by a natural spring at the top of the far end of the cave, and a stream led the water out. It was the place that first awakened the artist in me, if that makes any sense.

On that particular occasion, I made my way into the cave, and dove into the water without a second thought. I swam deeper and deeper, propelling myself further and further, trying to reach the bottom. And suddenly, I felt strong arms pull me towards the surface. I was so shocked, I didn’t even resist. Or at least, not until we got back to the surface.

“Bastard! What the fuck do you think you’re doing!?”

“EH, but you were under the water for so long! I thought you were going to drown!” The sopping wet kid stared earnestly into my eyes, both of us treading water.

“Che. I was just trying to reach the bottom, idiot.”

“Oh, sorry,” he laughed slightly, scratching the back of his purple-haired head in embarrassment. We’d made our way to shallower water, and our feet now touched the rocky bottom.

I looked away. “Have you… ever reached the bottom?”

“Nope!”

“Doesn’t that bother you?”

His eyes widened, and he laughed as he pulled himself onto a rock at the shore, while I followed suit. “Not really, no. Why would you want to reach the bottom?”

“Because then you finish! It’s a goal to accomplish!”

“Is it fun?”

“What?”

“Is it fun?” He insisted, head tilted to the side, as if in thought. “If it’s not fun, then it doesn’t really seem worth it – I mean, anything becomes boring when it’s something you have to do.”

All I could do was stare. This kid had appeared from nowhere, pulled me out of the water, and started explaining a world which I had never even considered before. I looked away.

“What’s your name, baka?”

“Alma! Alma Karma!”

I reluctantly pulled myself back into the present as I heard the creaking of stairs.

“Kanda?” The moyashi’s voice called out hesitantly.
“I’m in here,” I called back.

He came into the room, and his entire posture became more relaxed at the sight of me.

“Did you think I was going to leave?”

He looked away. “I mean, it’s not like you’re really required to stay or anything,” he mumbled.

“Anything that Neah asks is a requirement, as far as I’m concerned. Besides, I’d have to be one Hell of an asshole to just leave you alone.”

He smiled a bit, then glanced shyly back up at me. “Do you… wanna take a shower now? Or do you wanna just go to bed?”

Those words should not have sounded sexy, at all. And they didn’t, I insisted to myself as I told him I preferred to take a shower first.
I sat down in front of the piano, letting the events of the past 24 hours wash over me. Somehow, things had gone from terrifying to just plain strange. I heard the water begin to run, and felt a blush rise on my cheeks. Yuu Kanda was taking a shower upstairs. Water was weighing down that silky black hair, and dripping down that well-toned chest towards those strong thighs…

I sat bolt-upright. **NO! Bad mind! Don’t think of Kanda that way – there’s no point in that!**

Except a small voice whispered in my ear: *But he’s gay, remember? And he’s pretty nice to you…*

But the other voice retaliated immediately: *Even if he likes you now (which he probably doesn’t – you’re too much of a freak for that), what would he say if he found out about your arm? He’d leave immediately; no one’s crazy enough to deal with your shit. You’re just not worth the effort…*

I slumped over, pulling my feet up onto the bench and hiding between my knees. I felt my eyes begin to get wet.

No one could ever love you, you fucking faggot! You’re a depressed, crazy, useless, pathetic, worthless, undeserving, ugly, repulsive monster! Who could ever care for such a freak! They’d have to be just as crazy as you, willing to let you drag them under and drown right alongside you? Who do you think you are?! A bloody siren? Not that anyone would even fall for your seductions, though… But to be willing to drag others under to save yourself… You’re a horrible person, you know that?

“Yes… I know…”

“Know what?”

I nearly fell off the piano bench, I whipped around so fast. Kanda was standing there in the doorway, attempting to towel-dry his hair. His gaze sharpened, eyebrows furrowing.

“You OK?”

I turned away as I realized my cheeks were wet, and quickly wiped them dry on my sleeves.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I mumbled.

“You’re ‘fine’, huh?” I glanced back at him hesitantly, and realized he wasn’t looking at me. Or anything else, for that matter. He seemed to be gazing towards something invisible to normal eyes, a place far away. Then he seemed to shake himself out of his reverie, and turned his gaze back to me. “I’ve heard that one before, Moyashi.”
“… It’s Allen, Bakanda…” I whispered back. There was something in his face, something in his eyes, that told me he understood. Is that even possible?

He smirked, “Whatever. Come on, let’s go to bed. I want to get an early start on the project tomorrow.”

I got up and followed him out of the room. I realized as I got into bed that I was blushing again.

I struggled to breathe as I ran through a forest that seemed to stretch forever, endlessly. Every tree was the same, and though I was out of breath, it felt like I wasn’t moving at all. Branches scratched my face as I forced my way between them as fast as I could, and brambles tore at my clothes. Tree roots seemed to move into my way, tripping me, forcing me to bruise my hands as I caught myself, then push my aching body back off the ground. Every time this happened, I glanced behind me, terrified, to where I could hear the lumbering footsteps of the monster chasing me. I didn’t even know what it was, I just knew I couldn’t let it catch me…

Deeper and deeper into the increasingly dense jungle I rushed, my chest heaving as my lungs struggled to capture the much-needed oxygen. Then, finally, finally, I saw a light. Hope filled my chest and I pushed my pained body harder, thrusting my way through the thickets, until I reached –

For one dazzling instant I saw the sky, beautiful and blue, gleaming into the endless forevers, but then the ground vanished beneath me, and I felt myself begin to tumble into the darkness, one arm still desperately outstretched, reaching for the light it could never grasp.

I woke up with a start, sitting bolt upright. By the time I realized it had been a dream, I was huddled over my knees, shaking. I was breathing hard, as if I really had run miles upon miles through endless woodlands. My blood pumped through my body with such force that it felt like my ears were pounding, and I was covered in a cold sweat.

I wanted to scream. To scream until I ran out of breath and passed out.

I threw off the covers, and dashed toward my dresser, trembling hands desperately seeking what lay hidden at the back.

A black wave seemed to surround me, and I could no longer think straight. All I knew was that I hated everything, and I wanted it all gone. So with vicious fury I dragged a blade across my arm.

The relief was immediate, and I felt a broken smile settle on my features.

Again.

I obeyed the voice.

Again. Again. Again!

Every time, I did as it instructed, and slowly the voice went quiet, and the yelling in my ears stopped. I sat against the wall as blood ran down my arm in thick red streams, pooling on the floor. A dry sob broke the silence, and I let the tears begin to flow.
I fell asleep like that, propped up against the wall, and so I woke up very sore. I still ached from Cross’s beating, and now I also had an arm encrusted with blood. I made my way quietly into the connecting bathroom and began to clean myself up, disinfecting and bandaging the wounds, and washing the salt off of my face. I winced, hissing, as the water entered the wounds, but sucked it up. *It’s your fault, idiot; no use complaining.*

After I got dressed, I made my way downstairs, but stopped before I entered the living room. My very breath caught at the sight that greeted me. Kanda sat at an easel, fully concentrated on the sunrise visible through the bay windows, painting every detail as precisely as a photograph. Except more… raw. More magnificent. More wild. More like Nature, more like *him.*

I slid down onto the floor and sat, quietly watching, until I dozed off again, leaning against the door frame.
Light. Darkness. Black, blue and silver. Ebony, russet, midnight. Shadows made of hundreds of colors, individual unique shades that so many morons would merely classify as “dark”. Starlight sifting through the windows, the moon a barely visible crescent hanging in the sky like the thinnest claw, only just holding on to the fabric of the 2am sky.

The hours passed in tranquil silence. For as long as I could remember, art had always been my way out. When my thoughts were muddled and cloudy, I would sit down in front of an easel and paint. Never humans, only Nature. So that’s what I did. I painted, allowing my thoughts to wash away into the strokes of the brush. Everything that had happened today… It confused me. Clearly, the Moyashi’s issues ran far deeper than I had realized. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t annoying. It just meant that I was able to understand him better, somehow. It made sense now why I’d felt like there was more weighing him down than he was willing to express.

Hours passed like this, with deep contemplation, emotions released onto a canvas. Dark, shadowy landscapes expressing the residual pain I felt from being around him. The way he always made me remember Alma…

But maybe, just maybe, this could be a good thing…? The thought crossed my mind as dawn began to break, and I fastened another canvas to the easel. All this time, I had carried the darkness in my own mind silently, letting it consume me. I gazed out the windows at the slowly rising sun. Perhaps… the Moyashi might be the way to myself? I shook my head and dipped the brush into the paint. What the fuck are you thinking, idiot? Remember what happened the last time you got close to someone like him?

I took a couple of deep breaths and reigned in my thoughts, channeling my energy into the piece in front of me instead. Oranges, Reds, purples, pinks, blues… The softest of smiles fluttered across my features. Truly, sunrise was the most beautiful time of the day. A time of complete silence, but bathed in color. Proof that the supreme magnificence of the world had nothing to do with humanity at all. It lay entirely in a pattern that had been repeating itself for millions of years, and would continue to occur for millions of years to come.

Finally I rose from the chair, stretching my cramped muscles. It occurred to me that I had stayed up all night. Better make some coffee… And breakfast…

I turned towards the door and my eyes widened in surprise. There, sleeping curled up in the doorway, was the Moyashi. How long has he been there? For a moment I felt supreme irritation, but then I sighed and combed my hands through my hair. The kid looked exhausted. I guess he had to be though, to fall asleep in a position like that. I don’t want to just leave him, but… I don’t think I should wake him, either…
“Fucking Moyashi,” I hissed under my breath, then strode out of the room and up the stairs. Not wanting to enter his room without permission (What? I want people to respect my privacy, why shouldn’t I respect theirs? Isn’t that the “golden rule” or some bullshit?), I grabbed a couple of blankets from the linen closet and made my way back down. Once I reached him, I threw them over him (careful not to wake him up, though). Then I turned to walk away.

Except I couldn’t.


Carefully, I made my way back to him, and leaving the blankets covering him, picked him up, princess-style. I then proceeded to carry him to the bed he had offered me, silently pulling the door closed behind me.

Afterwards, I went back down and finished cleaning up my art supplies. Then, pulling the curtains shut, I leaned back on the couch. I’ll just close my eyes for a couple minutes…

I heard the light hush of the wind playing across the grass, the faint burbling of the brook that fed into the pond, the buzzing of cicadas. My eyes were closed as I lay on my back, but due to the brightly shining sun, I saw orange, not black. Everything was tranquil…

“Hey, Yuu!” The yell hacked through the harmony of Nature like a jacksaw, and made me sit up instantly, squinting my eyes at the culprit.

“What the fuck, Alma?”

“Oh, sorry, were you sleeping?” Alma rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, scuffing the dry earth with his sneakers.

I sighed in exasperation. “No, moron, just listening.”

“Listening? To what? It’s completely silent!”

“Sit down and shut up, idiot!”

He made a face and sat down. “How long do I have to stay quiet for?”

I rolled my eyes. “Until you stop being deaf to the world.”

We sat with our backs to each other in the hot summer sun, and let Nature envelop us. At first, Alma kept fidgeting, practically itching to do something. But I wanted to show him something. After all, he had shown me so much, though I’d never admit that to his face. Eventually, he settled down, and we both just sat there, 7 year old children overwhelmed by the colors and voices of Mother Earth.

After about an hour, he moved so that he was facing me. I frowned at him. “What is it?”

“Thank you, Yuu. You’re right, the world isn’t silent, it’s full of life!” He smiled at me with that freaking embarrassing grin, and I looked away, blushing.

“Idiot.”

“Hey, it’s my turn; let me show you something.”
Before I could even ask what it was that he wanted to show me, he had dashed off. Grumbling, I ran after him, chasing him through the field, and through the surrounding forest. I ran until I caught up to him at a giant boulder.

“Is this what you wanted to show me?” I raised my eyebrows in derision.

“Nope!” He grinned, grabbing my hand and leading me to the edge of the trees. “Look.”

My breath caught. In front of us was sparkling lake. Surrounded by all the trees, it was like a hidden gem. The sun’s rays danced across its surface, ruffled by the wind. But that was far from the most incredible part of the view.

The entire lake was covered in lotus blossoms.

“Aren’t they beautiful, Yuu?” The words were confident, but his face betrayed his nervousness. He was hoping desperately for my approval.

“No,” I began, and his face fell. I walked over to him, still gazing enraptured at the sight before me. “It’s gorgeous, Alma.” I grasped his hand, and his mouth split into the widest grin yet. To my surprise, I actually found myself smiling back.

I awoke from the dream to find moisture on my cheeks, which I hastily wiped away. I hadn’t thought of that incident in years. Mostly to distract myself, I looked outside, noting that sun was streaming through the bay windows. I wonder what time it is?

I wandered into the kitchen to check the clock, and found that it read 12:17 pm. Well.

Figuring it was about time, I set about making some lunch, using the ingredients I found in the pantry and fridge, which turned out to be fairly well stocked. I made cucumber sushi and udon soup, with mitarashi dango for dessert. The brat had better not complain.

As I set the water to boil for tea, I heard motion upstairs. Damn, he’s up. And I’m still on edge from that dream. Stupid brain, dredging up the past!

…This is going to be a long day…
The time that Kanda spent at my place went surprisingly well. In fact, I’d even dare say better than well. Like, we actually got along. Sure, he kept his distance from me, but it didn’t seem to be from irritation. And he was completely civil! I mean, ok, we argued a couple of times, but it wasn’t anything too bad. We finished up what homework we still had during the day on Sunday, and then watched movies. Turns out, we actually have similar tastes – go figure. So we marathoned the entire X-Men Movie Series. And afterwards, we just went to bed. That’s it. Not that I really expected anything to happen, but still... He was staying over, and he is gay... Then again, he doesn’t know I’m bi, does he? And honestly, even though I’m beginning to trust him, I still don’t really want him to know about that.

I wonder why that is? I have no problem with other people being non-heterosexual, so why do I have a problem with myself? I realized that while I was with him. The words I apply to myself are words I would never, ever, use against another human being. But despite how guilty it makes me feel, I don’t think I can continue denying it, at least not to myself. I like Kanda. I like him.

Damn it! Why couldn’t he just act like a jerk! Then I wouldn’t be in such an awkward situation!

Monday was rather uneventful, until about 6 in the evening.

I was working on my AP Calculus homework when I heard knocking on the door. Not expecting anyone, I hesitantly made way towards the door. Cross couldn’t be back, could he? The thought sent a bolt of fear through me. But upon looking through the peephole in the door, I let out a sigh of relief, and opened the door with a smile.

“Hey, Road! Come in! What’s up?”

The purple-haired girl smiled as she gave me a quick, light hug, then practically danced through the doorway. I followed her as she made her way towards the kitchen.

“Nothing much, just thought I’d look in on you. You weren’t at work on Saturday, remember? And Kanda called Tykki to get Neah, then stayed the weekend at your place. Don’t underestimate my information network. And don’t take me for a fool, either, Allen.”

The fear that had resided crept up my spine again. We sat down at the table, and I clutched my hands together.

“Road… I… I…”

“Allen.”
I looked up at her face, which was completely serious, but also kind.

“I’m no stranger to having secrets. Or problems that you don’t want to share with the world. And I’m not enough of an asshole to pry into other people’s business when it makes them uncomfortable. I just want you to understand that I can tell something isn’t right, and I’m worried about you. And also, I need you to know that if anything happens, or if you ever want to talk, you can talk to me, ok? I won’t judge you, no matter what you tell me.”

She gave me a small smile, then put one of her hands on top of mine.

“Understand?”

“Yeah. Thanks, Road,” I said, smiling back at her. Part of me doubted that I would ever tell her, and an even larger part of me couldn’t believe she could possible hear my story without judging me, but it still felt nice to hear her sentiments.

Suddenly there was knocking at the door again, interrupting us.

“I’m having an unusual amount of unexpected visitors tonight.”

“Oh, that’s probably Lenalee. She told me she wanted to come with, but had to finish her ballet class first. I figured I’d come a little earlier, so I could talk privately with you.”

I smiled at her again, trying to convey my gratitude for her sensitivity without words. The look she gave me in return told me she’d understood. As I made my way towards the door, I marveled at how keen she was, and what an absolutely amazing person.

“Hi, Lenalee! Come on in!” I smiled as I opened the door.

She smiled and thanked me, then followed me to the kitchen. After she sat down she began to undo the tightly wound bun on the top of her head, and I couldn’t help but marvel a bit at how beautiful and long her hair was. The dark green-streaked locks fell like silk over her shoulders. I recalled that her hair had appeared entirely green at first, but it was probably just the light. The whistling of the tea kettle brought me out of my reverie, and I poured three cups.

“I made green tea, is that all right? I suppose I should have asked earlier, but it slipped my mind. Sorry about that.”

“It’s perfect, Allen, thank you,” Road smiled.

Lenalee nodded in agreement. “Green tea is very healthy, and helps with weight loss.”

I glanced at her. “Surely you’re not dieting? You’ve got an amazing figure, Lenalee.”

She smiled bashfully. “Thanks. And don’t worry – it’s just a few pounds for ballet; we have a really important recital coming up in December. And I’m not actually losing that much weight, anyways: it’s all just being converted into muscle.”

“Well, tell me more about that recital when it’s closer. I’d love to go, if it’s ok with you.”

“Hey, now,” Road interjected, “stop hitting on my girlfriend!”

“I wasn’t hitting on her,” I objectied, flustered, as Lenalee blushed and Road laughed.

“Don’t worry, I know. I just felt like teasing you a bit.”
“So how long have you two been going out?” I asked. I had sort of felt that there might be something going on between the two of them, but it would have been rude to ask.

“I asked her out last Thursday. Figured it was just about time that I stopped letting my brother’s whims dictate my life,” Lenalee told me with pride, straightening up in her chair.

I stared at Lenalee in concern. “And Kamui was ok with that?”

“Well, we didn’t actually tell him,” Road informed me, “Figured we’d wait ‘till after Lenalee graduated, so as to limit the fuss.”

“Makes sense,” I grinned.

We continued chatting for a while, talking about all sorts of things; our classes, our teachers, our extracurriculars. Eventually, though, Lenalee regretfully informed us that she had to leave.

“My brother’ll throw a fit if I don’t get home soon.”

“I’ll walk you home,” Road suggested, then turned to me, “thanks for having us, Allen. The tea was great.”

“Yes, thank you,” Lenalee smiled.

I walked them out the door and watched them go until they rounded the bend, then retreated back inside. They seem so happy together. I wonder if maybe, just maybe, I can be like that with somebody someday, too?

Maybe… with Kanda?

Later that night I found myself lying awake in bed. Somehow, I just couldn’t manage to fall asleep. Being together with my friends earlier, in such a warm atmosphere, had reminded me of Mana. Of the time I had spent with him, and of how happy we had been together. Sure, we hadn’t had much, but that was never important. What was important was the love we felt for each other. What was important was how much time he spent teaching me how to juggle. What was important was the secret language we made up together. What was important was that he taught me how to play the piano. What was important was that we were together, and that we were happy.

Somehow, that happiness had eluded me ever since his death. I had never quite been able to come to terms with having lost my adoptive father, with having lost the man that raised me. Even now, being surrounded by people that seemed to actually care about my well-being, I still couldn’t feel the same sense of security I had had with him. I felt happy for a while, but once I was alone, the world would crowd in on me again, and I’d feel even worse than I had before.

*Will I ever be rid of this? Can anyone rescue me?*

Those two thoughts plagued me until I drifted off into an uneasy sleep.
Remind me again why I’m here?

Oh, right, because Tykki insisted. And Road backed him up. That bastard; he knows I can’t say no to her.

So, it’s lunchtime, and instead of relaxing by myself the way I usually do, I’m eating soba with Tykki and Lavi (who appear stitched together at the hip, they’re so fucking close to each other), Lenalee and Road (as close as usual), and the baka Moyashi (who appears to be inhaling food rather than eating it).

“Did you guys hear? Apparently Mr. Chan actually asked Fo out!” Lenalee piped up suddenly, smiling brightly.

“Seriously?” Lavi gasped, “What did she say?”

“Yes!”

Road patted Lenalee’s shoulder, smiling demurely. “That’s great. Those two really fit together.”

I furrowed my eyebrows and pinched the bridge of my nose with a groan exactly as everyone else started grinning in excitement. Why do people like parties so much? Jeez, I really don’t understand. What’s the fun in being around yelling drunk people?

“Ah! Right! Thanks Tykki,” Lavi exclaimed, shooting Tykki a thoroughly unsubtle grin. “So… I was wondering, since it is October, how would you guys like to have a Halloween party?”

“I haven’t been here long, but they certainly seem like a good match.”

“Speaking of good matches… Lavi, dear, didn’t you want to say something?” Tyki smirked, flawlessly redirecting the conversation. It amazes me how smooth he is in social situations. Easily changing topic and flouting his relationship at the same time… The way he manages to pull people into his pace is honestly impressive. Not that I’d ever actually tell him that.

“Ah! Right! Thanks Tykki,” Lavi exclaimed, shooting Tykki a thoroughly unsubtle grin. “So… I was wondering, since it is October, how would you guys like to have a Halloween party?”

I furrowed my eyebrows and pinched the bridge of my nose with a groan exactly as everyone else started grinning in excitement. Why do people like parties so much? Jeez, I really don’t understand. What’s the fun in being around yelling drunk people?

“We could hold it at my house,” Tykki suggested.

“Yay!” Road bounced happily in her seat. “A Halloween party means costumes, right? And Tykki’s place would be perfect – it’s a gothic dream!”

“I don’t mean to boast, but it definitely is. It was built over a hundred years ago by a rather, shall we say… eccentric member of our family. None of the current generation wanted it, and I was more than willing to step up to the plate. It’s been renovated enough that it’s fully furnished with heat, water, and electricity, but it looks like it could have belonged to Dracula himself.”
The baka moyashi seemed particularly excited. I guess I should have figured he would be into this sort of thing – his clothes and hair are definitely alternative, to say the least.

“So that’s decided then, right? Halloween party at Tykki’s place?” Lavi reiterated, grinning madly. “And costumes are a must,” he added, nodding at Road.

The Moyashi nodded excitedly, and Lenalee and Road said “Definitely” in unison. Then everyone looked at me.

“You *are* coming; right, Kanda?” Road questioned.

I sighed. “Che. *Fine.*”

After getting home, my first order of business was to begin training. It was now the middle of October, and the Kendo tournament was approaching. I may be in great shape, but that’s no reason to slack off. I ran laps, did core exercises, and practiced my sword technique. When I was finished I meditated and took a shower.

Afterwards, I set about preparing dinner (soba), and getting started on my homework. Right as I was finishing my AP Calculus homework, there was knocking at the door. *Who the fuck is that?* Gritting my teeth in irritation at the interruption, I headed to the door. Upon opening it, I found myself facing a tiny purple-haired girl.

“Hello, Kanda!”

“Hello, Road. What’s wrong? Why are you here?”

“Just dropping by. May I come in?”

“Of course.” I let her in, then followed her into the kitchen, where I immediately placed a kettle on the stove for tea. We sat in silence while the water heated up and I made the tea. As per usual, I offered her a jar of honey along with her cup.

“So, what’s up?”

“I’m dating Lenalee.”

“Ah. Congratulations.” The two had seemed close, but I hadn’t picked up on the fact that they were in a relationship. Probably because they were pretty subtle, especially in comparison to Lavi and Tykki.

“I’m really enjoying it, honestly. We’ve discussed it, and neither of is really certain whether the feeling is romantic or not. We just feel a strong connection, despite how short of a time we’ve known each other.” She glanced up at me. “Can you relate?”

*Uh-oh. What does she mean by that?* “Not really, no, but I think I understand.”

Road leaned back in her chair, eyebrows raised, a spoonful of honey in her mouth. Then she leaned forward again and sighed.

“Kanda, did you know I used to be a private person?”

“What do you mean by that?” I questioned.
“I mean, I didn’t really involve myself in the affairs of others. You were basically my only friend from outside the Clan. You know full well how they are – controlling as all Hell, especially Adam. That’s why Neah is so difficult to reach – he’s different, and therefore considered undesirable. I think Tykki, Jasdero, Devitto, and I are the only ones who keep in contact with him. The younger generation, basically. That type of environment just isn’t good for making relationships with people. But recently, I’ve had my eyes opened. I hang out with more people, and have more friends. And you know what I’ve realized? That I care about them. And that I was miserable before I met them.

“Kanda, I used to cut myself off from people, because I believed that they would never accept me for who I was, and would only ever end up hurting me. But I was wrong, Kanda.” She looked at me earnestly. “Do you understand what I’m trying to tell you?”

“Che.” I turned away from her angrily. “That’s different. I know what it’s like to lose the people close to you, and it’s Hell. I don’t want to go through that again.”

“But you will, Kanda, and that’s the truth! We all go through those things eventually! That’s why you can’t keep pushing people away! We want to be there for you, but you have to let us in.”

“I’ve let you and Tykki in, haven’t I? Isn’t that enough?”

“No. You need to let Allen in, too.”

I whirled back to face her, shocked. “Why should I let that baka moyashi in?!”

“Because he’s Alma, isn’t he? If you ever intend to move past what happened to Alma, you need to let Allen in. He would be good for you – I know it. And you would be good for him, too.”

There was nothing I could say. She was right after all – I’d been thinking the same things ever since I met the damn brat. At least, about the similarities.

“What makes you think we’d be good for each other?” I growled.

“Simple – you’re two sides of the same coin. If anyone can understand your pain, it’s him.”

We sat in silence for a while, and then she spoke up again. “Kanda, I won’t force you to do anything. I just wanted to give you some advice. I-I really care about you, you know. And I hate to see how much you’re hurting.”

“I’m not hurting…” The words barely made it out of my mouth, and we both knew I was lying. But neither of us said it. Instead, she reached across the table, and placed her tiny hand on mine.

And I didn’t pull away.
“I’m coming!” I called out in answer to the persistent knocking on the door. After reaching the entryway, I had to fiddle with the lock for a few seconds before I was finally able to open it. “Hello, Road,” I smiled softly at the little girl with the mischievous smirk standing on my doorstep. “Come on in,” I invited, stepping back from the door and gesturing inward. She thanked me and bounced inside, heading towards the kitchen. I quickly closed the door and followed her.

“I made lasagna,” I informed her, “Would you like some? And what would you like to drink?”

“Tea, please, whatever you have. And I would love lasagna,” she paused for a second, “Do you have any sweets?”

“You’ll spoil your appetite, My Lady,” I answered, giving her a slight bow.

She pouted, but I could see the gleam in her eyes, “But Sebastian…!”

“Very well, then, what would the Lady like?”

“Honey in my tea. I’ll be good and wait until after dinner for the rest.”

I laughed and took out a pot of honey and set it on the counter, then sat down across from her as we waited for the water to come to a boil for the tea.

“So, Allen, I have a request.”

“Anything,” I smiled. Road puts me at ease in a way I’ve never known before. Just being around her makes me happy. Not in the “crush” way, but in the friend way. She’s understanding and playful, and I feel truly blessed to know her.

“Will you do my makeup for the Halloween party?”

“Sure! Do you have any ideas of what you want to go as?” Truthfully, discussing my penchant for makeup still makes me uneasy, but I know I can trust her not to talk to others about my hobby. And it’s not exactly a big favor to ask – if anything, I’m the one that stands to gain in experience doing
other people’s makeup.

“Hmmm… I’m not really sure. I sort of had this idea of going as an undead ballerina, but I don’t want to accidentally insult Lenalee in some way. So maybe I’d be better as a demon? But that just feels… bland, somehow,” she glanced up at me, “What do you think?”

“I think you’d be fabulous either way. And honestly, the demon is tried and true, not bland. There’s always ways to take a new approach to an old theme. Like, stigmata on the forehead or something.”

Road touched her pointer finger to her chin and looked off into the distance, thinking. “That might actually be pretty cool. And maybe I could wear white, for a change of pace?”

“Do you have anything with an even-armed cross pattern on it? Or anything you’d be willing to alter? If not, we could always make something from scratch – there’s a JoAnne at the mall.”

She shook her head, frowning. “No, I don’t have anything like that. But I am pretty good at sewing, so I could do something… Do you have some paper and a pencil?”

“Yes, of course. One second.” I made my way over to the corner of the living room where I kept my school supplies and grabbed a pencil, eraser, and some paper. “Here you are.”

“Thanks!” I watched her as she quickly sketched out a human figure, then began to draw a dress onto it. It was impressive to see how quickly her idea took shape on the paper.

“That looks really cool.”

“Thanks!” She grinned, “But I feel like something’s missing…” She tilted her head sideways and studied the paper intently.

“Maybe make those rounded bits on the bottom of the skirt more pointed? Sort of petal-like?”

She quickly made the adjustments, then pronounced her satisfaction. “Thanks, Allen. I think this is going to look pretty cool. And the best part is, I’ll be able to wear it afterwards, too! Now then, what about you?”

“Hmm?” I hummed my confusion as I set down a cups of tea and plates of lasagna in front of us. I also remembered to put the honey jar down in front of her.

“Your costume, silly! What are you going as?”

“I... I don’t really know…” I hadn’t really thought about it much, except to worry that I might pick something too gay.

Logically, I really don’t think that the group I hang out with would ever make fun of anything I wore. But I’m still afraid of it. I still fear being made fun of, ostracized, all for something I really can’t help. I like what I like, and I am who I am. I’ve tried to change but I can’t. Unfortunately, a lot of people would say that’s no excuse, and judge me for it anyway. I know that all too well.

“Allen? Are you ok?”

I started suddenly, noticing that Road was looking at me with concern in her golden eyes. “Yeah, sorry, just zoned out for a bit.”

Her eyebrows furrowed. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. I’m fine.”
She nodded, accepting my words, though perhaps not completely. “Then what about the costume? Have you thought about it at all?”

I hesitated for a bit, then gave in. “I was thinking I might just go generic steampunk. Like, *Leviathan*. I have some h.naoto that I haven’t worn, and I’ve been looking for an occasion.” It had also briefly crossed my mind to go in drag, but I had killed that idea as soon as it made an appearance.

“Ooohhh… That would be awesome! I love h.naoto – their designs are so fabulously alternative! And so original, too!” She studied me for a bit, seeming to deliberate something. “Have you… considered doing your makeup with that?”

I swallowed dryly, nervous. “I mean…”

“Allen, I realize this is difficult for you, and if you really don’t want to, I won’t press the issue. But I still think you put way too little faith in our friends. At any rate, though, if you want, we can just do the same thing as last time – tell them it was me.”

I felt panic rising in me. They wouldn’t believe that, would they? Kanda certainly wouldn’t – he knew the truth. But… he wasn’t bothered by it. He even complimented my skills last time. I took a deep breath and made my decision.

“We… we could do that,” I whispered, not looking her in the eyes.

Road reached across the table and put her hand on mine, smiling reassuringly. I tried to return the smile, but I think it ended up looking more like a grimace, I was so nervous. She gave my hand a gentle squeeze. I couldn’t help but marvel at the strength of character, kindness, love, and strength that was packed into the tiny girl sitting across from me. She may look like a child, but she has wisdom that many fail to reach throughout the entirety of their lives.

I cleared my throat. “You’re an amazing person, you know that?”

Her smile grew even gentler, somehow, and she threaded her fingers with mine. “You are too. You have such a weight on your shoulders, but you manage to press on in spite of it all – it’s really inspiring.”

“What… what do you mean?” I felt as if ice had frozen my stomach, and was slowly creeping outward. Did she know...? About my sexuality? About… my self-harm?

She looked me sadly in the eyes, then uttered one fateful word: “Cross.”

My whole body tensed, and I felt fear fill me at the very name of the monster I had been dealing with for so long. My hand twitched, too, but she held on. Something about that calmed me, somehow.

“If I may, might I ask… How did you end up with him?” I saw the concern on her features, and something inside of me gave way. For the first time ever, almost against my own will, I opened that gate.

“He… He took me in after my adoptive father, Mana, passed away.”

She nodded, “I’m so sorry for your loss.”

I half-returned the nod. “I-I really loved Mana. He was my world,” I felt like I was choking, and knew that the tears were threatening to fall, just as they always did when I thought about Mana. I felt her squeeze my hand again, and took a shuddering breath. “But he died, and somehow Cross gained custody of me afterwards. I’m not really sure how – I think it might have been in Mana’s will. They
used to be close, I’ve heard.”

“Allen, I am so sorry for everything you’ve gone through, and for everything you’re still going through. And I want you to know that if you ever want to talk, or if you ever need anything – anything at all – you can count on me.”

I looked into her eyes and saw how serious she was. The compassion and determination written on her features told a story far beyond mere words. If I needed her she would be there – in that moment, I was surer of that than of anything else.

“Thank you,” I choked out, closing my eyes and breathing deep to prevent the tears from falling.

After that, we transitioned to lighter conversation topics while we ate. We hung out for a bit after dinner, too. She gave me one last hug as she left, and I felt exceedingly grateful for the existence of that tiny purple-haired girl.

But all her compassion somehow left an ever-growing bad taste in my mouth.

_I don’t deserve her kindness. Not after what I did. All of this, the entire situation with Cross, is nothing but karma come back to bite me in the ass. I deserve the pain, the punishment, because what I did, can never be forgiven._

I wound myself up, pacing back and forth, mentally torturing myself, until I couldn’t take it anymore. With a pained howl, I punched one of the brick walls of the house.

Three times.

I kept hitting the hard, rugged stone until my knuckles burst open, and I watched with rueful satisfaction as the blood began to drip down.

Only then could I breathe freely again.
“Close your eyes. Night growing…”

I heard my ringtone sound and I pulled my phone towards me, looking at the screen.

Road Calling

I picked up, sighing. “It’s only 4pm, Road. I am not leaving for Tykki’s place yet!” I pinched the bridge of my nose, squeezing my eyes shut. I really don’t want to go to this stupid party. What’s so wrong with spending a Friday night in peace?!

“No problem – you know how much I like clothes! Anyway, I was wondering if I could ask you for a favor?”

“Hello to you, too, Kanda!” I heard her giggling through the phone. “Don’t worry, I won’t make you get ready quite just yet. Of course, that’s only because I personally put together your outfit, so I know it’s flawless!”

“Uh-huh. Thanks for that, by the way – saved me a lot of effort.” The vampire outfit she’d picked was simple, yet elegant, like what a gothic nobleman might wear. None of that weird-ass pointy collar bullshit.

“No problem – you know how much I like clothes! Anyway, I was wondering if I could ask you for a favor?”

“Depends on the favor,” I answered, suspicious.

“I’ll be heading over to Allen’s place soon – we’re meeting up early so we can go to the party together. Thing is, though, Tykki’s place is pretty far, and I don’t exactly feel like ruining my new outfit. Or spending copious amounts of time outside in this weather – not exactly the Bahamas out there. So, I was wondering if you could pick the two of us up? Pretty please?”

I sighed, but knew that I couldn’t exactly say no. It’s not like I really minded the detour, or picking Road up. It’s the baka Moyashi I minded spending extra time with. The kid gets under my skin; what can I say? He’s just so like Alma… A lost, sad Alma, the one I rarely ever saw… The one I would surely see if he was here, and knew what I was doing to myself, could see how I was wasting everything he’d given me…

I felt my chest grow tight, and I bent over the table. Closing my eyes, I breathed deeply, trying to count to ten to calm down.

In. One.
Out. Two.

In. Three.

Out. Four.

In. Five.

“Kanda? Are you alright?”

The voice startled me back to reality. I had forgotten I was on the phone with Road.

“Y-yeah. Yeah, don’t worry about it, I’m fine.” Even I could tell that I wasn’t exactly convincing, but I could still feel the adrenaline pulsing through me. My fingers shook, and I clenched my hands into fists. Not here, not now. “I’m fine,” I repeated, “I’ll take you guys to Tykki’s. When do you want me there?”

“Hmmm… How about 6pm? That work?”

“Isn’t that a little early?”

“Nope. I’ve got something planned. And I have to make sure you’re wearing the costume right, don’t I?”

“Che. Whatever. I’ll be there at 6.”

“Thanks, Kanda! See ‘ya!”

“Bye.”

I leaned back in my chair after setting down the phone. I was still on edge and breathing hard from my near-episode just a minute ago. Realizing that meditation probably wouldn’t be enough, I decided to work on a painting. This particular piece was one I’d been working on since the start of the school year, but somehow I just couldn’t finish it. Something was missing, but what…?

I sat down in front of the easel, squinting at the work with displeasure. A slim figure sat in front of a small piano in the middle of a white room. There was a white couch a little ways off from him, closer to the viewer, and an enormous window in the background, through which nothing was visible. Oddly enough, something about the figure… I was tempted, sorely tempted, to make the hair silver. The person wore all black, and somehow the silver hair would suit that, suit the room. But that would be like painting the moyashi into my work. Why the fuck would I want to do that?

I stared at the painting for a few more minutes before finally giving in. Che. Whatever. An artist never ignores their instincts. Besides, who says it’s the moyashi? It’s just some silver-haired geezer in a room.

As I finished the hair, inspiration finally struck me, regarding the thing that had been my greatest writers’ block, so to speak. The window. Without hesitation, I painted another figure there, just outside. The figure was entirely black, except for the eyes, mouth, and a few outlines on the clothing, which were done in white. I left the background a vague gray behind him, nothing defined.

After I finished, I realized that it was already 5pm; I needed to start getting ready. Moving quickly, I grabbed a sticky note and labeled it before sticking it on the easel below the painting.

Noah’s Ark Series: Room of the Pianist (Sept. – Oct. 201x)
“You want me to do what?” I narrowed my eyes at Road in irritation, then sighed, pinching the bridge of my nose. Taking a deep breath, I responded as rationally as I could. “No, absolutely no fucking way in Hell.”

“Kanda, please don’t use that language. It’s highly distasteful,” Road sighed, “And why not? It would look awesome. Come on, please?”

“Are you deaf? I said no!”

Road turned to face the other person in the kitchen. “Don’t you think it would be amazing, Allen?”

I whirled toward the confused teen, who was currently leaning against the wall of his own kitchen. *He’d better not back her on this…*

“Actually, I’m not even sure why we’re even having this conversation. Why exactly do we want to put makeup on Kanda?”

“*Because,* Allen, it’ll look great. Think about it – nothing too elaborate, just black and red vampire eyes. I personally think it would look fantastic. Come on, Kanda,” she continued, turning back to me, “please?”

I sighed, opening my eyes, brows furrowed, then leaned back, calmly asking, “Who’s going to do my makeup, should I agree, huh? *You*? I think not. And there’s no one else here who does makeup.”

I know that Road’s makeup at the last party was done by the moyashi, and chances are he’s the one behind tonight’s work, too. *I hate to admit it, but the kid’s not bad…* Her skin had taken on a gray tinge, and there were 3D stigmata across her forehead. Her eyebrows had turned as purple as her hair, her lips were a purple-gold ombre, and her eyelids were pure gold, masterfully blended into black eyeliner.

Fortunately for me, though, she doesn’t know that I’m aware of the moyashi’s penchant for makeup, and she appears to have made the exact same promise as me – that she wouldn’t tell anyone. Which means that unless the moyashi himself suggests that he’ll do my makeup, I’m safe.

I noticed Road give the moyashi a pleading look. *Not gonna work, Road!*

“I.. I-I could, maybe… do it?” The moyashi’s hesitant voice rang out, clearly audible in the silence, despite how softly the words were said.

Road squealed in delight, practically tackling him into a hug. He seemed surprised, but smiled softly at her, hugging her back strongly.

“Of course,” he added, “that’s only if you’re ok with that, Kanda.” He shot me a hesitant glance, then dropped his gaze to his hands, which I noticed were shaking.

“Che.” I turned away from him. “Fine. But only because I don’t want you to cry, baka moyashi,” I smirked. It would have been sort of a shame for his makeup to be ruined. His lips, eyes, and cheeks were are all done in bronzes and browns, matching his steampunk getup.

Anger immediately erupted in his gray eyes. “I am *not* going to cry, BaKanda!”

My smirk grew wider. “Really?”
“Yeah, and watch it, because I’m going to be putting stuff near your eyes very soon. We wouldn’t want any accidents, now would we?”

I narrowed my eyes. “Are you threatening me? Doesn’t that violate some professional code of ethics?”

“Hey, come on, guys! Stop fighting!” Road interrupted, eyes blazing.

We both turned away from each other, then grudgingly turned back.

“Come on, there’s more light in the living room. I’ll go grab my stuff first.”

Road and I sat down in the living room, and she turned to face me, exasperation written across her features.

“Are you completely incapable of getting along with Allen?”

I decided the question didn’t merit a response, and she huffed beside me.

The moyashi soon returned and set to work. He chose brushes and palettes with the same surety as I did when I painted – no hesitation, only an occasional moment of consideration. Having him so close made me notice something, though. I glanced around to see if Road was still in the room, but she had apparently wandered off. I vaguely recalled her asking the moyashi if he had any sweets at home. Chances are, he’d responded with an affirmative.

“So, are those bandages on your knuckles part of your costume?”

His hands twitched, and a flash of something dark flew across his features, before he gave me a slight smile. “Yeah.”

“I see. Nice attention to detail, then – you even added fake blood.”

“What?” He gasped and looked down, eyes widening when he, too, noticed what I’d just pointed out.

I glanced up at him, eyebrows raised. “You might want to redo those bandages before we go,” I told him.

He swallowed and laughed nervously. “Yeah-yeah, I’ll do that. Haha.”

I sighed and rolled my head. “Oi, baka moyashi. Have you ever wrapped bruised knuckles before?”

“Um, not really, no,” he muttered, looking away.

I sighed again. “Then let me.”

“What?” He looked straight in my eyes, surprise written all over his face.

I rolled my eyes. “I practice kendo. I’ve had my fair share of split knuckles; I can show you how to wrap them properly.”

He hesitate for a second before nodding. Then, pulling himself up, he glanced over his makeup, scattered all around us. “Thank you, Kanda. But let me finish your makeup first. I’m almost done.”

After he pronounced himself satisfied, the moyashi proceeded to put his stuff away carefully, immediately washing his brushes and setting them out to dry. After that, we sat down on his
immaculately cleaned bathroom floor and he hesitantly extended his hands towards me. I carefully
undid his poorly done wrappings, and found myself slightly taken aback by the amount of damage
that had been done to his knuckles. Their skin was completely gone, almost to the bone.

“Have you been punching a brick wall?!"

“It was an accident, ok? What business is it of yours, anyway, what I do?” He shot back, angry
and… scared?

Was he attacked again…?

“Che. Fine, whatever. Just stay still and let me try to fix this.” I carefully cleaned the wounds and
bandaged them properly. It wasn’t an easy process, considering how much his hands kept flinching
away. I guess pain inflicted by others, even if it’s not deliberate, must bring back bad memories,
things he’d rather forget. Well, no way for me to judge him for that, considering my own problems,
my own issues with remembering the past…

“Do it like that,” I told him as I finished, then cleaned up. “Considering how bad the injury is, I
expect it’ll take close to a month to heal.”

“What?! That long? They’re not even that deep!”

I turned to face him, raising an eyebrow. “No, but you have to consider where your injury is – any
deeper and the bone would have been exposed. Plus, there’s no way for you to just not use your
hands while your knuckles heal. That’ll slow the healing process, too – it’s why any injuries to the
hands or feet take forever to heal.”

“Right,” he nodded. As we descended the stairs he added, “Thank you.”

I looked back at him. “You’re welcome.”

“Welcome!” Tykki threw the door wide open, inviting us inside with a huge Cheshire grin. Fitting,
as that was what he appeared to be dressed as; striped fluffy tail, cat ears and all. And clearly, all of it
was purple and pink. I could use him for target practice; he’s probably visible from 3 miles away.

“Tykki!” Road cheered, launching herself into his arms. Not even missing a beat, he picked her up
and swung her, but of them laughing like idiots. The sight made the corners of my lips twitch
upwards. Idiots…

“Thank you for having us over, Tykki,” the moyashi smiled, extending his hand. Tykki shook it
vigorously, then brought him in for a quick hug. He then ushered the two smaller members of our
party in ahead of the two of us.

“Hey, Kanda! Glad you could make it!” He gave me a quick once-over. “You look fantastic.”

“Don’t let the baka usagi hear you saying that.”

“Haha! He won’t get jealous that easily! And if he does, well! I’m sure I can make it up to him
somehow,” he winked.

I rolled my eyes, “Idiot.”

I set down the stuff we’d brought on the table in the kitchen. Road had insisted I ought to be the
gentleman and carry all of the heavy stuff. Which, by her interpretation, was everything. The moyashi had tried to help, but I told him to shove off. *Not like I care, or anything, but the quicker his hands heal, the better.*

*Why?* A small voice asked from a distant corner of my mind. I didn’t give it an answer, instead opting to get busy putting stuff into the refrigerator.

“Hi, Kanda!” I heard a cheerful voice from behind me, and found myself face-to-face with a fairy Lenalee.

“Hi.” I took in her costume. “You look great, Lenalee.” *But was she always that skinny? I feel like she might have lost some weight…*

“Doesn’t she?” Road appeared out of nowhere, immediately wrapping her arms around Lenalee’s waist. Then, looking up into the eyes of the pigtailed girl, she continued, “Come on, let’s get something to drink.”

“Ok,” Lenalee agreed, smiling down at Road.

I leaned back against the wall, sipping a beer and watching the events from the sidelines. The baka usagi waved at me, and I rolled my eyes back. He was dressed as a pirate. *Figures.* I felt myself relax – Tykki’s house just did that to me. Something about the ancient gothic house made me feel almost at home. *Maybe because it’s so different to everywhere else I’ve stayed. Nothing like Alma’s house…*

“Hey, guys! Come on, let’s play the King Game!” The baka usagi yelled out, pulling Tykki towards the living room. Everyone seemed on board, which meant that Road dragged me in, and I sat down, far away from the rest of them. *I still don’t understand why I have to be here…* My eyes drifted over to the moyashi, talking animatedly with Lenalee and Road. Then I quickly looked away again.

We drew straws, and guess who should be king first? None other than the baka moyashi himself.

“Hmmm… I order Tykki to drink 3 shots of vodka.”

“Hah!” Tykki scoffed, “No problem.” True to his word, he knocked the shots back easily, as would be expected. Tykki’s a heavyweight when it comes to alcohol, and other things, too.

Next time it was the Lenalee’s turn.

“I order Lavi to give Tykki a lap dance!”

I groaned inwardly. *Why am I not surprised? I’m betting she’ll enjoy this even more than the two of them.*

Cheshire Cat Tykki smirked at the usagi, who mirrored the expression, though with an added hint of excitement. He slowly got off the couch, then leaned over to give Tykki a view of his ass. Turning slowly, he straightened up, a grin firmly affixed to his face. Then he leaned forward over Tykki, lips nearly brushing. Bracing his himself on Tykki’s shoulders, he sunk onto Tykki’s lap and began grinding up against the taller man. Soon they were both gasping into each other’s mouths, before Lavi suddenly got off and sat down next to Tykki, giving him the biggest shit-eating grin I’ve ever seen. It was actually sort of impressive. Tykki himself was looking at Lavi with a face full of lust.

*Lavi will not be getting much sleep tonight.*

“Next!” Road laughed out.
We drew again, and who should become the king but Lavi. His eyes flicked over the room, that same shit-eating grin still plastered on his face.

“Kanda, I order you to kiss Allen!”

“No,” I hissed, “absolutely not. Why the fuck should I kiss him?!”

“Same here!” The moyashi piped up, “I have zero desire to kiss that wannabe samurai!”

“What did you say, brat?” I spat, narrowing my eyes at him.

“Well, guess what – I really don’t care. I’m the king and I order you to kiss!”

“Come on, Kanda,” Tykki laughed, “don’t be a spoilsport! Or are you too much of a coward?”

Damn that Tykki – he knows exactly what to say to get under my skin.

“Fine, whatever,” I growled, getting up and making my way over to where the Moyashi was pushing himself back further into the sofa.

I leaned in over him, watching his eyelids flutter as his gaze flickered between my eyes and lips. He swallowed, clearly nervous, and his breathing sped up. I could practically see his heart rate speeding up; his pupils dilated with adrenalin. I stood there for a full minute, staring into those deep, annoying, emotional, frustrating, gorgeous silver eyes.

Then I leaned forward, and all I knew was fireworks.
Fireworks. That’s the only way to explain what I felt at that moment.

Kanda’s lips felt so… right. A little chapped, but pleasantly firm. And so, so warm. I couldn’t help it – I closed my eyes, my right hand involuntarily rising to brush his face and pull him closer. He shifted to the side just a bit, and it felt even better. A perfect match. I felt like I was flying, and I lost all control of my impulses; I licked his lips, and he licked back, his tongue sliding wetly over mine. I could feel my body heat and heart rate rising. I could die right now, and I wouldn’t regret a thing.

After what could have been 3 seconds or an eternity, Kanda finally pulled away. My arm lingered next to his face for a short while before finally falling back down into my lap. But our eyes remained fixed on each other’s. His pupils were dilated, and mine were probably the same; we were both breathing hard.

“You like that, Moyashi?” He smirked.

“It’s Allen, BaKanda!” I hissed, instantly irritated. Had I just thought there was some sort of connection between us? Stupid! What kind of connection could I possible have to this rude asshole? Who apparently completely lacks the ability to read the mood.

His eyes narrowed for a second. “Che. Whatever,” he grumbled, straightening up. (Probably not the best choice of words, eh?) He crossed the room again and sat back down, then gave me one last smirk before turning to face the wall in apparent boredom.

I glanced around. Tykki was the only one looking at Kanda, and he seemed thoroughly amused. Everyone else was looking at me with slight, barely contained smiles. I gulped, feeling fear coil in my intestines. Irrational, cold dread.

“Whatever, Kanda. Your technique’s good, I’ll give you that. Unfortunately for you, though, I’m straight. So that’s all you’ll ever get.” I leaned back on the sofa, trying to feign nonchalance. I had the horrible feeling it hadn’t worked, though. Everyone raised their eyebrows at me, exchanging disbelieving glances. Except for Kanda, of course, that ass.

“Don’t flatter yourself, baka moyashi. I don’t want you, anyway; not my type,” Kanda intoned, continuing to stare at the wall.

“Right.” This conversation has gotten seriously awkward. Time for a getaway. “I’m gonna go grab something to eat, if you guys don’t mind. I’m pretty hungry.” Smooth, Allen. That was so subtle. Tykki nodded at me, but Road made to get up and follow me, concern written on her features. “Ah, no, don’t get up on my account. I’ll be back in a sec.”
I made my way through the house, feeling panic welling inside me. I slipped quietly up the stairs, then locked myself in the bathroom. Sitting on the edge of the bathtub, I tried to relax my breathing.

*Nice going, faggot! Now they know what you really are! You think any of them are ever going to talk to you again? You’re a liar, a freak! Do you think what you said fooled any of them? You just made matters worse! Well done!*

*And Kanda, too! Did you honestly think you had a chance with him? Did you think there was something there? Fool! Why would anyone ever want something as broken, as freakish, as you?*

I gasped for air. I wanted to yell, tell the ugly voices in my head to shut up, but there was nothing I could do. Nothing except…

I glanced around, looking for something to use, and found it in an instant. There, sitting under the sink – an umbrella. Tykki probably put it there to dry after the rain two days ago. Shaking slightly, I closed it completely, then rammed the metal handle into my leg. A gasp of relief left me, but it wasn’t enough. I did it again. And again. And again. I kept slamming the handle into my thighs until they were numb from the pain, and the voices were gone, replaced with the cries of my body, begging me to stop.

*I’m so screwed…*

I leaned over the countertop in the kitchen with a sigh, hiding my face in my hands. *No way I can just go back to them, like nothing ever happened. Damn it! Why did Kanda have to screw me up like that? Like Hell they bought the lie about me being straight. So now, instead of just being weird and distant, I’m the pathetic gay kid who can’t come out of the closet that literally everyone knows he’s hiding in!*

I felt my eyes sting as tears threatened to fall, but I straightened up, deliberately pushing my right thigh into a drawer handle. I hissed in pain at the immediate sting. My legs were far from ok, I could tell – I’d made the trek back down the stairs slowly and gingerly. *It’s gonna be at least a week before the pain stops.* A broken grin crossed my features momentarily at the thought.

I pushed myself away from the counter and ran a hand through my hair. *Well, at least they don’t know about my ‘bloody little problem’. I really don’t think there could be anything worse than that.*

*“Oi, moyashi. What’s taking you so long?”*

I whirled around to find Kanda in the doorway, and my eyes narrowed. *“What do you care?”* I snarled, *“Last time I checked, you weren’t exactly interested.”*

*“Che.”* Kanda looked at the wall, then back at me. *“Thanks to you running off like that, Lenalee and Road have been on my ass about how I was a dick to you. They seem to think I started it.”*

I raised my eyebrows. *Why are they taking my side? I’m pretty sure this is the first time that I’m the one clearly in the wrong.*

*Kanda’s eyebrows drew closer together. “Are you… ok? You seem sort of off, moyashi.”*

*I keep telling you, it’s Allen, Bakanda,”* I retorted, but I just couldn’t manage to muster up my usual fire.
I felt the tension rising between us, like a dam about to burst. He wasn’t going anywhere, and every second that went by, the urge to tell him something, anything, even the tiniest little thing grew stronger. Maybe he could help? He sure as Hell seemed willing to listen; determined to, even. Maybe I could just tell him a partial truth – something about Cross, maybe. Because as much of an ass as Kanda could be, he actually cares for the people around him, I realized, thinking back to the time he rescued me from the robber, and the time he called Neah over to help me. The way he stayed with me the whole weekend, just so I wouldn’t have to be alone. Road, Lavi, Tykki, Lenalee – they all trusted him. There had to be a reason.

“Actually, I-”

“Yo, guys, what’s up? Why are the two of you alone over here? Come on back and join the party!” We both turned to find a very clearly intoxicated Tykki in the doorway. Did I mention Kanda had gotten closer to me at some point? I guess not, but then, I didn’t really notice it either until right freaking now because he’s only one freaking foot away from me. Tykki, however, had clearly noticed, and drawn all the wrong conclusions. A grin formed on his face as he continued, “Ah, boy, is Kanda getting ready to steal your heart?” His gaze flickered up to the tall, dark, and absolutely furious figure standing next to me. “So that’s what gets you going? I mean, I knew it wasn’t me, considering how quickly that ended.” He gave us a wide, knowing grin and a highly unsubtle wink.


“Ok, ok, whatever. Have fun, you two-~!” He laughed, turning around and leaving the room. We both just stood there in silence, before I finally pulled myself together. Somewhat.

“So… You and Tykki… uh…” Well, apparently ‘pulled myself together’ is a vast overstatement. Because that was not the question I wanted to be asking. Or more accurately, not the question I should be asking.

“No.” Kanda hissed, then sighed. “He… He was the one who suggested it, back in 6th grade or some shit. That was when I realized I was gay, though certainly not for him. I’d kissed a girl and felt nothing, and it just sort of happened.”

He seemed oddly insistent on convincing me that it meant nothing to him. “So, you really don’t feel anything for him?” And how did that question even pass my lips? I think the alcohol and endorphin high were a bad combination…

“No fucking thing.”

“But, maybe… he feels something for you? I mean, why else would he bring it up?” Each word was quieter than the last as they left my mouth, what with Kanda’s absolutely withering glare. Then he just sighed and looked away.

“Tykki reminisces when he’s drunk, ok? I’ve heard him talk about everything from his first pet frog to his last day of 8th grade. Once he even talked about seeing Haley’s comet. Ask Road if you don’t believe me.”

“Ok.” Silence. Then, I gathered my courage one last time. “Wh-why are you telling me all of this?” I can’t be the only one feeling it, can I? That there’s something here?

For a moment he just stood there, apparently shocked. Then…

“I-I don’t know. I wonder why? It’s certainly none of your fucking business…” I feel like that
should have offended me, and it almost did, except Kanda didn’t appear to be talking to me, anymore, but to himself. He seemed to genuinely not understand his own actions. Kinda funny, honestly.

I wanted to comment, but suddenly I just felt tired. Tired of thinking, tired of hurting, tired of everything. And in that moment I understood why Cross liked the alcohol so much – it helped him forget. And right about now, I was intent on making the whole world go away.

“Come on, Kanda,” I said, grabbing two beers and handing one to him, “let’s just forget it.”

And we did.
Nothing makes me feel alive like kendo.

Most of the time, I feel empty, lost. Alma is gone, and I feel his absence like a great black hole that threatens to swallow me at every moment. I often feel as if I’m not even living, really – just existing. I go through the motions of life in complete monotone; the only emotions that ever seem to reach me are negative – sorrow, anger, frustration. Sure, I play the part – I’m good at that – but in the end I really do feel rather disconnected from the world.

Not that I care, really. Mostly, the world isn’t even worth my time. It’s full of idiots – people running left and right in the hopes of achieving impossible dreams; people lying and cheating their way ahead of the crowd, and mercilessly crushing those in their way; people pretending to care, while not actually giving a single fucking shit. Long story short, humans are shallow, and I don’t care to interact with them.

But every once in a while I realize how lonely I am. I know it’s my own fault – Hell, it’s my own design – but I still feel the emptiness sometimes, and I don’t know what to do about it. No matter how much time I spend with Road and Tykki (and recently the baka usagi, Lenalee, and the baka moyashi), I’m still empty. And I hate it.

So I try to fill the hole with marijuana, art, and cigarettes. But it’s not nearly enough. I’m sure I could be addicted to them all, and a thousand other drugs and indulgences besides, but it wouldn’t do a thing. I’d still feel like a corpse pretending to be alive, caught in a world I no longer belong to.

After all, I’ve already crossed over once.

And Alma brought me back.

So I’m here on borrowed time, but I’m here to stay, because to waste his sacrifice is unimaginable.

But that doesn’t make me feel alive, just resigned to the fact of my existence.

*Kendo* makes me feel alive.

There’s just something about the lifestyle (I refuse to call it a sport) that captivates me, raises me up. Spending hours swinging a bokken or bokuto allows me to become absorbed in the passion of movement. The traditional garb gives me a connection to the past, to all that has come before. The time spent in meditation, contemplation and study calms my mind, elevating me above the problems of the everyday. And sparring… it makes me feel *alive*. Honestly, really, actually *alive*.

And that means the world to me.

So I always attend the kendo competitions I’m invited to, regardless of how small the chances are
that I’ll find anyone truly strong enough to best me. Every once in a while, I have the opportunity to have a match or spar with someone pretty strong, and I relish the challenge. I welcome the feeling of blood rushing through my veins, all of my nerves on edge, my muscles tensed and ready for the fight.

This competition was no different. Mostly, my matches were with black belts my own age. And don’t get me wrong, they’re not bad, but few of them are even close to my level. So I won all of my matches with relative ease.

Afterwards came the fun part. I had the opportunity to spar with Cloud Nyne and Winters Zakolo, two martial artists that even I have to admit are impressive. By odd coincidence, they are also Generals of the Black Order, just like Tiedoll.

General Zakolo is big and tough, with enough strength in his body to move an elephant. General Nyne on the other hand, is agile and light on her feet. They are complete opposites, and fighting the two of them one after another was pure ecstasy. I couldn’t resist the smirk coming to my face as I faced off against them. I won’t deny having felt a twinge of disappointment when we had to stop.

“You’re quite impressive, Kanda,” Nyne stated matter-of-factly as she and I made our way towards the locker rooms. Everyone else was long gone, but I was more than willing to stay behind in order to have a chance to spar with the Generals. “Have you considered joining any professional teams?”

I just shrugged. My future was always a bit of a sore spot for me. I’m already filling out applications to colleges and universities (since the deadlines are fast approaching), but I still don’t really know what I want to do with my life.

“Hmmm… Well, at any rate, perhaps you should join the Order.”

I stiffened, furrowing my brows a bit. “… Why exactly would I want to do that?”

“Well, it is primarily an organization of scholars, but we have a lot of connections – being a member could help you achieve your goals.”

I bristled at those words, “I will achieve my goals by own means. I don’t need any crutches.”

“Damn, the old man was right about you. You really are independent-minded. But the Order isn’t a crutch, Kanda – it’s just a small leg-up. You’re lucky to have the chance to become part of it.”

“I appreciate the invitation,” I bit out, attempting to stay civil, “but my answer remains unchanged.”

Nyne just shrugged. “Whatever you say, dude.” We’d reached one of the locker rooms, and she turned to me. “Well, this is me. Nice to finally meet you, Kanda.”

I nodded. “Nice to meet you, too.”

I entered the locker room and quickly changed, deciding to shower at home instead. As I left the room, I found myself looking at a familiar face. I almost smiled, and I knew he heard the almost-warmth in my voice.

“Hey, Marie.”

“Hello, Kanda,” he smiled, pulling me into a hug I tried my damndest to resist.
“So, what brings you here, Marie?”

The two of us were sitting at my kitchen table, drinking tea. I’d already showered, and we’d been talking for quite a while, but this particular topic of conversation hadn’t come up yet.

“I’m on my way to a recital, but I have an 8 hour layover between the plane and bus. So I thought I might stop by for a chat.” He levelled his eyes at me. “Tiedoll is worried about you, Kanda, and quite honestly, I am too.”

I tensed, then forced myself to relax. Just pretend… Just act the way you always do.

“Oh? Why is that?”

“Kanda, you didn’t take Daisya’s passing very well. Neither Tiedoll nor I have ever seen you quite like that.”

I felt like I’d just been punched in the gut. Daisya… I’d been doing my best not to remember, but it was proving difficult. Not that it really caused me to act any different – it just increased the emptiness I felt that much more, made me more and more willing to turn to drugs and cigarettes. Nothing else of course – I can’t dishonor Alma like that.

“I’m fine,” I insisted.

Marie sighed, “If you say so. But Kanda, I want you to know that we are here for you, should you ever need us.”

I felt my throat constrict, and all I could do was nod.

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That night (Jeez, is it still only Saturday? Fuck, what a day.) found me at the house of the baka moyashi, working on our English project. The Kendo competition had lasted from 9am to 1pm, but I stayed until 4pm sparring with the Generals. Afterwards I spent about 2 hours with Marie, and 8pm now finds me looking over the moyashi’s additions to my analysis. It pisses me off to have to admit, but his points aren’t half bad.

By the time 10pm rolled around, we were both worn out. The moyashi kept side-eyeing me, and it was beginning to get on my nerves.

“Speak up, baka moyashi: What do you want?”

“It’s Allen, BaKanda!” He hissed.

I snorted, vaguely amused, somehow not even annoyed at the insult (Why is that?). “Whatever.”

“…I just wanted to ask if you wanted to spend the night,” he huffed, looking away, his pale cheeks turning slightly pink. Heh. Then he looked back at me in apparent irritation. “But you’re being a bit of a dick, so…”

I looked out at the dark sky outside the window. Spending the night… That didn’t really sound like a good idea, but somehow… I kind of wanted to do it.

“So can I stay or not, Moyashi?”

“…Yes.”
“… Then I will.”

His face lit up a little, and he smiled at me. “Want to watch TV? I’ll make some popcorn.”

“Che, whatever,” I sighed, standing up and beginning to make my way towards the living room. I plopped myself down on the couch and turned on the TV by hand, not able to find the remote. *Baka moyashi, can’t even keep his things in order.*

“… And now a word on traffic. An accident occurred today on Highway N72. A passerby caught it on camera.”

I didn’t react nearly fast enough.

They played the footage; the blue Honda Civic crashing into the railing, the impact crushing the front of the car, the windows shattering, smoke billowing from under the hood.

My vision began to tunnel, a headache mounting behind my eyes. I leaned forward over my knees, groaning, my fingernails digging into my skull as I pressed my hands up against the sides of my head. My breathing and heart rate sped up, and the world turned dark and disoriented.

*Rain hit the roof, sloshing along the road.*

“Mom, when are we gonna get home?” The purple-haired child leaned forward in his seat, not bothered at all by the storm raging on outside.

“Just a few more minutes, honey, don’t worry. We’ll be back in time for your show…”

Bright light suddenly obscured everything, and the world spun and flipped like some madman’s rollercoaster. Metal screeched and a scorching heat enveloped everything, the smell of burning rubber permeating through the space.

“Alma!!”

“Kanda… breathe… just breathe… in… out… in… out…”

I felt a surprisingly strong hand making soothing circles on my back, another hand squeezing my thigh, tethering me to what I dimly realized ought to be reality.

But I could still smell the smoke, hear the crunch of metal collapsing in on itself, feel the pain tearing my body apart…

Slowly, though, the visions began to fade. And all the while, those warm hands stayed there, comforting me along with that calm voice.

“… You can stop now, Moyashi…” I breathed out, my voice harsh. Even to my ears, it sounded broken.

There was a pause, but then the hand on my back resumed making soft circles.

“… I’m not going anywhere.”

“Are you feeling better? Do you need anything?”
I shook my head. My attack had resided, leaving me tired as fuck. Not to mention embarrassed at having the baka moyashi take care of me.

The lights were turned low, and the TV was off (thank the Gods). The moyashi had just set down a mug of jasmine tea on the coffee table in front of me.

“… Aren’t you going to ask?”

“I know what it’s like to have secrets, Kanda.” Pause. “But if you want to talk, I’ll listen.”

…

“Alma’s parents adopted me, after my own parents died in a house fire.”

Silence. The hand hesitantly returned to my thigh, and I didn’t push it away.

“… But when I was ten, we got into a car crash on the way home.

“My adoptive parents both died. Alma... He died too.”

The other hand had come up to rest on my back again, and slowly began to move.

“Only I survived. But I was badly injured… I needed a heart and lung transplant… And Alma was an organ donor.”

I heard a quiet intake of breath, and the hand moving on my back started slightly.

“We were compatible, and I was near death… So the doctors decided to save my life through him.” I raised a shaking hand and put it up against my chest, closing my eyes. “Now… I carry Alma inside of me.”

The hands stayed there, warm and stable, supporting me. The tears I could no longer hold back spilled over, and I felt relief like nothing I had ever known.
The next week passed by in blur. Cross hadn’t turned up over the weekend, even though he had said he’d be back after 3 weeks. *Maybe he’s dead? That would be nice.*

I was filled with anxiety, knowing that Cross could turn up any day now. I had the money he’d wanted, and more besides, but I knew that wouldn’t spare me the typical abuse.

But I also felt… happy, sort of. Kanda had stayed over on Saturday, and he had trusted me with his greatest secret. I had the distinct impression that not even Tykki and Road knew the whole story, and yet he had told *me*. I couldn’t help but feel honored. His behavior towards me seemed a little different now, too. Sure, he wasn’t exactly Mr. Nice Guy, but he was no longer openly hostile, and I sort of got the sense that “Moyashi” had become more of a pet name than an insult. Not the nicest nickname one could ask for, but coming from Kanda…

And, unbeknownst to me, other ideas began to surface. Kanda had trusted me. Maybe… I could build a relationship with him after all? But wouldn’t that be like taking advantage of weakness? And besides, a relationship with another man was not a possibility, not for me. I couldn’t go down that road. Besides, who would want to be in a relationship with a freak like me? Nobody, that’s who. Once he knows the truth about my arm, he’ll leave, I have no doubt about that.

Friday night found me finishing up my AP Chem homework, wondering how Lenalee was doing. Her brother seems to be doting on her even more than usual, and it looks like that and her constant ballet practices are beginning to wear her down. She’s still as positive and kind as ever, but she seems to be losing weight.

I was startled out of my reverie by a crash from the entryway. Someone had just thrown the door open violently, and I felt my gut clench as I realized who that someone must be.

“Get out here, idiot apprentice!”

Shaking slightly, I hurriedly shoved my school work behind the couch, and stumbled out to meet the demon standing in the doorway.

“… Master Cross…”

He shoved past me, nearly bowling me over. “Where the fuck’s the food?!”

I gulped. I hadn’t known he would be back tonight, and I hadn’t made anything yet.

“I… I haven’t made anything…” I stuttered, terrified. *This is not going to end well*…
His eyes narrowed in anger; the air seemed to pulse with it.

“Do you have the money?”

I reached up take the money out of the cupboard, then handed him $2100 with shaking hands.

He counted.

“… Is this all?”

I felt the walls begin to close in on me. “… You told me to make $2000.”

He stood up, and began to advance towards me. I backed into the cabinets with a gulp, fear encompassing and overwhelming all of my senses.

“So you thought you could just slack off?!” He roared, grabbing me by the shoulders, and throwing me to the floor.

I lay there stunned for a few seconds before reality made itself known again.

“I’m sorry!” I gasped, shielding my face in my arms.

He grabbed my right arm and dragged me up. “You think a fucking “sorry” is enough?!” A kick to my stomach sent me flying again, and left me winded on the floor.

The booted feet approached, and I wanted to cry.

“If you don’t stop that right fucking now, I swear to all the War Gods in the sky that I will call the police on your ass, and get you put away for life.”

The voice sounded like ice; cold and cruel. But I felt myself warmed by the intent anyway. It can’t possibly be…?

“Fucking brat,” Cross snorted, “get out before I beat you, too.”

“I’d like to see you try – I’m an internationally ranked kendo champion. I’m also close personal friends with 3 members of the Noah Clan. And my foster father is General Froi Tiedoll of the Black Order.” A different pair of boots had entered my slightly hazy vision, and were advancing on Cross. “Now get the fuck out of here.”

Cross didn’t respond, but I watched his boots retreat and heard the door slam.

The other pair of boots stayed still for a few seconds longer, than made their way over to me. I felt strong arms pick me up princess-style.

“Kanda…” My voice was weak and I knew it, but I had to say something. This man, this beautiful, brave, incredible man had just saved me. Again.

“Shut up, Moyashi. I know.”

He carried me up the stairs and to my room. By the time he set me down gently on my bed, my clarity was returning, and I sat up slowly.

“Kanda… please, don’t leave…” I whispered, reaching towards the form standing next to my bed and grasping onto his trench coat.
A warm, calloused hand was laid gently on my forehead. “… I’m not a complete ass, you know,” he murmured, sitting down next to me.

“… What are you doing here?” I asked as my reason returned.

“We were supposed to get together tonight to work on our AP English project, because we didn’t really get much done last week…” He trailed off.

“Oh. Right.”

I reached for his hand, and he gasped.

“Moyashi… what have you done?”

“…Huh…?” I looked down, and reality crashed back all at once. The hand I had extended towards him was my left, and my sleeve had slipped up, leaving my cuts in plain sight.

I snatched my arm back immediately, cradling it in the other hand. My gaze was fixed on him, terrified. This is it… This is the end…

Kanda held open palms up in my direction, and spoke softly, as if to a wounded animal.

“It’s ok, it’s all right. Calm down. Don’t worry – I’m not going to judge you, I promise.”

He’s lying! The voice inside of me yelled. He’s tricking you! He’s seen your scars – no one could stand to be in your presence after knowing what you do!

“Listen to me, please. I’m sorry for how I reacted. I swear to you – you can trust me, Allen.”

My eyes widened, and my mind went silent. “…What… did you just say?”

“I said you can trust me, baka Moyashi.” I saw a grin dancing on his features.

“It’s Allen, Bakanda…” I whispered, still in shock. He may not have repeated it, but I know what I heard. Even if it was only once, I know he said my name.

He spread his arms even wider, and I didn’t even try to resist, just fell right in between them, circling his toned, muscular body with my thin, pale arms. And amazingly enough, his arms fell into place on my back, and held me close to him as I cried.

“I was adopted, too, you know.”

I was sitting in bed, nestled in between Kanda’s legs, my back lying on his front, his back against the wall. It has taken a while (I really don’t know how long), but I had finally calmed down. And now he was rubbing my right arm to calm me as I spoke. He had known intuitively not to touch the left.

“I don’t know who my real parents were. It was when I was around 6, I think? I was taken in and raised by a man named Mana, who worked as a circus clown. The years I spent with him, I travelled around and learned to be myself. He taught me all about the circus, and how to perform. We even had our own made-up language.

“But one day, when we were headed home, there was an accident. A car came speeding down the road, headed straight for us. Mana… Mana pushed me out of the way, saving my life.
“But he lost his own life in the process.” At that point I had to stop, my renewed sobbing making it impossible to continue. He held me through it, whispering to me that it was all right, that it wasn’t my fault. Those words… I don’t think I could ever convey to him how much it meant to hear that.

Eventually, I calmed down enough to finish my story. “After that, I was taken in by Cross, an old acquaintance of Mana’s. I was 11 at the time. I started cutting when I was 12, and I’ve been doing it ever since.”

It was a relief, to finally say out loud the things I’d been keeping a secret for so many years.

And Kanda accepted it all without a single word of judgement.
In the end, I spent the entire weekend at the Baka Moyashi’s place. And the truth is, it passed by pretty quickly. I mean, yeah, we were both a little awkward around each other, but fuck – we’d told each other our deepest secrets. It hadn’t taken much actual time to speak the words aloud, but knowing those types of things about a person changes how you behave around them and what you think of them, regardless of how you may try not to let it affect you.

By the time Saturday night rolled around, things were pretty much back to normal. It was pretty surprising to realize how alike we are – I guess that’s probably why we don’t always get along. We’re equally passionate, and we both hate being wrong. We also both have seriously deep-seated issues which we do our best to hide from the world.

In the end, we got a surprising amount of work done, as well, so now we’re essentially back on track with the AP English project.

The next week went by pretty calmly, too, though there were a few hiccups. I may have told him to fuck off when he tried to say something about one of my AP Calc proofs, and he may have called me an asshole a few times. I sort of feel like his language has gotten dirtier since I met him – I wonder if it’s my influence? That thought doesn’t piss me off nearly as much as it should, honestly. Huh.

On Thursday I received a call while I was working on my AP Chem homework.

“Yuu-kun, my darling boy! How are you?”

I took a deep breath as I felt my blood pressure begin to rise from the all-too-happy voice. “Fine.” Pause. “And I am not your son.”

“Ah, but a pupil is like a son! I view you as my son, as family.”

I bit my lip. Family... Daisya...

“And as family, I’m requesting your presence for Thanksgiving dinner this year.”

“…”

Logically, I knew I couldn’t refuse. That wasn’t the reason for my hesitation. In fact, I surprised myself by not being completely opposed to the idea. What worried me was… the Moyashi.
It was the first thing that entered my mind. Who knows when that fucking bastard could come back? Is it really ok to leave him alone and go more than a state away? Then logic returned. Of course it’s fucking ok. Why the Hell wouldn’t it be? Why the Hell do I even care?

And that was where my own fucking train of thought struck me completely fucking dumb.

Why... do I care? Because I do care, that part’s fairly obvious at this point...

“Hello? Yuu-kun? Are you still there?”

The voice in my ear jarred me out of my thoughts and back into reality.

“Yeah... yeah. I have to think about it.”

“Yuu-kun... Is there... a reason you don’t want to come? Or... a reason you want to stay?”

“It doesn’t matter, does it?” I responded gruffly. And apparently, that was all the answer the geezer needed.

“Yuu-kun! Is there somebody new in your life? Will you be introducing them soon? Maybe Marie and I should fly down there, instead! That way we can all have dinner together, and you can introduce us!”

“NO,” I snapped, probably much faster than I should have if I was aiming for discretion, then continued more calmly. “There is absolutely no need for you to come down here.” A small part of me noted that I had chosen not to deny the old man’s accusation that I had “somebody new” in my life. I ignored it completely. Instead, I deliberated for a few more seconds before speaking. “I have a lot of work over the break, but I think I can go. I’ll text you tomorrow.”

“All right. I’ll buy the tickets tonight, then.”

So, apparently “I’ll text you tomorrow” means “I’m going” to him. I guess I should have seen that coming, though.

“I can’t wait to see you again, Yuu-kun. Good night!”

“‘Night.”

The call ended, and I leaned back in the chair – talking with the old man always wore me down. And I couldn’t help the feeling bugging me in the background – that while I didn’t mind going, I didn’t want to leave the Moyashi. And again...

Why the fuck is that?

“Oy. Moyashi.”

“It’s Allen, BaKanda,” His voice was cool, and he didn’t bother turning to face me. “What do you want?”

“... I’m probably going to visit my family over Thanksgiving. That old geezer is difficult to resist.”

He raised an eyebrow at me. “O-kay?”
He’s gonna make me spell this out, isn’t he.

“Will you be all right? … At home?”

His eyes widened a bit, and his pale cheeks turned a little rosy.

“I-I should be fine, yeah,” he murmured, looking up at me as he pushed his hair back behind his ears. The corners of his lips turned upward. “Thanks.”

“Che. Whatever,” I growled out, turning away. I felt my own cheeks start to heat up, and I glared angrily at the wall opposite us. What the fuck is wrong with me…?

At home that afternoon I went through my usual routine: homework, training, and meditation. Obviously I didn’t get all of my homework done, but it’s better to get started as early as possible. So after I finished meditating, I made myself soba for dinner, and sat down with some lotus tea to continue my AP Calculus homework.

Alma would have hated this, I thought with a wry grin. Tea and homework on a Friday night? Never in a million years would I have been able to convince him to go along with a plan like that…

As I stared at the tea in my hands, I felt my stomach sink. I had to set the cup down, because I knew I would drop it if I didn’t, my hands were shaking so badly. When… was the last time I remembered…? When… was the last time I thought about it? About him?

I could feel my head begin to ache, and I squeezed my eyes shut, massaging my temples as I did so. How could I forget? How could I not think about all he sacrificed? About all he gave up for me?

I got up and made my way over to the cabinet like a zombie, and pulled out the Tylenol. My head was pounding.

I need to get rid of it; I need to get rid of everything.

I popped 2 pills, then, after a moment’s hesitation, tossed back another. Feeling increasingly sluggish because it obviously takes more than a minute for drugs to kick in and that fucking headache was getting worse and worse, I sat back down to the tea slowly growing cold on the table.

I need something stronger.

I got up again, this time heading for the refrigerator. I pulled out a bottle of sake and proceeded to pour. 1 shot. 2 shots. 3 shots, 4…

My alcohol tolerance is pretty high, but I was starting to feel it. And that damned headache still refused to go away. Maybe more painkillers could help? Nah… Better to smoke…

The world seemed to tilt as I stood up, and there were spots in my vision. I felt nauseous.

Slowly I made my way through the house towards my room, tripping a few times in the process, to my unending disdain. What a fucking mess. You can’t even walk straight.

I was passing be the bathroom when I thought better of it, and walked in. I stumbled towards the toilet and vomited into the bowl. Slowly I got back on my feet, still unsteady, and flushed. Then I wandered out and to my final destination.
Once I fell onto my bed, darkness covered my eyes, and I knew no more.
Realizations (and lack thereof)

Chapter Notes

Allen POV

Author's Note: The song that Allen uses as his ringtone is Dark Enough by Amanda Lopiccolo. It's a song about self-harm and suicide, and very powerful. Be prepared to cry the first time you listen to it. She has a YouTube channel for her original music - I highly suggest checking it out. It really is a very beautiful song.

Warnings: swearing; hints at internalized homophobia; hints at and references to mental illness [so overall, really not that bad]

“So whatcha up to this weekend, Allen?”

I was waving goodbye to the customer whose purchase I’d just rung up when Road appeared on my left, chin in hands and elbows on the counter. She grinned cheekily up at me.

“Nothing much, really,” I smiled, “Homework, basically.”

“Booooriiiiinnnnnggggg.”

“I know. But it does need to get done.”

She sighed, “True.”

“Hello!”

“Hello!” I immediately put my “happy sales clerk” face on as I looked up, only to find myself facing someone a little more familiar. My eyes softened a bit. “Hey, Lenalee! How are you?”

Road eased herself around the counter and over to Lenalee’s side with a smile.

“I’m well, thank you. Just here to pick Road up at the end of her shift.”

“I’ll be done in a few minutes. You wanna get food after?” Road’s eyes gleamed as she stared up at her girlfriend.

“Ah, no, sorry. I already ate, and I am watching my weight. I’ll be happy to sit down with you, though.”

Road’s brows furrowed. “When did you eat? Are you sure you don’t want to get something small?”

“I really am sorry, but no. I’ve already maxed out on calories today.” She hugged Road quickly. “Thank you for your concern, dear. But don’t worry.” She glanced up at me briefly to indicate she wasn’t opposed to me being there for the conversation. “I eat enough.”

“Well, all right,” Road shrugged after hugging Lenalee back, “How about you, Allen? Would you like to grab dinner?”

“I appreciate the offer, but I really wouldn’t want to impose on your time together,” I smiled. When
they both seemed about to object, I followed up: “And I have a shift at the piano store after this, anyway.”

“Jeez, Allen, you work way too hard,” Road sighed again, shaking her head.

“… Working in a piano store isn’t really ‘working’ for me, though, if you know what I mean. I love the piano, and working there means I get to use the instruments free of charge.”

Lenalee grinned at me, “Nothing better than free stuff!”

“Absolutely.”

At that point someone came up to the register, asking about trying on a Hell Bunny Dress, and Road took over the register while I went to help them out.

After Road and I finished our shifts, we parted ways. I watched the girls walk off with a smile. They really do suit each other.

Before entering the piano store, I ducked into a bathroom to change. I love the worlds of Hot Topic and classical music equally, but the clothing choices of those two lifestyles don’t exactly mesh. I entered the bathroom in ripped black pants and a band tee with a long-sleeved shirt under it. I exited in black slacks and a white dress shirt. It was especially important to look “presentable” today because I was going to be helping a younger student with some simple songs.

After the lesson (which went well, thank goodness), I had time to sit at one of the pianos in back and play. I had blank scores out in front of me, but it didn’t do much good. After 2 hours, all I had was an ever-growing “discard” pile which I knew I wasn’t actually going to get rid of, so that I could learn from my mistakes.

Strange as it may seem, I had Kanda on the brain the whole time.

My fingers fluttered over the keys. He’s… so hard to pin down, so hard to describe. He has so many faces, he’s so unpredictable. His moods and attitude change so easily. But I guess that makes sense. He hasn’t forgotten Alma.

And how could he, really? I looked up, checking to see that no one in the store needed anything, then returned my gaze to the piano. His past is as ugly as mine. Arguably even worse, in fact. He really doesn’t deserve it.

Recently… he’s actually been… nice to me. Sort of. I mean, he’s definitely not acting the way he has when he first met. I wonder if it’s pity? But pity doesn’t seem to be his style. If anything, it seems like he actually understands, maybe even cares about my problems. I wonder why that is…?

Is there… a reason he’s being nice to me? Might it be worth it to have a little hope? My gaze wandered over to the storefront window. Through it, I could see the people milling around outside. Teenagers, adults, children… There were fewer people now, around 9pm, than there had been just an hour ago. The Starbucks line was full as ever, though. I wonder if he likes coffee? I’ve only actually ever seen him drink tea… I felt my cheeks begin to heat up.

Wow, I am acting so clichéd right now. Honestly, at this point, is there any real purpose in denying it to myself?
I like him.

I like Kanda Yuu.

I like the haughty, insulting, wannabe samurai who actually punched me in the face the first day I met him.

I like him, a guy. I really like him.

But who can blame me, really? I mean, sure, things got off to a bad start, but it got better. I found out that he’s not nearly as much of a jerk as he seems to be. He’s unwaveringly loyal when it comes to his friends. He just acts cold because, like a certain someone, he internalizes his pain. And while he’s never actually said it, I think he just doesn’t like getting close to people because he worries about having to go through that type of loss again.

He battles his demons, same as me. But he does it better. Even with all the shit that he’s been through, he’s survived, and become so strong and beautiful. And I bet anything that if something were to break him, he would reemerge; just as proud, just as smart, just as good.

Like… a lotus.

My eyes widened for a moment, then I nearly leapt for the pencil and blank scores that had lain forgotten on top of the grand piano. I knew what my piece was going to be.

I put thoughts, emotions, and impressions into music for the first time in my life that night. Until then, it had always been others giving me the music, be that books, teachers, or Maria. But this time, I did it on my own.

A slow, sad, soft melody slowly transitioned into a powerful, grand anthem. This dropped off and rose again. The second time was a variation on the first, but which would require much more musical prowess to play, as I made it a lot more decorative. I used a Japanese key, so that it would suit him more. And at the end… the piece just breaks off. Maybe that’s my personal melancholy, but that’s how I see him. When he dies, there’ll be a hole in the world where he once was. And it definitely won’t be slow. When he dies, I’m sure he’ll go out with an explosion, akin to a star’s transition to a supernova, and from a supernova to a black hole.

When I got home I made myself soba, and didn’t even try to convince myself it wasn’t because of a certain tall, dark and handsome samurai. Who knows, maybe he’ll stay over again at some point? He might appreciate me being able to make Japanese food.

Not that it’ll really matter, I thought morosely, I seriously doubt he’d be interested in me anyway. I’m just another fucked up teenager, which he definitely doesn’t need. He’s got enough on his plate already.

As I sat down to eat I pulled my AP Chemistry homework out. Might as well get some work done. Just as I was finishing the first of my 11 proofs, my phone rang.

“There was a girl in the front of my class...”
I felt a twinge of melancholy as the familiar melody began to play. Remind me again why I use that song as my ringtone? Oh, right – because I’m fucked up, and love reminding myself of that fact even when I’m in an OK mood. I really need to work on that. A glance at the caller ID allowed me to smile though, fortunately.

“Hello, Road. What’s up?”

“Nothing much! Just missing you~!” She giggled, and I couldn’t help but laugh back.

“Well, darling, it has been an eternity,” I sassed back, before I could think through what I was saying. I gulped, and I felt the blood drain from my face as panic set in. Shit. That was so gay.

“Absolutely!” I could hear the laughter in her voice, and my gut unclenched a bit. She obviously hadn’t arrived at any not-so-great conclusions. I have got to be more careful.

Logically, I know that Road won’t judge me for my sexual orientation, just as she doesn’t judge me for my love of makeup. But something inside of me can’t let go of that age-old fear, that skeleton in my closet. Pun intended.

“Anyway… I was wondering: Would you like to spend Thanksgiving with me and Lenalee, Allen?”

“Ummm… Would that be alright?” I love my friends, I do, but spending the evening with two people who are currently dating seemed like third-wheeling it, big time. And besides… “Isn’t Thanksgiving supposed to be spent with family? At least, that’s what it seems like in media, when they’re not talking about all the casualties of Black Friday.”

“Wow, Allen, dark.” I could hear the laughter in her voice through the phone. “But true. And don’t worry – my family isn’t really prone to spending holidays together. Normally I’d hang out with Tykki and Neah, but Tykki’s gonna be with Lavi this year, and Neah’s been called away on a business trip.”

“So you turned to me ‘cause there was no one else?” The thought made something inside of me twist unpleasantly. Nobody wants you; don’t you know that yet?

“The Hell, Allen!? That’s not it at all!” Road sounded genuinely enraged. “I was going to invite you regardless! I just wanted to explain why it’ll only be the three of us. Though not really only, I guess. Two of my cousins, Jesdero and Devitto, may stop by, for the eating part of the evening at least. Don’t worry, though – they’re cooler people than most of my family.”

“I guess… If it’s really ok, I mean, I don’t exactly have anything else to do…”

“Awesome! I’ll give you directions. Just make sure you bring an overnight bag.”

“What?”

“Oh come on, Allen! I’m not going to make you walk home in the freezing cold! Even more important, I’m going to make so much food you won’t be able to!”

A smile settled on my features, and my lips curved upwards slightly. “I look forward to it.”
Thanksgiving: Loves Old and New

Chapter Notes

Kanda POV

Author's Note: With this chapter, I am caught up on AO3 with where this fic is at in writing and on FF.net. So from here on out, the updates will come much slower, at the speed at which I write them. Which is very slowly. I apologize ahead of time.

Warnings: reminiscences on the deaths of loved ones; Kanda has a mouth [so nothing, really]

Maybe I should have tried to turn Tiedoll down? This is... not alright. Being here, without Daisya... I sighed, leaning back on the wooden chair on the patio, looking out at the forest that lay not so far away. One thing to say for Tiedoll: he loves nature, even more than I do. So he built his house out in the middle of fucking nowhere, so that he wouldn’t have to deal with people and pollution. It’s a 5-10 minute drive before you encounter another house, and an hour before you get to the nearest “city” (18,000 inhabitants).

I watched my breath cloud the air. In late November, winter was definitely setting in. No snow yet, but the trees had lost all of their leaves, and the ground was always covered in frost. The Earth seemed... almost dead. Life was betrayed by the rustling of leaves in the wind, or by the scampering of rarely seen animals along the forest floor.

Mother Nature was falling asleep, and soon She would cover the world in a blanket of snow, white and pristine and glistening. Only the evergreens would interrupt the greyscale of the landscape.

A slight smile crept over my face. I... really want to paint this... Everything so calm and peaceful, so quiet... Nature has a magnificent way of making all problems seem trivial, and allowing a person to just... forget. Which is something I definitely need.

My ear twitched as I heard the jangle of the doorknob behind me. A soft ‘whoosh’ as the door opened, then footsteps on the patio.

“You’ll freeze out here, Yuu,” Tiedoll stated softly.

I stayed silent.

“Come inside, the turkey’s done.”

“...I don’t like turkey.”

“Well, come try it anyway,” the old man responded, and I could hear the smile in his voice. We repeated some version of this conversation every time we got together. It’s almost tradition. And the fact that I’m not pissed off by ‘tradition’ right now is proof that I’m somewhat out of it. Which pisses me off.

But I got up with a sigh to follow him inside. As I opened the door, I glanced back to see two stags walk side by side through the trees. I turned away, leaving Nature to Her own devices, and entered the warmth of Tiedoll’s house.
Dinner turned out to be fairly quiet and uneventful. … Until it wasn’t.

The food wasn’t bad. I’m not too big on Turkey, but the old man knows that. So he made me soba noodles, to my surprise. Tiedoll isn’t actually a bad cook, and Marie is actually really good. (Obviously, I didn’t do anything but help set the table. I can cook, and pretty well at that, but Hell if I’m gonna let either of them find out.)

Marie and Tiedoll talked a lot about Marie’s work and the Black Order. I just listened. I’m not too big a fan of talking, obviously. But then, just as we were starting on dessert…

“So, Yuu-kun. Who was it that made you want to stay back?”

I froze, then took a deep breath. “Like I told you before, no one.”

“Aww, come now Yuu-kun. You can’t hide it from me. Who are they?”

Even in this ludicrous situation I noticed that Tiedoll had used a gender neutral pronoun. I sure as fuck will not be answering his question in full, but it’s something of a relief to know that he doesn’t expect it to be a woman. (What? He may irritate me to no end, but that doesn’t change the fact that he’s my foster father. I do care about him, probably. [Also, why the fuck am I being so fucking nostalgic today?!?])

“Like I said: No one.”

“Kanda, don’t lie,” Marie interjected, “Tell us about them.”

I leaned back in my chair with a curse. “Fuck.”

Marie raised his eyebrows, while Tiedoll frowned. “Please refrain from such language, Yuu-kun.”

“Well you’re the ones pressing me to talk about something that I don’t want to talk about!” I hissed angrily. Where the fuck did that come from?

The old man’s features relaxed. “All right, Yuu-kun, I understand. I’m sorry for pressing you.”

For some reason, I felt guilty seeing their faces. They really just wanted to know more about my life. And I never tell them anything.

“His name is Allen,” I blurted, “Allen Walker. He’s… a friend.” I slunk back into my chair as Tiedoll’s face lit up in a seriously annoying manner.

“Ohoh! Allen Walker, you said? What’s he like?”

Shit. I seriously should have kept my mouth shut.

“A good kid,” Marie interjected, “and a musical genius. I was his piano teacher in London. He’s the one who wrote Lala’s Lullaby.”

“Really, now. What a small world it is,” Tiedoll mused, then turned back to me, “I’m glad you’ve made another friend, Yuu-kun. You keep to yourself so much that it worries me, you know. And if Marie thinks he’s a good kid, then I’m truly happy you were able to meet him.”

I stayed quiet.
“Speaking of a small world, Kanda ran into General Cloud Nyne the other day,” Marie mercifully interjected, changing the subject.

“Ohoh! And what did the two of you discuss, Yuu-kun?”

“She invited me to join the Black Order.”

“Have you… considered her offer?”

“Not particularly. I don’t want to join, Tiedoll,” I stated firmly, levelling my eyes at him.

“I understand. Still, know that the invitation stands.”

I nodded, and Marie once again steered us off to a different topic. I felt grateful, but at the same time, sad. If Daisya was still here, the conversation wouldn’t be so tense, with so many jumps. He always filled a room with his presence, and could calm any situation with just a few words. He even managed to make me smile, every once in a while. Not having him here… is incredibly painful.

Just like Alma. People like them, just didn’t deserve to die. People whose smiles light up a room, who can make ever the dourest person in the room relax. People who burn like shooting stars, swift and bright. They light up the world but vanish in the blink of an eye, leaving nothing behind but haunting melancholy. That, and a trace of their presence, never forgotten, in the twirl of a soccer ball, in spiked and unruly hair, in a star-shaped tattoo.

“So, you’ve made friends with Allen, then?”

I glanced up as Marie seated himself beside me on the couch. We’d finished cleaning up after dinner, and Tiedoll had gone outside for… something. I wasn’t really paying attention.

“Yeah.”

“He really is a good kid,” Marie paused, “Is he still with Cross?”

I froze, and clenched my hands in anger. “Yes.”

“I take it that’s why you didn’t want to come?”

“… Yes.”

“That man,” Marie sighed, “Is not fit to be around children, much less raise one.”

“You knew?” I questioned, as the context of his words dawned on me. “You knew, and you didn’t do anything!”

Marie looked straight into my eyes, which by this point I’m sure conveyed my anger quite clearly. “There was nothing I could do. Allen never actually said anything to me. And if I had reported it to the police, Cross would have fled with Allen in tow, and I hate to think what would have happened to him then.”

I was still bitterly angry and disappointed to know that Marie had done nothing to help the Moyashi, but at the same time, I understood. He was right.

“You’ve changed, you know,” he continued.
I turned to face him, eyebrow raised. “How?”

“You seem more settled, now. Like you managed to figure something out.”

I snorted. Just what the fuck did I figure out? I feel crazier than ever.

“Kanda.”

“Yeah?”

“He’s not just a friend, is he?”

That was a loaded question. I’ve never told Marie (or anyone else, for that matter), about my sexuality. (Before the party, that is.) Not because I’m afraid or whatever, but because it frankly never mattered enough to me. But now, faced with coming out, it scared me, suddenly. I didn’t think this would actually be difficult. And there’s the other problem, too: Am I ready to admit that the Moyashi, no, Allen, is more than just a friend? To myself, and to someone else?

Because he is more than a friend, isn’t he? I’m loyal to my friends, I always have been. But that doesn’t explain the depths of my hatred for Marian Cross. The way, when I saw him approach that prone white form, I didn’t just want to stop him; I wanted to kill him. I wanted to slice him into pieces, then leave him to suffer, to die a slow and painful death. If he were just a friend, I would not have felt like the world had stopped when at first as I neared him, he didn’t react, didn’t even move. If Allen were just a friend, I, Kanda Yuu, would not have felt like crying when I saw him, so broken and afraid.

I would not have stayed with him so many times when I didn’t have to. I would not have held him in my arms as he cried, relating back to me all the shit he’d been through. I would not have told him about me. About Alma.

If he were just a friend, I would not have wanted, that night when he was in my arms, to hold him longer, to do more than just hug him. I would not smile at the thought of snow, or the glimmer of silver jewelry. I would not have painted him into my work.

“He is just a friend.”

Marie stayed quiet, either doubtful of my honesty or sensing there was more that I wanted to say.

“But hopefully not for much longer.”
“Welcome! Come on in!” Road pulled me through the door with an enormous grin on her face. “You can take your stuff up to the guest bedroom – it’s just up these stairs, then the second door on the left!”

“Thank you, Road. Before that, though; I brought a mille fueille. I know you’re cooking, but it just seemed rude to turn up empty-handed…”

“Oh my gosh!” Road’s eyes went wide, “You can make crepe cakes? You have to teach me! Thank you so much, Allen!” She giggled as she took the platter from my hands, and placed a light kiss on my cheek. “I’ll take this to the kitchen. Come join me when you’re ready!” With that, she flounced away down the hall.

I smiled and shook my head a little as I made my way up the stairs. *Road is as energetic as ever.* Upon entering the guest bedroom, I couldn’t help but smile even wider. *She is definitely the person who decorated in here.* The walls of the room were lilac, with gray drapes and bedcovers. The furniture (bed, bookshelf, and dresser) were all black. I set my stuff down on the dresser, then made my way back downstairs, and followed my nose to the kitchen.

“Smells delicious,” I smiled upon entering, “Also, and I’m sorry for not saying this earlier; you look super cute.”

“You think?” Road giggled. She was wearing her hair in two unruly pigtails high on her head. Her legs were covered in gray leggings, and she wore a loose black tunic, covered by a frilly white apron.

“Definitely,” I smiled, touching her left shoulder lightly for a few seconds, “Now, is there anything I can help you with?”

It took a few minutes of arguing to convince her that she really did not need to treat me as a guest, and should just let me help her. Once I succeeded, I handled backup and prep work, and let her order me around. It was sort of funny how demanding she became after she was sure she could get away with it. *Little Princess,* I smiled.

Eventually, though, we did manage to get to a point where everything was either in the oven, out of it, or ready to go in, so we sat down with two cups of Honey-Lemon Ginseng Tea, and just talked. I found out that she loves The Birthday Massacre just as much as I do. (No idea how we never figured that out until now.) I also learned for certain what I’d only suspected previously: that she loved designing and making clothes as much as I loved makeup, if not more.

“So… Allen, do you have anyone you like?”
I nearly spit out my drink. “What? Why?!”

“No particular reason. It’s just… I’m so happy to be with Lenalee. She’s seriously a dream come true! And Tykki seems to actually seriously enjoy being in a relationship with Lavi. It’s the first time I’ve seen him so… complacent. And I want that for all of my friends.” Her eyes went wide. “If you want it, that is! If you’re ace, or aro, or just don’t want a relationship, that’s cool too, of course! And if that’s the case, I’ll stop bothering you about this type of stuff.” She winked at me. “But if you do want a relationship, I’m more than happy to play matchmaker, you understand.”

I smiled back at her for a moment, then looked down at my mug. I think I did a pretty good job of maintaining my calm demeanor, but inside, my thoughts were racing a mile a minute.

You can’t tell her anything! She’ll think you’re a freak, a fag! Why would she ever want to associate herself with a tainted piece of trash like you?

Because Road’s not like that! She’s smart, and funny, and kind! In all the time I’ve known her, she’s never once given me a reason to distrust her! She’s loyal and sweet, and the truest friend I’ve ever known!

How can you be sure she’s your friend? You should know better – the world isn’t that kind! Everyone is only in it for themselves! They’re nice while it’s convenient, they use you, then abandon your worthless ass when they realize how much work, how pointless it is to be with you! You’re more effort than you’re worth. And your ~precious Road~ will only be here while it’s convenient!

No – you’re wrong! She has more love, more compassion inside of her little frame than should be able to fit in a galaxy, much less a human being!

“…Allen? Are you all right?”

“What?” I snapped back to reality to find Road frowning at me, concerned. “Oh, yeah, yeah, sorry. Just thinking.”

“What about? …If you don’t mind me asking.”

“Just… people,” I said, my heart still racing. I looked at Road, biting my lip. It’s all right. She won’t judge you. This girl, of all people, never would. I took a deep breath. “There is… someone I like,” I managed to whisper.

In a split second, Road’s face went from mildly concerned to grin-breaking-her-face happy. “Oh my gosh! Who? Who? Tell me, Allen, please?!”

I laughed, despite myself. Nothing was okay; I was afraid of her rejection, afraid that others would find out, afraid he would find out, terrified of my own mind. And yet, like so many times before, I found myself unable to resist those excited, pleading eyes.

“Kanda.”

Her eyes went wide, and her jaw dropped. I felt fear course through me.

Holyshit she’sgoingtorejectme.

Then she squealed and launched herself at me, pulling me forward to hug me awkwardly over the table. “O. M. G!!! I knew you two were perfect for each other!” She moved away and settled back into her chair, and I leaned back as well. “Sorry about that, Allen. I just got so excited! You and Kanda would be so perfect together! Oh, my gosh!” She squirmed in her seat, hands on glowing
cheeks, still smiling like there was no tomorrow. Then her face took on a mischievous smirk, and she leaned forward to rest her elbows on the table, and her chin in her hands. “So,” she began conspiratorially, “Tell me, Allen, what exactly it is you like about him.”

I really couldn’t help it; I smiled. “Well…”

“Heya Road!”

“What’s up, Princess?”

“Hello, Jasdero. Devitto, I am not a princess. If you insist on calling me one, then I would ask that you treat me the way you would an actual princess – in other words, not make me spend the whole day in the kitchen and then turn up just in time for dinner without having helped at all.”

I overheard the conversation from the kitchen, which came about when Road went to open the door after we heard knocking. *Looks like it’s a good thing I didn’t call her a princess to her face, then.*

I heard them make their way through the house to the kitchen, then Road stepped aside and introduced us to each other. “Jasdevi, this is Allen Walker. Allen, this is Jasdero, and this is Devitto,” she said, gesturing at each of us in turn, “They’re my cousins. If you want to talk to them both, go ahead and call them Jasdevi.”

Jasdevi wore loose, flowy sweaters of navy blue, and black slacks. Devitto’s sweater had a deeper, looser neckline, and fur trim. His hair was short and black, and he wore heavy black makeup on his eyes. Jasdero’s hair was long, blond and wavy.

“Heya, Allen! I’m Devitto! I use he/him/his pronouns.”

“Nice to meet you, Devitto. I use he/him/his as well.” I turned to the blonde, “What are your pronouns, Jasdero?”

“I use she/her/hers, but they/them/their is okay, too,” Jasdero informed me stiffly.

I smiled and nodded. “It’s nice to meet you.”

She smiled back, and I had the distinct feeling I’d just passed some sort of test. “I like ‘im!” Jasdero laughed, facing Road.

“I told you he was cool.”

“You did. But now that we’ve ascertained that for ourselves, can we eat?”

“No! We’re going to wait for Lenalee! However, since you two are here now, you can go ahead and set the table for five people. Since Allen and I have been cooking all day, we shall sit and continue to relax a bit after our toils.”

“Yes, your highness,” Devitto intoned, offering a mock bow mirrored by his sibling. Road just raised an eyebrow, and they sauntered off.

“Jeez,” she sighed, “I love them to death, but those two can be a handful.”

“They seem cool to me,” I shrugged. My initial impression of them had been pretty positive. Opening with pronouns? Definitely a cool move. “Are they twins?”

“Yes, they are. And just you wait. They can be even wilder than Tykki.”
Just then the doorbell rang, and Road shot out of her seat, happiness written across her features. “Sorry, Allen, I’ll be right back. That’s got to be Lenalee.”

I smiled as she dashed off. *It’s adorable how much she cares.*

The rest of the evening was enjoyable, and much less emotionally nerve-wracking than the day as a whole had been. We ate till we were all groaning, then spent an hour lounging around in Road’s living room recovering from the amounts of food we consumed. Lenalee stayed with us, though I’m pretty sure she ate a lot less than the rest of us. Her recital is only about a week away now, so I guess this is crunch time, including for her figure. Once I’d recovered from my food coma I helped her out with the dishes, much to Road’s annoyance. She insisted that her “guests shouldn’t be doing the cleaning up”, but was still too full to move and help us. We assured her that it was absolutely fine.

I quite enjoyed talking alone with Lenalee, actually. We’re part of the same friend group, obviously, but it’s just that: a friend *group*. I don’t really have many opportunities to talk to Lenalee alone. So we talked about classes (I didn’t realize AP English was her favorite), music (apparently she likes classical music, particularly Tchaikovsky, which isn’t really a shock), and she gushed for 10 minutes straight about Road. It was adorable.

Afterwards, we rejoined the others, and talked until late. Road had been right – Jasdero and Devitto turned out to be awesome people. And they were alternative as Hell, so we bonded over that, too. Devitto took off his sweater to show us that he was wearing a Black Veil Brides tank-top underneath, which made Road roll her eyes and attempt to hide a grin. Jasdero ended up rolling on the floor with laughter.

In fact, Jasdero spent a lot of the evening laughing. I almost thought she was high, but Road assured me that was not the case, and Jasdero was “just that type of person”. I ended up exchanging phone numbers with both members of Jasdevi, actually. I also came to understand why Road introduced them that way. To say they’re on the same wavelength would be a massive understatement. They have serious Twin Powers.

I honestly don’t think any of us ever made it to a bed. We all just fell asleep in the living room, with *The Nightmare Before Christmas* playing in the background. Road griped about not having finished the movie when we got up the next day, so we spent the morning watching it while eating pancakes.

I felt happier than I have in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Holidays~!

Go ahead, admit you love me for this. ;)

Thank you to everyone who has read, commented on, or given kudos to my story! I am incredible grateful!

Love,
Red
When I got back home late Sunday afternoon, my first order of business was unpacking – if there is one thing that I absolutely cannot stand, it’s mess. That may seem at odds with my artistic tendencies, but I really don’t care about anyone’s opinions or preconceptions. “Artists are messy”? What the fuck. Honestly. If you don’t clean brushes properly, you end up having to throw them out. If your workstation isn’t clean, you’ll contaminate your colors. If your supplies aren’t in their proper place, you won’t be able to find them when you need them in a hurry because inspiration just struck and the paint is already drying.

After that, I spent a couple hours practicing my sword forms, took a shower, and meditated for a while. As I walked through house afterwards, I stopped in front of an oil painting that hung in a secluded corner of the house. The corridor led nowhere, and curved in under the stairs to form a sort of alcove. I used to meditate there sometimes, when the weather was cold, but now… not so much.

The oil on canvas was one of my finest works, but the situation that had given rise to it was, well, unfortunate. And also very typical of me, honestly.

Ever since he first entered my life, Alma has been a part of me. When he died, it felt like I lost my whole world. The panic and pain that comes with too much reminiscing set in less than a week after he had died. I was still in the hospital, and the seizure was so bad, the doctor panicked – he thought my body was rejecting the transplant. After they realized that was not what was going on, they called in some fake-nice psychiatrist so that I could “talk to them”, and “open up about my feelings”. I was young and unstable enough then that that they got me. I talked enough for that asshole shrink to slap me with a label (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), prescribe me a bunch of meds, and go on their merry way.

The thing is, the meds actually made things worse. So I was taken to a different psychiatrist (the first one was the hospital psychiatrist, after all), who prescribed something else. When that didn’t work, they prescribed something that sort of worked, but made me too dizzy to walk up a flight of stairs. When I explained this to them, they said that since it works, we should keep it, but “we can decrease the dosage a bit, if you like”. It was around then that I decided I was done to Hell with psychiatrists. What’s the point of shoving myself full of meds that either don’t work or cause such serious side-effects that I can’t live my life normally? It’s better to just handle this on my own. I was 12 years old at the time.

As time went on, I started to get better. I trained myself not to react as strongly, figured out how to calm myself down when I was on the verge of a panic attack, got to know my triggers so that I could avoid them. But despite all this, when I turned 14, things got bad. I don’t know why, but they did. And by then, Tykki was already very much into drugs. So I just did what any 14-year-old would do: I talked to my friend, and started self-medicating.

This painting was made the summer after I turned 15. I had a particularly bad flashback which
included the memory with the lotus blossoms on the lake. So, propped up on weed (probably mixed with something, I’ll be honest – when I talked to Tykki, I’d made it clear I wanted to be high, not low, and I didn’t care what it took) and alcohol, I painted this piece. I understand now why people always assume art-types are on drugs.

It's a 4' by 5' canvas, painted with oils and framed. The background is a dark (well past navy) blue, with murky blue-brown shapes rising from it, swirling in it. Even I don't know what they are, and that's sort of the point – you see what you want to see, what your mind conjures from the haze. But the shapes are far from the focus of the painting, anyway. Dead center in the piece is an enormous lotus blossom, pink and white, painted to look like it's actually glowing. But it isn't an image of triumph, but of a dawning awareness of mortality. The flower is beautiful, yes, but it's also dying. The edges of the petals are turning brown, and their pointed ends have begun to curl outward and droop. The lotus is still alive and beautiful, but its life is nearing its end. Soon enough, it will sink back down, reclaimed by the murky abyssal waters from which it had once arisen.

Monday morning was a bit of a shock. It was cold outside, and the lights inside the school were way too fucking bright. I grabbed my stuff and sat down in AP English. Two more weeks until winter break.

“Hello, Kanda,” I heard a soft voice speak up near me. Looking up, I found the Moyashi smiling at me, concerned and… hopeful? I looked away.

“Morning, Moyashi.”

“It’s Allen, BaKanda!” He hissed, stalking away.

I smirked.

I fully intended to spend my lunch period outside with a leisurely smoke. When I found Tykki there as well, I expected that I would get my wish. He looked up as I strode outside, but waited for me to light a cigarette before saying anything.

“How was the break?”

I turned away. “All right.” I may have finally admitted to myself, and even told Marie, about my newfound affections for the Moyashi, but that information wasn’t gonna reach Tykki quite just yet. I turned back to him. “You?”

He smirked, “I spent the whole time with Lavi.”

“Spare me the details, Tykki,” I groaned.

“You sure~?”

“Absolutely.”

We stood there in silence for a while after that, finishing our cigarettes. Tykki can be annoying, yeah, just like his boyfriend, but unlike Lavi, he knows how to appreciate staying quiet for a while. But only for a while.

“So, are you gonna come inside?”

I looked at him, and raised an eyebrow. “What?”
“Dude, our breath clouds the air even without the cigarettes – it’s fucking cold! Aren’t you gonna come inside?” He smirked, “Not in that way, of course. I have a boyfriend, you see.”

“Tykki, shut the fuck up.” After his comment, I really wanted to resist, but he was right – it’s fucking cold. “Che. Whatever. I’ll go.” With one last sigh, I followed him inside the building.

Why does reentering the school building mean going to lunch? I was really looking forward to a peaceful empty period. Now I have to spend it with these morons in a room that is way too loud. Ughhh. My head is killing me. As discreetly as I could (which is quite discreet, mind you), I popped two Tylenol with water from my water bottle. Then turned back to the lunch table I was presently sitting at, which included the Moyashi, Tykki, Lavi, Road, and Lenalee. I was somewhat surprised to see that Lenalee is eating the exact same thing as me for lunch: a bottle of water. Guess she’s worried about staying healthy. That recital of hers is this week, right?

Right on cue, Lenalee spoke up:

“So, guys, I have something for you, if you want it.” She reached into her bag to pull out slips of paper, then began handing them around. “These are the tickets for my recital. I have one for each of you, and two for Jasdevi, if you can get it to them,” she smiled, handing the extra tickets to Road.

“I didn’t realize you knew Jasdevi!” Tykki grinned, surprised, “When did that happen?”

“Well I’ve spent a lot of time at Road’s place this semester,” Lenalee shrugged, “and they seem to frequent the place, so I feel I’ve gotten to know them pretty well. They may not be interested in ballet, but I thought I’d invite them, just in case,” she finished with a smile.

“Thank you, dear,” Road grinned, pecking Lenalee on the cheek, causing her to blush a bit.

“The Nutcracker? What part do you have, Lenalee?” All- The Moyashi piped up after a moment of silence, smiling at the pigtailed girl.

Lenalee bit her lip, barely containing her smile and blushing like mad. “I’m Clara, actually.”

“What? Oh my gosh, why didn’t you tell me?” Road gasped, hugging a laughing Lenalee around the middle.

“Congratulations, Lenalee!” The Moyashi grinned, “That’s awesome!”

“Well done, girl. That’s seriously impressive,” Tykki grinned.

“Yeah, you’ve worked your ass off for it!” Lavi added, “No wonder you were dieting!” Road shot him a look, and something flickered across Lenalee’s face, there and gone in the blink of an eye. I don’t think anyone else caught it. “Uh, not that your figure wasn’t great before, I just mean, I can tell why you put so much work into it.”

“What the idiot is trying to say, Lenalee,” I interrupted, “is that you’ve worked really hard, for years, to get as good as you are in ballet. And that work is finally paying off, and we’re both proud of, and really happy for you.”

“Th-thanks, Kanda. That really means a lot, especially coming from you.”

I looked around to find everyone staring at me, with smiles and surprise. I rolled my eyes. Just because I’m normally an asshole doesn’t mean I can’t compliment a friend on her hard work.
“Actually, I have other news, too!” Lenalee grinned, trying to change the atmosphere. Or prevent me from hitting someone – who knows? “Remember how I was able to get away from my brother for Thanksgiving? I found out why!”

“Oh?” Road’s eyes gleamed, “Is it something we’ll be able to use to spend more time together?”

“Probably. As it turns out, Reever asked my brother out! And Komui said yes!”

“Ok, I’ll be clear: I never saw that one coming,” Lavi stated, eyebrow raised, eye wide.

“I know – I was shocked, too. I thought they were just really good friends.”

“Oh!” Lavi perked up suddenly, “I have similar news, actually! Fo and Bak Chang have also started dating! I found out this morning!”

Tykki said, “Gods help him,” while I spit out a “Jesus fucking Christ,” at the same time.

“That’s a strange expression, no? ‘Jesus fucking Christ’? How exactly does that work? Like, is he autosexual or something?”

We all turned to the Moyashi, sitting there all innocent. Then Tykki just burst out laughing, loud and obnoxious. Lavi quickly joined in, and even Road ended up giggling into her hands.

“Well, I’ll never be able to look at ‘jfc’ the same way again,” Lenalee smirked. (I didn’t know she could do that.)

And the Moyashi just sat there, all innocent, embarrassed smiles. Well, fuck him too.

...

Maybe not.

...

Or actually, yes.
Lenalee was magnificent as Clara. She had an incredible stage presence and (at least in my admittedly limited understanding) beautiful form. She shined when she needed to, but could blend into the background easily when other characters needed to be in the spotlight. The finale was greeted with momentous applause, and the cast came back to bow 4 times.

Afterwards, Lenalee and I walked back to my place. We had agreed earlier that she and Road would come over to my place to have a quiet, yet celebratory evening. Road had to go home first for “family business”, but she promised she’d be by in an hour or two. In the meantime, Lenalee and I would go back to my place and hang out. I figured I’d make some tea, and had already made some light snacks earlier in the day. Lenalee was sure to be hungry, but I doubted she’d be able to eat anything heavy, after so much time spent dieting. I had also bought materials to make Pho with, for that very reason. Pho is a light Vietnamese soup – it’s made entirely of vegetables, noodles, and thin beef slices, and is very clean. It’s refreshing and filling, without being heavy.

As we made our way back towards my place, I noticed that Lenalee was quiet, and she seemed to be walking slowly. I’ve heard about all the stuff ballet dancers do, not caring if their feet bleed during a performance, so I slowed down.

“Are you all right, Lenalee?”

“…Hmmmm…? What? Oh, yes, I’m fine. Don’t worry about me, Allen. I’m just a little tired is all.”

“All right, if you’re sure,” I responded, looking at her in concern.

“I pulled a fruit bowl out of my fridge immediately and put it down in front of her. Hopefully the apples, oranges or clementines would invite her fancy. Afterwards, I set about making tea, then set down across from her.

“You really were magnificent tonight, you know.”

She smiled softly at me. “Thank you,” she murmured.
“Are you sure everything is all right? Maybe you should eat some fruit,” I invited her, gesturing to the plate. “That could help you regain some of your energy.”

“Hmm.”

We sat in silence for a little while, until the kettle started whistling, and I got up to pour the tea. As I was placing the kettle back on the stove to cool, Lenalee started to get up, saying she was tired of sitting down.

I whirled around when I heard a clatter. Lenalee was standing up, clutching the table. I moved forward immediately, and was very glad I had done so, just barely managing to catch her as she collapsed.

“Lenalee!”

I laid her down and quickly checked her pulse, finding it erratic, but gratefully, there. I reached immediately for my phone, hitting the speed dial. I breathed a massive sigh of relief as the person on the other end picked up immediately.

“What’s up, Allen?”

“Neah, Lenalee just collapsed. She’s breathing, but her heart rate is definitely erratic.”

“Give me 5 minutes – I’m on my way. If her condition deteriorates, we may have to take her to the hospital. Can you stay on the line?”

“Yes,” I answered immediately.

I heard harried conversation in the background, and then the running of a motor. It took 6 minutes for him to get here, and as worried as I was for Lenalee, I had to wonder how many laws the man had to have broken in order to do that.

He swept over to Lenalee the moment he came in, and immediately started checking her vitals. He lifted her and carried her to the living room couch with ease. By that point, she had begun to wake up, protesting the attention.

“Neah, I’m fine, it’s all right…”

“No, Lenalee, you really aren’t,” a soft voice spoke up from the background. I turned around quickly, amazed to find Road standing in the doorway. With all the commotion going on, I realized guiltily that I had completely missed the fact that she was here. Then again, it makes sense; she must have come with Neah. And looking at her now, I was struck by the fact that I had never seen Road so subdued before. She was always loud and energetic and smiling, sometimes mischievous, always genuine. Now, though, she seemed very withdrawn and quiet.

Lenalee struggled up into a sitting position, batting away at Neah’s hands as he tried to indicate to her that she needed to stay lying down.

“Road, it’s all right, I’m fine. I just got a little dizzy is all.”

“A little dizzy? Really? That’s all?” Road’s eyes were narrowed slightly, and I thought I could sense rage simmering under her calm words.

“Of course. Happens all the time.”
If she thought that would calm Road down, Lenalee was sorely mistaken.

“All the time? What do you mean, ‘all the time’? You passed out, Lenalee! That shouldn’t be a common thing!” She was still standing in the doorway, her eyes blazing, hands clenched into fists at her sides.

Lenalee seemed taken aback. “I… I… But… I’m all right…”

Road’s fury turned immediately into apparent sadness. “You… really don’t see anything wrong? At all?”

Neah reached forward, placing a hand softly on Lenalee’s shoulder.

“Lenalee. I realize this must be difficult for you to think or talk about, and I’m not going to ask you to talk to me, or anyone else here. It doesn’t have to be your brother, it doesn’t have to be one of your best friends. But you are going to have to talk to someone.

“I can tell, even without taking any measurements, that you are dangerously underweight. You are very seriously harming your own body with your behavior.

“I am not saying,” he added hurriedly, seeing that Lenalee looked like she was about to interrupt, “that you are doing it deliberately. You may not realize it.

“But it is happening. You need help Lenalee, help which only a professional can really give you. Please, not for the sake of your family, not for the sake of your friends, and certainly not for my sake, but for yours: talk to someone, and find help. Your situation is already dangerous. You need to talk to someone now, before it becomes deadly. I realize that is blunt, but there is no other way to say it.”

He gazed at her earnestly as he finished, and I hoped she would take his words to heart.

For at least a minute, there was complete, heavy silence. Then…

“I… I knew something was wrong,” she whispered, barely audible. She looked down at her hands; not willing to face us, or looking for an answer, I do not know. Gods know I’ve looked for answers in my hands before. And found all the wrong ones.

“It started so well, so calmly… It was just a couple calories, it was just cutting out the desserts. Even when my weight began to sink and hover near the edge of the BMI version of “underweight”, I ignored it. The BMI scale is fucked up, and any normal doctor will tell you that; so is the “2000 calories per person per day” mantra.

“But I went to a party last year. And they had pizza, and cake. And I wanted it, so bad… I couldn’t resist. And then I couldn’t resist spending an hour over the toilet, throwing up everything I’d eaten. The last 3 times I stuck my fingers down my throat, all that was coming out was stomach acid.”

A shiver ran down my spine. What she was talking about, the control, was something I know all too well. I glanced up at Road. She looked horrified and dejected.

“I… I don’t do it often, the whole binge and purge thing. I don’t like it. Mia is mean. But Ana… is a friend. Or at least, I thought she was. She gave me control, she gave me agency. But she also took my freedom, and by the time I started to become aware of what was going on, I… I couldn’t do anything to stop it anymore.”

We stayed silent for a while after that, not knowing what to say, not wanting to break the silence. But then Lenalee’s shoulders began to shake, and she covered her face in her thin, thin hands. Road immediately was there next to her, sitting on the couch. She reached around and hugged Lenalee
hard, pulling her close. I heard her begin to whisper into Lenalee’s ear.

Neah silently got up and walked out of the room, meeting me in the doorway, and gesturing towards the kitchen. We made our way there and he sat down at the table. I put another kettle on the stove.

“Would you like some tea? Or anything to eat?”

“Thank you, Allen. Don’t worry about making anything, though – whatever you have is fine.”

I grinned at him ruefully, “Neah, I owe you an awful lot. Making you dinner one night doesn’t even begin to cover it.”

He waved dismissively. “Allen, it’s my job. More than that, it’s my passion. I didn’t become a doctor to make money, I did it to help people.”

“Hmmm… Well, I know at least three people you’ve helped, now. Kanda, Lenalee, and I all probably owe you our lives.”

“Kanda told you?” Neah seemed visibly shocked.

“Well, I mean, he told me about the accident… And I’m pretty sure you’re the only doctor he’s trusted since then…”

“Ah, yes. I’m amazed he was able to talk to someone. Pleased, but amazed. Looks like he’s making progress,” he trailed off, smiling slightly.

“Hmmm… Thank you again for coming tonight, Neah. I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t been available…”

“Called 911, I would hope,” he responded wryly, raising an eyebrow at me. “But I’m glad you were able to reach me. Speaking of, I haven’t heard from you in a while. Some of the things Lenalee said tonight probably touched some nerves. Are you all right?”

I gulped, “I-I guess… I’m no worse than usual, I suppose…” It felt weird to talk to someone, but he already knew at least a huge part, so… And besides, I trust him.

And talking to someone is actually really freeing.

Neah smiled sadly at me, “I’m sorry, Allen. I wish I could do more.”

“You’ve done more than enough. More than anyone has ever done for me, except for my… adoptive father.”

He nodded with a soft hum. “Still, I wish I could do more. Cross deserves a jail cell, but you… you deserve help. Help and love.” I didn’t respond, just poured us both tea (he had requested Jasmine).

As we sat drinking our tea quietly, Road and Lenalee came through the door, prompting both Neah and I to begin to get up. Lenalee just motioned for us to sit, and sank into a chair. Road pulled another one up next to her.

“I’m sorry for everything, Allen, Neah.”

“Lenalee, there’s nothing to be sorry for,” I assured her.

“Allen’s right,” Neah nodded.
“See? I told you,” Road grinned, grasping Lenalee’s hand.

“The far more important thing is what happens from here on out. It’s up to you, Lenalee. Only you can make the decision to get better.” Neah’s words were hard, but his voice was gentle. It was clear how much he cared.

“I… I don’t think I can tell my brother about this. And without that… I can’t see anyone, really. But I do want to get better.”

“And I’ll be there for you, supporting you every step of the way. Whatever you need, you need only ask,” Road informed her, probably not for the first time that night. Her eyes showed such determination and devotion, it moved me.

“Road’s right, Lenalee. Whatever you need.”

I glanced at Neah quickly, and he took the hint. Even as my stomach did flip-flops, I heard him telling Road that they needed to arrange getting Lenalee to their place, and what would have to happen after, as he led her out of the kitchen.

“Lenalee,” I began, awkward. I felt almost sick with nerves. I don’t like talking about this.

“I-I don’t want to say that I know how you feel, because I don’t, not really.” She stared at me, surprised, worried. “But I do understand what it’s like to live- to live with… to live with mental illness. I-I have depression, Lenalee. I may not understand everything you’re going through, but I want you to know that you can talk to me. I don’t really know if it helps at all, to talk with someone else like you, even in only a few ways, but if it does, I want you to know that I’m here for you.”

I gazed earnestly into her eyes, trying to convey how seriously I meant what I said. And Lenalee seemed to understand, and take it the right way, because she reached over and put her slight hand on top of mine.

“Thank you, Allen. Let’s- Let’s both of us keep fighting, together. For the sake of ourselves, and for the sakes of the people we love.”

I clasped her hand and smiled at her, glad to see the love and determination in her eyes.

“Always.”
Confession

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: This chapter feels off, somehow, but I guess that's to be expected. This is a chapter that's been set up to happen for so long that there's just no way for it to be done right. Ya'no?

Warnings: vague references to mental illness; references to loss [so basically nothing]

Kanda POV

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The more time goes by, the more mixed feelings I have about this fucking AP English project. On the one hand, I have to work with the fucking Moyashi. On the other hand, I get to work with the fucking Moyashi.

… That’s probably all the explanation that needs be given here.

Honestly, now that I understand my feelings, and actually know what’s going on, I’m angrier about it than ever. I mean, of all the people it could have been, I had to end up liking the beansprout with an attitude. That kid has no idea what he’s gotten himself into with me.

Though I guess that type of reasoning implies there is anything between us at all. Which is just plain wrong. I think he likes me, but certainly not as anything more than a friend.

Though then again, I’m not so sure the kid is straight. The time we kissed at that party, he seemed pretty into it…

For whatever reason, these types of thoughts plagued me as I drove all the way to the Moyashi’s place on Saturday. Eventually I decided to put on D’espairsRay, so that I could finally stop thinking. Nothing can quiet the mind quite like Love is Dead.

So by the time I got to the Moyashi’s house I’d managed to calm down. Not feeling like getting out of the car, I honked the horn. It took less than a minute for the Moyashi to barrel out the door looking thoroughly displeased. He stormed his way over to my car (much to my secret pleasure), got into the passenger seat, turned to face me, and seethed.

“Kanda, this is a residential neighborhood. Don’t honk your horn like some stupid asshole driving way too fast in a crappy car on the highway.”

I didn’t bother responding, just pulled away from the curb with a smirk.

We spent nearly 6 hours working on our analyses and discussions. Won’t deny, it got pretty heated sometimes. But that’s exactly what I enjoy about being with him. The Moyashi isn’t afraid to voice his opinions, and we disagree just enough to make things interesting. The only stops we had between 10am and 4pm were three (three!) 10 minute breaks for the Moyashi to grab something to eat. I
swear the kid is a bottomless pit.

When we finished, I stood up from the table and stretched. I noticed his eyes seemed to follow my movements. *Is this really just my imagination?*

“Want something to eat?” I asked with a smirk (it definitely wasn’t a grin), “I can make soba.”

“Don’t worry about it,” the Moyashi interjected, jumping up, “Let me make something.”

I glared at him. “You’re at my house – you’re the guest. Sit back down.”

He stayed standing, arms crossed, the corners of his lips twitching upwards.

Rolling my eyes, I gesture towards the stove. “Fine, you make tea.”

We worked in silence, making our respective parts of the meal. After he’d set the water to boil, he began to wander around the kitchen. I noticed he stopped in front of the shelf over which a hollow space looked into the living room.

“Kanda?”

“Hmm?” I had a feeling I knew what was coming.

“Is this… Is this a picture of you and Alma?”

I turned around with a sigh and made my way over to him, gazing at the photograph. Two children with shoulder-length hair, one with purple hair, the other blue-black. The purple haired child had a birthmark across his nose. Both of them were grinning into the camera. A field full of wildflowers was vaguely visible behind them.

“Yes.”

“… I’m sorry.”

I shrugged. “It was… long ago.” The teapot began to whistle on the stove. “Come on, let’s finish making the food.”

We were both quieter after that, but I don’t think it was necessarily an uncomfortable silence – just contemplative. I know I, for one, was seriously wondering where to take the evening. I mean, I knew where I wanted to take it; the question was just if I should. That and fucking how.

By the time we had finished eating and cleaning up, I’d made my decision. *Fuck it.*

“Moyashi.”

“Yes?”

“… I want to show you something.”

I led him through the house, back to the alcove under the stairs, where the painting of the lotus blossom hung. I heard a slight intake of breath.

“It’s beautiful. Is it… your work?”

“Yes.”
We stood in silence for a minute. Then I began to speak.

“I… really loved Alma. Whether it was romantic, or ever could have been, I’ll never know. Fate intervened before I ever had the chance to find out, before I was old enough for something like that to even cross my mind.

“But the fact is, Alma’s gone. And he’s never coming back.”

I turned to face him.

“I will never forget him. But I can’t live my life in the past. It doesn’t work – it only leads to tragedy. That, and, well… eventually, fate interferes again.

“I was ready to live my life going nowhere. I thought I would keep going for Alma’s sake, for the sake of the sacrifice he made, and no other. I thought I would go to college, get a job, and eventually die. I never expected to enjoy anything ever again.

“But… things are changing. I feel things that I never thought I could, emotions I don’t quite understand. All I really know is that I can’t continue to pretend I don’t feel the way I do.”

I took a deep breath, and clenched my fists.

“Allen.”

I saw his eyes go wide.

“I like you.”

Silence, then a stuttering, “W-What…?”

“I like you. I want to be with you. I want to go out with you.

“Allen, I like you.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, What do y'all think? Do you love me for the chapter? Or hate me for the cliffhanger?

As always, a huge "thank you" to everyone who has read, followed, favorited, and/or reviewed. You motivate me to keep writing!

Love,

Red
“Allen, I like you.”

What.

The.

Fuck.

I just kept staring at Kanda, mouth slightly agape. I felt like my mind had short-circuited.

*How is this even possible? Kanda... likes me? As in, “likes me” likes me? How? WHY?!!*

“Oy, Allen! Moyashi, did you hear me?”

I startled out of my reverie, returning to reality to see Kanda staring intently at me, eyebrows furled. I realized with another shock that Kanda had just confessed to me.

And I had left him unanswered.

I gulped, then took a gasping breath. He was drawing away from me, looking pained. His jaw was clenched, his eyebrows still furrowed. It seemed he was trying to keep his emotions in check, and failing miserably.

“K-Kanda... I...I...”

My breathing was speeding up, and I felt panic surging inside of me.

“Why me?” I finally blurted.

His eyebrows rose, then his eyes narrowed, before his face settled into a look of disbelief and confusion.

“What the fuck do you mean, ‘why you’?”

I felt like I was dangerously on the brink of hyperventilating. Try as I might, I couldn’t contain myself.

“Kanda, I’m a mess!” I finally gasped out, tears beginning to gather in my eyes. “Dude, I’m fucking crazy! I’m lazy, I’m stupid, I can’t so anything right. I have caused people pain. I-I’m not worth it, I’m not worthy of this, I’m not... worthy of you.”
For a moment he just stood there, eyes wide, then he lurched forward, and for a moment, I thought he was going to hit me. I actually flinched back. But then I felt his arms around me, and I just stood there, frozen in shock.

“Baka. ‘Not worthy’? You’ve got to be joking. If anyone’s ‘unworthy’ here, it’s me, after all I’ve done.

“And as for ‘why’? It’s simple, baka Moyashi. It’s because you’re you.”

With that sweet, sweet statement, Kanda leaned down and kissed me on the forehead.

“Come on, let’s go have some tea.”

Half an hour later, we were sitting at his kitchen table drinking lotus tea. What is it with Kanda and lotus flowers? The thought drifted idly through my head before I shooed it away. There were more important matters to deal with. We hadn’t really talked since before we came to the kitchen, but it wasn’t an uncomfortable silence, exactly. Still, it had to end eventually, and I figured I should be the one to break it.

“Kanda, I… I have problems, you know.”

“I know. I do, too, remember?” He raised an eyebrow at me, smirking. But I could tell there was something there, something hidden in his eyes. Darkness, just like mine.

“I… I’m not straight, you know.”

He snorted, “Yeah… I sorta figured.”

“It’s not funny, Kanda! I… I don’t… I don’t like this part of me.” I had to look away from his face, I couldn’t say this straight to him. “I’m not… homophobic, you know. A person’s sexuality doesn’t bother me. But somehow… something that I accept, celebrate even, in other people, I can’t accept about myself.”

I slowly raised my head to meet his eyes again, worried about what I’d find there. To my intense relief, his eyes were gentle. Slowly, he reached towards me, and placed his left hand on top of my right.

“I won’t pretend to know how you feel, because I don’t. I grew up in a family that never once made even a single homophobic comment. And know that I was very, very lucky for that.

“And I also know that you… weren’t so lucky. I can’t even imagine the damage that fucking monster’s done, what he’s said to you, how much he’s hurt you. And you had pain to deal with even before that bastard got his hands on you.

“I know you have problems, but Allen… You don’t have to fight your demons alone. I can fight them with you, if you’ll only let me.”

I gulped, then gasped out, “Is that really ok? Can you really deal with my crazy?”

He smirked.

“Moyashi, we’re both fucked up.”
He got up, and made his way around the table, sitting down in the seat next to me. His right hand rose to push my hair back behind my ear. I guess it’s gotten long… I looked down, biting my lip, then glanced back up.

“Tell me this is ok.”

I let out a gasping breath that I hadn’t realized I’d been holding.

“Tell me I can kiss you right now.”

My breathing sped up, and my pulse pounded in my ears.

“I won’t kiss you unless you say I can.”

I stared at him, eyes wide, and I saw the uncertainty there, hidden behind his earnest gaze. And I realized there was no way I could resist this man any longer.

And I also realized that I didn’t care.

I leaned forward.

“Kiss me.”

He did.

It was shy, it was forceful, it was gentle, it was raw. There was passion, there was need, and there was deep, deep care. I didn’t know a kiss could hold such kindness, could relay such profound emotion. He didn’t pull me closer, didn’t try to make it more. He just kissed me, warm and gentle and there.

I wanted to cry. How the fuck did I land a guy this decent?

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, but was also an eternity too soon, Kanda pulled away.

I wanted to pull him back, didn’t want that warmth to go away.

I reached forward, grasping his hand, then slowly entwining my fingers with his.

“Does this… Does this mean we’re… y’know… going out?”

Kanda laughed breathily.

“Of course it does, baka Moyashi.”

After that, he pulled me closer and kissed me again.

Chapter End Notes

And that is where I leave you, for now. Hope you enjoyed! :)
Love,
Red
The Future Isn't Written in Stone

Kanda POV

Persistent knocking alerted me to the fact that there was a visitor at my door, as well as to the fact that the visitor did not seem inclined to believe I wasn't home. That, or they knew full well I was home and just felt like being an irritating prick.

"All right, all right, I'm coming!" I bellowed, striding irately through my house. "Who the fuck is it?"

"It's Road, you jerk! Now let me in!"

"Ah." I pulled open the door, stepping aside to let the short girl inside. "The knocking was excessive. You could have just called," I told her with a scowl.

"Perhaps. But I felt like letting out my frustrations on your door. I should probably apologize to it, poor thing."

"I'm fairly certain my door is an inanimate object and therefore has no feeling, be it physical or emotional."

"You never know, Kanda."

I chose to keep quiet.

"Do you have any candy?" She questioned as we entered the kitchen.

With a sigh of (mostly feigned) irritation, I pulled down the candy jar and handed it to her. I'd stocked it with lollipops yesterday. She grabbed the jar from my hands with a giggle, and then set about the serious task of selecting the first piece. Which she did in under 10 seconds.

"So what brings you here today, Road? You could have called ahead." I set the kettle on the stovetop while I spoke, and picked out a jasmine-mango tea.

"I just kinda… wanted to talk."

I shot a glance in her direction, my brows furrowed. This can't be good.

"Hmmm… Well, then talk."
The silence continued until I'd finished making the tea and placed two mugs down on the kitchen table, along with a pot of honey for Road.

"Things are… sort of rough right now."

I stayed quiet.

"Did you know that Lenalee has an eating disorder?"

"… I had my suspicions."

"Well I didn't. I found out when she nearly fainted on Friday at Allen's house after the recital."

"Hmm." Yikes.

"I just… I feel so guilty, ya'no? I mean, I'm her girlfriend! Isn't it supposed to be my job to notice these things, to help protect her from them?" She hung her head. "I feel like a failure."

"You're not. It's not actually your job to take care of every person in your near vicinity 100% of the time. If it was, you'd be royally fucked, because we're all pretty fucked up."

She snorted, eyebrows raised. "You know, I don't think that should make me feel better, but it does, somehow."


We were quiet for a little while, drinking our tea. Watching Road drizzle more honey into her cup than should physically be able to dissolve in the tea made me feel… something. A combination of awed and nauseous, I guess. Finally, she spoke again.

"I told my parents I want to go into fashion."

I studied her silently. I had been aware of her goals for a while now, but I'd been aware of the type of people her family is made up of even longer. I doubt that ended well.

"Sheryl just about blew a gasket."

I grimaced. Sheryl Kamelot is one of the most unpleasant sons-of-bitches I've ever had the misfortune of meeting. Unfortunately, he also happens to be Road's father. Why the Hell do we all have such fucked up families? Oh, wait, duh. Fucked up family equals fucked up kids. Simple math.

"Well, fuck him."

"Uh, how? He's my father, Kanda. Do I run away? Where do I go? How do I pay for my education?!"

"Right. Uh, I meant, do it your own way. Prove to him that he's wrong. Take the next year to show him how good you are at this, and that you do have a future in your field.

"Your father's a creep, and an asshole to boot. But at the end of the day, he loves you. You're 'daddy's little girl'. I've heard him say so numerous times," She pulled a face at this, rolling her eyes. "He'll let you do what you want if you convince him that it's the only way you'll be happy, and that you can actually live off of it."

"Kanda, it's… not that simple. My family is… complicated." Her brows had furrowed as she gazed intently into the hot mug grasped in both hands.
"I know."

"No, you do-"

"Yes, I do. Tykki’s a lot less guarded when he’s high as a fucking blimp."

"Oh."

I leaned back in my chair with a sigh. "Think of it this way. You won’t be able to provide the usual services, but you’d provide them an avenue into a completely different area. You could move freely in a world which is, let’s face it, fairly corrupt. But despite how twisted it is, it has its own rules, and probably a strong distrust of outsiders. If they want a line in, you'll be perfect for the job. At bare minimum, you could be an informant. But considering the imagination of your family members, I doubt that’s all they can come up with.

"I know you want freedom, want to cut them out completely, but I doubt that's possible, at least at this stage. But this could be the first step in that direction."

"You're right, Kanda. Thanks."

"At any rate," I smirked, "if you have any real trouble, call me. On your fucking phone. I'll bring help, in the form of Mugen."

"I doubt you'd get away with threatening an Officer of the Law, Kanda," she responded, eyebrows raised, a smile twitching around her lips.

"Ah, well, then call me, again, on your fucking phone, if you need to talk. About your family, Lenalee, anything. Or if you want to help me get rid of that ridiculous jar of candy."

"You mean the one you keep stocked just for me?"

I didn't feel that question merited an answer.

Later that night, I decided to call the Moyashi. *I mean, why the fuck not? We're dating now, this isn't weird. Except of course for the fact that I'm dating the baka Moyashi. How the fuck did that happen again? Really, I have no clue.*

I dialed his number (I had flatly refused to put it on speed-dial). He picked up on the third ring.

"What's up, Kanda?" He sounded vaguely breathless, and I couldn't help picturing the blush that was probably coating his pale cheeks. *I am so fucked.*

"Nothing much. Just wondering if you have any plans for the break." *Real smooth, Kanda.*

"Ah, well, not yet, not really." Silence. Then, "Ummm… Do you have any… suggestions?"

"You could come over." The idea had been percolating in my mind for a while. I had scared Cross off the last time he'd paid the Moyashi a visit, but that was a while ago, now, and who knows when that raging asshole might come back? Or what would happen to the kid if he did?

I heard a gulp on the other end. "When? And for… for how long were you thinking?"

"The whole break, baka. We're both alone otherwise – why not spend the time together instead?" *Wow, that sounds sad when I put it like that.*
'Uhhh…'

'We can have Road and the others over here too, intermittently. With no adult interference around, they'll be happy to come over.'

'Are…Are you sure that's ok? I mean, the break's two weeks long…'

'Che. Who the fuck cares. We'll need to work on that stupid AP English project together, anyway. This just makes it more efficient. Don't make me say it, moron.'

'Well yes, I suppose that's true, but still…'

'Damnit, I want to see you.' Fuck.

'Oh.' Silence. 'Ok, then. I'll go over on Saturday, I guess.'

'Good.' Well, this was awkward. Time to put an end to it. 'See you tomorrow.'

'Goodnight, Kanda.'

After the call, I felt restless. Not matter how much I tried, I couldn't get the Moyashi out of my head. And those thoughts took me down roads I hate to travel.

Picturing his smile, thinking of his laugh, bright and infectious, made me think of another. In my mind's eye, white hair turned purple, growing in length. A birthmark appeared across his nose. His mouth moved, and I struggled to hear his words.

'It's all your fault.'

I gripped the back of the couch I was seated on with one hand, the other grasping my shirt. My vision started to flicker, memories resurfacing before my eyes, clear as the world around me should have been. My breathing sped up, and I felt nauseous, a headache building behind my eyes. I could hear the crackling of fire, feel the heat on my skin. In the distance, screaming echoed.

Where am I?

"Home, home, home!" I yelled aloud, opening the eyes I'd squeezed shut to, for a moment, glimpse a burning building before reality suddenly snapped back into place. I sat on the couch for several minutes, trying to get my breathing back under control, and to stop my hands from shaking. And all the while, there was that fucking headache…

I stumbled through my house and into the kitchen, shoving things out of the way in the cupboard, reaching to the back… and finding exactly what I was looking for: a bottle of Vicodin. I tossed back two and headed up to bed.
Have you ever had one of those days where everything is going well, and you feel like you're on top of the world, flying above the clouds? You know, one of those days where simply everything is perfect, and you're looking forward to the future? The type of day where you know, somewhere deep down, that it's simply too good to be true? Yeah, that's the sort of day I've been having.

In fact, that's the sort of week I've been having. Kanda called on Sunday, and essentially asked me over for the whole break! How awesome is that? I get to spend two whole weeks with my sexy, smart, (mostly) gentle boyfriend. I felt a little hesitant accepting the offer at first, because I didn't want to be a burden; but he insisted, so clearly it's ok with him.

Admittedly, I was sort of worried about him on Monday, though. Kanda came to school looking absolutely hungover. He told me he wasn't when I asked, but he seemed fairly subdued about it. He didn't snap the answer the way I expected him to. Still, he was much better on Tuesday, so I guess he handled whatever it was, or at least pushed it aside. He made it seem like it wasn't a big deal, but he's not very good at talking about feelings, so…

Anyway, it's finally Friday, which means I need to pack. The day has passed in a whirlwind of last-day-tests and 'Secret Santa' themed things, but now that school's over, I have a whole different type of 'busy day' ahead of me. If I'm gonna spend two weeks with Kanda, I have to actually take stuff with me: toothbrush, nightclothes, actual clothes, towels, makeup…

As I sorted through my stuff, putting things into a duffel bag (clothes) and a carry-on (makeup), I couldn't help thinking about how long it had been since I'd packed up my stuff and left. With Mana, who was part of a traveling circus, we were basically always on the go. And with Cross… we weren't always traveling, but when we left, it was always in a hurry. And now here I was, packing my stuff again. Except this time, I could come back any time, and I was very much looking forward to this outing, despite the nerves. I mean: two weeks alone with my boyfriend. I have to say, I'll be pretty disappointed if there isn't progress.

Glancing at my phone, I saw that it was approaching 6pm. Kanda and I had originally decided on Saturday, but then Tykki made a fuss, saying he wanted Kanda's car then, and since I have stuff to
take, we decided to move forward my stay by a day, and had agreed that Kanda would pick me up around 8pm. Not that I don't trust Kanda, but I still wonder about those two. There is definitely more to their relationship than "friends". I mean, Kanda usually isn't willing to indulge anyone (except Road, I've noticed, but everyone dotes on her, the little minx), yet he let Tykki have his car without much of a fight. Ah well, if it's important, I'll find out eventually.

Just then, there was an intense pounding at the door. Damn, he's impatient, but I guess I knew that already. I made my way downstairs, a small smile on my face. I opened the door without hesitation.

"Welco- Master."

The smile immediately fell off my face, replaced by fear that I hid carefully behind a neutral mask. I stepped aside. "Co-Come on in."

Cross stomped in without a word, chucking his coat onto the coach, and making his way towards the kitchen, wordless. I followed apprehensively. His silence could either mean something good, or something very, very bad.

"Where's the food?" Cross growled out, glowering at me.

I gulped. "I-I have cold soba…" That had been intended for Kanda, but if Cross wanted it, I would give it to him. Absolutely.

"Fine."

No swear words yet, and no request for alcohol either? Oh, this is so not good.

I hurried to do his bidding, quickly fixing him soba with some toppings on the side, and placing the plate down in front of him. He ate it quickly and quietly, and my tension level rose with every minute. I could tell this was going to be a bad night, and I rushed to do the dishes once he was done with them. Then I stood by the sink, uncertain of what he wanted or expected. Or when it would all begin.

"Your boyfriend not here today?"

My breath caught in my throat. "My-My what?"

"That pretty-boy samurai who saved your ass last time. He not here?"

"… No."

He smirked evilly up at me. "And here I half expected him to saunter down naked, even more self-satisfied after having fucked you up the ass. Or has he dumped you already?"

I felt like I'd swallowed my tongue. This was leading up to something, I just couldn't tell what. Even if I had been able to speak, I wouldn't have known what to say.

"You know, if you had told me years ago that you were into men, you would have been a lot more useful to me."

I felt the bile rising in my throat, though I didn't know if it was from fear, anger, or genuine nausea. How does one react to their caretaker telling them that they would have prostituted their ward if they'd known he wasn't straight? I felt tears beginning to prick my eyes, but blinked them away; crying would only make Cross angrier.
Slowly, with all the formidable nature of a nearing tsunami, Cross rose to his feet and began to walk towards me. When he reached me he stood, towering over me for a full minute or more. Then, suddenly, he punched me in the stomach. I doubled over, gasping, and he kicked my legs out from under me, sending me crashing to the ground. I braced myself for the next blow.

But it didn't come.

Instead, he knelt down before me, and hissed, "You know that it's all your fault, don't you? Mana is dead because of you. You deserve every hit I give you, you fucking faggot. Do us all a favor and die already, yeah?" With that he rose, and after a hard kick to my stomach, he walked away.

I lay there in shock and pain for I don't even know how long. Finally, I slowly pulled myself up, stumbling towards the other side of the kitchen.

It's all your fault!

I know.

Mana is dead because of you!

I know.

Cross is crazy because of you!

I know.

Kanda will destroy himself by being with you!

I know.

Everything you ever touch, you destroy!

I know!

You're a failure, a fucking pathetic faggot! You don't have any purpose, any meaning. You're nothing but a monster!

I KNOW!

You deserve to die!

I KNOW!

I pulled open the kitchen drawer, grabbing a carving knife. Appropriate.

I stared at the blade, every instinct telling me to do it, my mind yelling at me to do it! A small, desperate part of me tried to come up with a reason not to, a reason to keep going. It failed.

"I'm so sorry," I whispered into the empty house, and plunged the knife into my left wrist. Blood spurted out and flowed down my arm, dripping to the ground as pain flooded through me. Shakily, I transferred the knife to my shaking, bloody left hand, and sliced my right wrist open, too.

I sunk to the ground, breathing shallow. What was that I'd heard before? 'Down for death', was it? Well, that's what I want now.

My hands were shaking worse than ever, and my vision was starting to blur. Am I crying...? Or is it
the blood loss…? I managed to push the knife into my arm and pull down, blood slowly leaving my body there as well. Then transferring the knife again, I did the same on the left as well, cutting through layers of scabs and scar tissue. *Somehow, it's not bleeding as much as I expected… Is it not… deep enough? Ah well…*

My pulse was thudding in my ears, and the knife had slipped from my hands. *When… did that happen?* Through blurry eyes and muffled ears I thought I heard yelling, and a pair of black boots approaching.

*A black-clad angel… How pretty…* I sighed, and everything went dark.
The moment I reached the moyashi's house, I knew something was off.

The door wasn't just unlocked; it was wide open.

*Shit.*

I parked the car on the curb and jumped out, then briskly but silently made my way into the house and through the hall. When I entered the kitchen, I felt as though my heart had stopped.

*Red.*

*Red. Red, red, red, red.*

I felt panic rising inside of me, but I breathed deeply and held it at bay. *I am not the main concern right now.* I pulled my phone out of my pocket, and after a moment's deliberation, made the call.

"911. What is your emergency?"

"My-my… friend… he cut his wrists open, vertically." As I spoke, my voice became steadier, the procedural nature of the actions making it easier to speak. Pushing down my panic, I looked around for something with which to staunch the bleeding. "There's a lot of blood, but I think the bleeding is slowing down."

"Sir, could you give me the address?"

"Of course." I rattled off the address, noticing vaguely that I knew perfectly the address of a boy I'd only known for a few months.

"Thank you, sir. We are sending an ambulance. Please stay on the line."

I nodded numbly, despite the fact that they couldn't see me. I'd managed to find dish towels in the meantime, and attempted to staunch the bleeding by placing pressure on the injuries. Reaching up with a bloody hand, I checked Allen's pulse. It was faint, but there.
KAMI-SAMA, doumo arigatou gozaimasu.

Time slowed to a crawl as I waited for the ambulance to arrive. I just knelt there, trying to keep pressure on the arms of the boy in front of me. I felt shaky and disoriented, but I kept my self-control, breathing deep and even to keep my vision from tunneling. Somewhere in the background, I heard screaming, I felt heat, I heard sirens.

It came as a shock when a hand reached into my view, and I flinched back. Suddenly, four paramedics were hurrying around in front of me. Three worked to place Allen on a stretcher, and the fourth knelt down in front of me. I saw his mouth move, but didn't hear a word. The man reached forward and pulled me up to my feet, forcefully but gently pulling me into the ambulance. He sat me down and closed the door behind us as we sped off. Glancing over next to me, I saw the other three paramedics still with Allen.

"Go to him," I managed to gasp out.

The EMT nodded and turned. I just stared into the space before me, vision slowly fading to black around the edges of my sight. My chest burned and ached. I took quick, gasping breaths. NOT YET. Not until he's safe.

I have no idea how long the trip took. Allen was rolled out of the ambulance, and then the EMT turned to me. He pulled me up and out of the ambulance, leading me towards the hospital. And when I saw the glass doors and white walls beyond them, that was the exact moment I lost it.

"NO! Don't take me in there!" I felt, rather than heard myself scream. I sank to the ground, clawing at my hair, knowing distantly but full well that I must look absolutely crazy, but no longer able to hold my emotions in check. My vision went black, and I heard the screech of tires and metals, felt the searing pain in my chest and gravel against my knees and palms and head. I screamed, then lost myself to blessed blackness.

The first thing I noticed was light. As I opened my eyes, I felt as if I had been blinded, and immediately closed them again with a hiss. Then, groaning, I slowly opened them again, and shifted myself up. Where the Hell am I?

I glanced around. White walls, white sheets, beeping instruments.

Hospital.

Panic seared through me, and I launched myself up as my memories came back. The white walls crowded in on me. Allen – I have to find Allen. I threw the covers off and jumped out of bed, pulling an IV out of my arm harshly, disconnecting the wires from my chest. I had barely made it to the door when it slammed open in front of me, and I found myself face-to-face with a harried-looking Neah.

"Kanda," he sighed, posture immediately relaxing, "You can't just do that. When you rip off the sensors, it signals that your heart has stopped. Jesus, you scared the shit out of me." His turned worn eyes to me. "Please, Kanda, sit back down."

"Where's Allen?" I asked without preamble as I made my way back to the bed.

"He's still in intensive care, but he's stable. He should wake up within a few hours. It's a good thing you found him when you did – a few more minutes and we may not have been so lucky."

I gulped, trying to keep myself calm. "Yeah, I seem to have a knack for arriving at the right moment."
Neah chuckled, but it had little humor in it. "That you do." He sighed, and fixed his gaze on me. "What were you doing there, Kanda?"

I stayed silent, deliberating. *I trust Neah, and I know Allen does to some degree. But would he want Neah to know about us?* Figuring I’d go for a half-truth, I answered, "I was picking him up. He was supposed to spend the break with me."

Neah's eyebrows rose. "The whole break?"

"...Yes."

"I see. I didn't realize the two of you had gotten so close. This must have been hard on you, then," Neah murmured, leaning forward towards me in his chair. "Are you ok?"

I stayed quiet for a bit, then whispered, "I'm just... numb. I have to get out of here, Neah. You know I hate hospitals."

He nodded at me in understanding. "Of course. I talked to Tiedoll on the phone."

"You WHAT?!" I jumped out of the bed again, anger washing through me.

"Kanda, you collapsed in front of a hospital, after having what was very obviously a panic attack. By the time they contacted me, they'd already looked through your file. Seeing as you have a bit of a history when it comes to panic attacks and serious injuries, they decided to keep you here. And for future reference, just because I'm listed as your primary emergency contact, does not mean I'm your next of kin. You're not emancipated, Kanda. They won't release you to me, not when you still have a father."

"Then how is Allen getting out? They won't... they won't try to call that bastard, will they?"

"Well, they did," Neah began, holding his hand up to stop me from interrupting, "but it didn't work – they couldn't reach him, obviously. I'm listed as Allen's emergency contact, too, so since his primary caregiver isn't available, they'll release him to me once he's cleared to leave. Admittedly I had to pull a few strings, but it'll work out."

"Che. 'Primary caregiver,' my ass."

"I agree. But unfortunately, until Allen is willing to go to the police with the abuse, there's nothing much we can do. Of course, that might happen sooner than he would have wanted it to."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they had to undress him, obviously. And he had distinctly boot- and fist-shaped bruises building steadily on his stomach. There's a lot of older bruising as well, and x-rays revealed quite a few old fractures and broken bones. It doesn't take a genius. Child Protective Services has already been notified. Allen will have to talk to them when he wakes up."

I was silent for a minute. "So you'll take him in?"

"For the time being, yes."

"Will CPS try to take him away from you?"

"Honestly, I doubt it."

"How come?"
"Allen's going to be 18 on the 24th. He's less than two weeks away from being legally an adult. Once that happens, CPS won't have jurisdiction any more. And considering how slowly the system moves, they'll probably decide to just leave him with me. Of course, I'm more than willing to take him out of Cross's hands, but if Allen doesn't want to stay with me, then there won't be anything that I can do."

"Right." I still felt numb and panicky, and a little light-headed, but I was relieved to know that at least physically, and for the foreseeable future, the moyashi would be all right. "I want to leave now."

Neah nodded, handing me the bag that had been sitting on the bedside table beside me. "I picked up some clothes for you."

I nodded. Right, the ones I was wearing are covering blood.

"And as I was saying earlier, Tiedoll's been contacted. He gave me permission to release you when you were ready. More specifically, he gave me permission to release you when you said you were ready. The man really trusts you, Kanda. So having said that, I ask: Are you sure you're ready?"

"Positive." I have to get out of here.

"Ok. I'll go fill out the forms while you get changed."

It took less than half an hour to get me cleared, after which Neah drove me back to my place. I noticed my car was in the driveway, and I guessed he'd been the one to handle that, too.

"Neah."

"Yes, Kanda?"

"Call me when he wakes up."

"Of course. Anything else you need?"

"No, not really. Just… thank you, Neah."

He smiled at me. "Don't worry about it, kiddo. It's the least I could do."

After I got home, I sat down on the couch. I spent half an hour just sitting there, not knowing what to do, not wanting to do anything. I just sat there and thought.

I thought about Daisya. Thought about how much he loved soccer, how much he loved his country, and how much he loved his family. He loved too much; he loved the world, and died trying to protect it.

I thought about Alma. Thought about innocence and laughter, about embarrassment and guilt, about mischief that would always get him scolded. He lit up everything around him with a warm golden glow, made it impossible not to smile. He hid his worries well, even though I knew he was afraid – he was terrified of disappointing those around him. But he never did, not up to his dying breath.

I thought about Allen. About soft smiles and curious eyes. About intelligence that could only be described as 'wicked'. About warmth both on his skin and bleeding out of it, about a sadness that dragged him down far past the point of low, making it impossible for him to go on.
And I thought about myself. About how much I had been given, how much love I had been offered, and how many times I had failed them in return. How many times I had been rude and cruel, hurting the people who cared for me, even if they didn't say so. I stole the light from everyone I cared for, draining them until they vanished, before moving on to my next victim.

*What the fuck is wrong with me? Why do I always take from others and never give back? Why can't I stop spreading my misery to those around me, inevitably dragging them into the ground?*

*My parents should be alive. Daisya should be alive. Alma's parents should be alive. **Alma** should be alive. Allen should be happy.*

*And he might be, without me to drag him down.*

I huffed in disgust. *Listen to me – I sound pathetic. What is this, a fucking “everything is my fault” pity party? I don't fucking have the right to complain about anything – I just need to shut up and suck it up.*

I got to my feet, stumbling a bit on my way towards the kitchen, a headache building behind my eyes. *I need to forget for a while.* I pulled a bottle of sake and a bottle of Vicodin off the shelves. There were about 20 pills still left in the bottle and I poured 5 out into my hand, contemplating them.

*This… shouldn't be too many, right? …Maybe I should skip the alcohol, though…* I put one Vicodin back in the bottle, then tossed back the pills still in my hand. *Ah, whatever… It's not like it's enough to kill me.* I brought the sake up to my lips and drank deep, slamming the bottle down on the countertop harder than I intended to, glass shards and sake strewing the countertop.

I collapsed into the chair at the kitchen table, a broken, bitter laugh escaping me. *What the fuck am I doing with my life? Kami, after all he gave me…*

"Alma… I'm so sorry…"
Sometimes We Don't Want to Wake Up

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: DGM is not mine, obviously.

Author's Note(s): 1) I AM SO SORRY. Gods, it's literally been more than 3 months since I updated. I have just been so busy with University. But accept a 2700 word chapter as an apology? 2) Special thanks to my wonderful Beta, FandomlyCroft, for putting up with all my bullshit!

Warnings: discussion of self-harm, suicide, and child abuse

Allen POV

The first thing I noticed was the soft hum of machinery, followed by a rhythmic beeping. I opened my eyes slowly, finding myself in a bed with soft light around me. The walls were plain and white. A glance downwards revealed what I had feared: my arms covered in bandages, wires sticking out of me, wrists held tightly in leather restraints. My breathing sped up, and I vaguely registered the beeping speeding up as well.

Who found me?

And why couldn’t they just let me die?

I heard the door open and looked up, panicked, only to relax a bit at the sight of the figure in the doorway.

“Hello, Neah,” I croaked, surprised at how difficult it was to speak.

“Hello, Allen,” the haggard-looking man responded with a small smile, “Glad to see you’re still with us.”

I didn’t say anything for a moment, not quite able to say the same back to him. I laid back down into the bed, closing my eyes. I’m still here. I failed. I’m still not free. I felt the tears begin to slide down my cheeks as I held back a gasp, wanting to maintain at least a bit of dignity. I heard the rustling of clothes as Neah came closer.

“I’m sorry, Allen,” I felt him place a gentle hand on my shoulder, “I know this isn’t the result you wanted, but I promise you that it is what the rest of us wanted.”

I opened my eyes. “Who found me?”

Neah’s hand dropped away, and he sat down in the chair next to my bed with a weary sigh. “Kanda,” he murmured, then ran a hand across his face.

I felt a pit in my stomach. Something about the way Neah had responded filled me with dread. “What happened?”
“He walked in, called 911, rode in with the ambulance and collapsed. He woke up pretty quickly and left, but…”

“But…?!?”

“I called him, to make sure he was all right. When he didn’t respond, I went to check on him, and found him unconscious. He still hasn’t woken up.”

“…What happened?”

“He mixed Vicodin with alcohol.”

The world seemed to spin around me. Kanda had…?

“He should be fine, and he may even have escaped doing lasting damage done to his liver, somehow, though we can’t be sure of that quite just yet. Based on his medical history, the hospital has ruled it an attempted suicide. Of course, that can’t be confirmed until he’s woken up,” he looked at me sorrowfully, “I’m sorry to tell you this, but I don’t much see the point of lying.”

I gulped. “This… This is all my fault. If only I hadn’t… Kanda would have been fine if only he hadn’t turned up. Oh gods, I should have been more careful!” I felt hysterical, and would certainly have been clawing at my left arm if they hadn’t both still been held tight in the leather straps.

“No, Allen, it’s not your fault.”

“Yes, it is! I pushed him, I made him vulnerable, oh gods, I ripped out his fucking heart…!”

“Allen, what are you talking about?” Neah’s face was now a mask of confusion.

A part of my mind was screaming at me to Shut up! Don’t tell him! But mostly I just couldn’t hold back the incredible wave of nausea and guilt rising inside me.

“I was supposed to help him, not destroy him! Oh gods, if I’d known this would happen, I would have just rejected him. This is all my fault… it’s all my fucking fault…”

Neah stood back up and came over to my bedside, looking me hard in the eyes. “Allen, it is not your fault. Kanda has been suffering for a long time now, and so have you. What happened is neither of your faults. Neither of you is to blame for anything. You need help, both of you. Kanda has severe PTSD, and you are very seriously depressed. The adults in your lives should never have left you alone, treated you the way they did. Especially you.” Neah paused, taking a breath, hesitating.

“Based on what you said, I’m going to make a conjecture. Allen,” he leaned in a bit, eyes gentle, “are you and Kanda dating?”

I gulped, then nodded.

“Ah. Suddenly, some things are making a lot more sense,” he chuckled slightly, “I wondered why he would have invited you over for the entire break.”

I grimaced, “Yeah, well, I’m pretty sure I fucked that all up.”

“No, Allen, I don’t think so. I honestly believe the two of you are good for each other, and that you can help each other heal. It’s not an easy process, and love, or whatever it is between you, doesn’t actually make all of the problems go away.

“But having someone there can make the pain easier to bear. And I promise, you can bear it; both of
you can. Recovery is possible, I swear it.”

Neah seemed so earnest, so determined, and I desperately hoped he was right. But… “Cross is still there, though! And I just, I can’t take it anymore! I can’t take the beatings, and the pain, I just can’t! I hate him, and I hate that he gets to say he has custody of me. Mana was my father, not him!” I could feel the tears running down my cheeks again. Mana…

Neah stood back up suddenly, shocked. “M-Mana?”

“Mana Walker, my adoptive father. Cross only fosters me,” I whispered sadly, “Mana died when I was 11.”

“Allen, do you… know my last name?”

I scrunched my eyebrows in confusion. “What?”

“Allen, my last name is Walker. My full name is Neah Walker.”

Something shifted inside me. Something that felt strangely like hope.

Neah sat down on the edge of my bed, and reached out his hand towards me. “I—I had a twin brother, who died 7 years ago. His name was Mana. He had a son that he adopted while he was in the circus. He never told me the child’s name, only that he loved the piano.” His hand was shaking, I noticed, as he placed it on top of mine.

The world was tilting again, but in a different way, a better way. Could it be true? Could Neah… actually be my uncle? Wouldn’t… wouldn’t that make him next of kin? Wouldn’t that mean he could take me away from Cross? The hope I felt was growing inside of me, but there was still a large black cloud of guilt in the way…

“Neah… Can you forgive me for hurting Kanda?”

Hesitantly, as if still unable to believe it, Neah leaned forward and hugged me.

“There is nothing to forgive.”

Everything seemed to speed up, and the next few days passed in a whirlwind. Neah organized everything – he swore he would take me away from Cross, and immediately filed papers to get himself confirmed as my next of kin, and therefore my guardian. He said it would take a while, but he had connections, and would rush the matter. He swore to me that all of my ties to Cross would be severed by the time February rolled around. In the meantime, he told me that Child Protective Services had been notified by the hospital, and that I would have to speak to a representative, but he could be there if I liked. I told him I needed to do this on my own.

The man who strode through the door was in no way what I expected. He introduced himself as Winters Zakolo, and seemed like just about the scariest person I’d ever met, short of Cross. Despite the tattoos and bulging muscles, though, I felt safer around him. If there was one thing I was absolutely certain of, it was that this man would protect me, and could probably beat Cross to death, if he was so inclined.

“So… Your name’s Allen Walker, is that right, kid?”
“Y-Yeah…”

Zakolo sat in the chair next to my bed, which seemed far too little for a man of his stature. “Do you know why I’m here, kid?”

“You’re… CPS, right?”

He nodded.

“Then yes, I believe I do.” I didn’t dare look at him. The man made me feel safer, but the old ghosts still haunted me. What would Cross do, if he found out I told someone? I shuddered to think.

He sighed, “Look, kid, I get it. You don’t want to talk to anyone – who would? You’ve grown up in an unstable environment, moving from place to place, raised by multiple different people. The childhood you had has seriously impacted the way you relate to the world. So seriously, in fact, that you decided to give up, decided to take your own life. That is not a decision that anyone would make – only someone who has truly given up, who sees absolutely no other way out of dire circumstances would dare take that route.

“Look, kid, I’m not judging. I know some people have it worse – a lot worse – than others. But I also know that something put you there, pushed you far enough that you felt you had to break. And though it may be hard, I want to talk about what that ‘something’ is, or at least what I suspect to be a part of it.” Zakolo leaned forward in the chair, towards me. “So, Allen, is there anything you would like to tell me about Marian Cross?”

My breath was coming fast, and I clenched my fists. Could I tell this complete stranger everything? Could I spill my secrets, and actually hope that somehow there would be repercussions from Cross, and not for me? I glanced at Zakolo, and saw the large man waiting patiently, clearly accustomed to this sort of behavior… from people like me.

“If I tell you, will I be safe?” The words were soft, and all wrong. I wanted to phrase it another way, take it back. I wanted to appear confident, just making sure that everything was in order. Instead, I sounded like a terrified child.

Zakolo stood up and walked towards me. “I swear to you, I will make sure of it.”

I gulped, then gasped out, “Cross beats me.” Zakolo nodded, and I saw anger in his eyes for a moment before they became encouraging again.

“Go on.”

“He-he makes me play poker, and gamble, so that I can get money for him.” Now that I had started, I found it difficult to stop speaking. I felt tears beginning to gather in my eyes. “He hits me, and kicks me, he always has. Sometimes I lose consciousness. He swears at me, and makes me cater to his every whim.

“And he’s threatened to prostitute me out… though he’s never actually done it.”

Zakolo actually growled. “No one should do any of that, Allen. You should never have had to go through any of that. I swear I will protect you – Cross will never touch you again.”

Even as tears slowly dripped down my cheeks, I felt a massive wave of relief. I thought about Mana, about Neah, about Zakolo, about Road and about Kanda. I have so many people that care about me.

It’s time I started to care about myself, too.
After three days in the hospital, Neah took me back to his place. We stopped at my house first, to pick up my bags, which Neah hefted into the car with ease, insisting I needed to rest.

His house turned out to be a fairly standard American 3-story place. It had 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, walk-in closets, a lounge in the basement, a living room, dining room, and massive kitchen. We ate while we talked. I had thought it might be awkward being with Neah, but he seemed to love the prospect of getting to know me. He told me stories from the hospital and his life, and I told him parts of my life in the circus and playing the piano with Marie.

“Really? Noise Marie? I know the man – Mana and I were once good friends of his, though we’ve been out of contact for a while.”

“How come?”

Neah shrugged, “The Noah Clan isn’t too fond of the Black Order. Somehow the two manage to get in each other’s way a lot. Though I think only people on the inside are generally aware of that.”

“Umm… Is it ok for you to be telling me this, then?”

“Quite frankly,” Neah grinned, “I do my best to piss off my family in order to keep them out of my business. They don’t much like me – medicine is too holier-than-thou for them, and in general I take great pleasure in breaking their rules.” His face turned more somber.

“Mana was stronger, though. He actually left the Noah behind completely. Given your ties to both the Order and the Noah, it’s not a bad idea for you to know a bit about what’s going on,” he grinned again, “only a bit though.”

“The Noah Clan is very insular. There are high expectations of all the family members, and only a demon deal could possibly save those who fail to live up to the standards that have been set. The head of the family, Adam, is a tyrant – he must be obeyed, and the weight of his demands tends to fall most heavily on the youngest of the family.

“I fear that in this regard, Mana and I are somewhat to blame. I defied the family, defied him, when I went into medicine. Mana essentially gave him the middle finger in the rearview mirror when he ran off to join the circus. Adam was enraged by our defecting, and seems to have determined to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

“Ironically enough, though, the stricter regulation has probably at least somewhat contributed to the creation of an entire generation that just flat-out hates the Clan. I fully expect Tykki, Road and Jasdevi to eventually go the same way as Mana and I. Adam hates losing control, but his absolute obsession with maintaining it is what will lead to his downfall.”

Neah sat back on the couch we had migrated to in the living room, fixing his eyes on the ceiling. I smiled a bit – Neah’s place was so eccentric. The walls and couches in the room were a deep maroon, and red-gold drapes hung across the windows. The floor was dark blue tile and a massive Starry Night carpet, mirroring the ceiling, which was painted to be a fairly lifelike rendition of the night sky. It feels safe here.

“Allen… I would discourage getting involved with the Noah. The Black Order would be a better association to have.”

“…Cross is part of the Black Order.” It was difficult to say his name.
“Yes. But so is Kanda’s foster father, Froi Tiedoll, as well as Marie. In fact, Winters Zakolo is a member as well. Mana and I were never officially members, but we’ve had connections, clearly. It’s just one more thing that put us on the outs with the rest of the Noah.

“The reality is that the Noah and the Black Order are similar. They’re far-reaching and influential organizations which seek to promote their own goals. The biggest difference is that the Black Order has a majority of members that want to improve the world around them. The Noah just want to further their own ends. And those ends can be fairly detrimental to the general populace at times.”

He turned to face me. “If you want my advice, either foster your relations with the Black Order, or avoid them both. Just my thoughts, though.”

We were silent for a bit after that, until suddenly his phone rang.

“Hello, this is Neah,” he started nonchalantly, then suddenly sat straight up, “Wait, seriously? Oh, thank the Gods. Hold up, I’ll be right over.” He was already getting up as he ended the call.

“Kanda’s awake, Allen, I need to go see him. Do you want to come with me, or do you want to stay here?”

Neah was giving me an out, I know he was. But sooner or later I would have to face up to reality, and the longer I let it sit, the greater the chance that these wounds would fester, and Kanda and I would never be able to repair what had been between us.

“I’m coming,” I told him, then followed him resolutely out the door.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who supports me and is patient with me. I swear, I will not give up on this work!

Love,

Red
Accept the Past, but look to the Future

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I still don't own DGM, clearly.

Author's Note(s): 1) Yikes, it's been forever since I last updated. ^^;; (And how many times has this happened?) Anyway, I am sorry for the long wait periods between updates. University is rough. 2) As always, a great big "Thank You!" goes out to my wonderful Beta, FandomlyCroft, who still puts up with me for some unknown reason.

Warnings: mentions of suicide attempts; discussion of mental health issues

Kanda POV

Waking up was not fun. My head felt like someone had taken a hammer to the inside, and they fucking refused to let up, continuing to pound away. The throbbing made me clench my teeth and let out a hiss of pain, and only my strength of will kept me from yelling out. When a nurse entered the room, I practically demanded some kind of painkillers to make the migraine go away. He refused at first, then made a call, and eventually agreed, plugging something into the IV drip in my arm. I sighed softly in relief as the pain in my head eventually began to fade. Unfortunately, the fading ache made me able to think again, and I realized just how deep in shit I was.

My wrists were secured to the bed in padded leather straps. The only reason for the hospital to have done that was if they believed I had attempted suicide. That’s absolutely not what happened, but given my medical and psychiatric history, they’re not too likely to believe me. Not to mention, passing out is one thing, a suicide attempt is entirely another: no way Neah will be able to spring me this time. Tiedoll is probably already on his way. The very thought made me groan.

The more I thought about it, the worse the situation got. The nurse refused to tell me anything (Why?), so I still don’t even know if I’ve done permanent damage to my liver. I can’t always think straight, but I have enough clarity now to realize that alcohol and painkillers were a terrible idea. Even if I’ve managed to avoid liver damage (and that’s a pretty big “if”), I now probably have a suicide attempt on my permanent medical record. I’m still underage, so they don’t have to release me; in fact, without my guardian here, they can’t.

Alma… I really have let you down, haven’t I? You gave me a gift that cost me your life, and I almost just threw it away.

When Neah arrived, I was ready for the lecture. He sat down next to my bed and looked straight at me. I steeled myself, struggling to hold his determined gaze.

“Kanda, I’m only going to ask this once, and I want you to be completely honest with me. I know for a fact that you’ve lied to me: you’ve lied about your mental state and your drug and alcohol use. Right now, I need you to tell the truth. Even if you never speak the truth again, I need you to do so
now.

“So tell me… Did you try to kill yourself?”

I held his gaze as I answered, hoping that he could both hear and see the truth of my answer.

“No, Neah, it wasn’t a suicide attempt. I know I shouldn’t have mixed Vicodin with hard alcohol, but I…”

*What? Wasn’t in my right mind? That’s the truth, but it’s not something I can say.*

“… I wasn’t thinking,” I finished weakly.

Neah nodded at me. “Okay. I can’t get you out the way I did last time. I assume you’re aware?”

“Yes.”

“Tiedoll is on his way – he should be here in a couple of hours.”

I felt my gut twist. I did not want to face Tiedoll. No doubt he would be disgustingly accepting, but who knew what he’d do after that? Both he and Marie had been worried about my behavior already – this incident combined with the whole fainting thing might be the last straw. They might decide they wanted me back home, so they could keep a better eye on me.

And I don’t want that. *My whole life is here... school, friends, boyfriend...*

I shot straight up.

“What happened to Allen?”

Neah blinked a couple times, shocked at the sudden change in topic, before he smiled softly. “He’s all right; he’s awake and doing fine.”

I relaxed just a bit at that, leaning back into the pillow.

“In fact, he’s probably doing better than he has been in a long time: I’m adopting him.”

“What?” I knew Neah cared for Allen, but it was still unexpected.

“Well, as it turns out, I’m his legal guardian. I have been for years.”

My eyebrows rose, and I opened my mouth to speak, but Neah continued on before I could ask.

“Mana, Allen’s adoptive father? He was my twin brother. I knew he had taken in a child, but it took years just to figure out that he had died; we never knew what happened to the kid. Small world, huh?”

“So... Cross is gone?”

Neah’s smile turned evil. It was an expression I had rarely seen, and it reminded exactly why the rest of the Noah had left him alone after he abandoned the family. “Oh, yes. He’s been reported to Child Protective Services, so no doubt he’ll be fleeing the country soon. For his own sake, he’d better not try to contact Allen ever again.”

“Well, if he does turn up, let me know. ‘Cause I’d like a run at him, too.”
“Mhmmm…” Neah avoided outright agreeing to my request, I noticed. “Speaking of Allen, would you like to speak with him?”

“…Could you get these cuffs off me?” I wanted not to care, I really did, but I hated not being able to move. I was being treated as something I wasn’t, and I really didn’t want the Moyashi to see me like this.

Neah frowned, “Let me talk to the nurse. I can’t guarantee anything, but I can try.” He left the room, and I watched as he talked with the nurse outside for a couple minutes. Eventually, he came back in and slipped the leather cuffs off. “I can’t close the blinds if these are off, is that ok?”

“Yeah, fine. Thanks, Neah.”

He nodded and smiled. As he was leaving, he turned back and spoke to me from the doorway. “For what it’s worth, you Allen are a good match, I think.”

From his smile I could tell that he didn’t mean as friends.

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Allen walked in looking nervous as all Hell.

“Hey, Kanda,” he murmured, trying to smile, and failing miserably. He looked like he was in physical pain.

“Don’t make that face, Moyashi, this has nothing to do with you,” I sighed.

“But…”

“No, listen. I made a couple shitty-ass decisions, and landed myself in here as a result. Quite frankly,” I smirked ruefully, “it was a long-time coming.”

“What do you mean?” Allen’s eyes widened.

“I—I haven’t been completely honest with you, Moyashi.” I spoke softly and slowly, fighting the instinct to shut my mouth. I’ve been silent for too long. Pushing people away is what has gotten me into this mess – I need to stop doing it if I want to get myself out.

“I… take painkillers. A lot of them.

“…And this isn’t the first time I’ve mixed them with alcohol.”

“Kanda…” Allen’s hand moved towards me, then hesitated from where he was sitting in the chair next to my bed.

I rolled my eyes. “Touching me isn’t going to burn you, you know. Honestly, just sit up on the bed, you’re making me feel awkward, baka moyashi.”

He blushed, but followed my suggestion as I shifted in the bed to make room. I swallowed and tried not to focus on the bandages clearly emerging from under his long sleeves. This is far from only about me.

“Honestly, substance abuse is a pretty big part of my life. I drink, I smoke cigarettes and pot, and I take way too many painkillers. And there’s no point pretending that it was justified; I get headaches a lot, but mixing alcohol with the painkillers I take to get rid of them was never going to help the
situation.” I went silent, and watched as he put one of his hands on top of mine.

“Kanda… I… I don’t want you to be mad at me, but I have to ask. What you did… was it a suicide attempt?”

That was a question I had absolutely expected. “No – it was an accident, I swear.”

“Ok… And, ummm… did this have anything to do with me? With what I did?”

I sighed. *I have to be careful how I answer this question.* “To say that the two things are completely unconnected would be a lie,” I began, feeling him tense beside me, “but it *was not your fault.* Like I said, this has been a long-time coming. Your attempt was like the last grain of rice that tipped the scale. Even if you hadn’t done it, something would probably have pushed me over that brink eventually. Honestly, it might have happened at random, just because I was having a low day. It wasn’t your fault, Allen.”

I felt his frame relax as he leaned into me.

“So… you won’t hate me?” He whispered, quiet.

“Of course not – I care about you a lot, Allen.” I turned my hand over, entwining my fingers with his. “And it’s because I care that I don’t want you to apologize.”

“…What?”

“You apologize for everything, baka moyashi. *This* isn’t something to apologize for, none of it is; not my condition, and *certainly* not yours. Of the two of us, I’m the one who should be sorry. I knew you were suffering, but I didn’t realize just how much. I’m sorry I didn’t help you enough before, and I want to be there for you now.”

“You saved my life, Kanda. You have nothing to apologize for.” Allen’s other hand came up and turned my face towards his. “It’s not going to be easy, Kanda, for either of us. But… I want to keep going with you, if you’ll have me.”

I smirked and leaned forward, touching his forehead with my own. “I wouldn’t have it any other way, baka Moyashi.” Then, changing the angle a little, I kissed him gently, feeling warmth fill me as I felt his smile against my own.

Allen stayed with me long enough that he actually fell asleep leaning into me. We had talked about school and friends and new movies, and eventually we pulled up Netflix and started watching *Bones,* as per his request. At some point (after 4 or so episodes, I think), I noticed that he’d gotten a little too quiet, and looked over to find him asleep against me. I couldn’t help the slight smile on my lips. *Baka…*

I sighed softly, looking out through the glass windows. I wished I could draw the blinds, for Allen’s sake, too, but I knew that wasn’t really an option, as per Neah’s deal. My eyes wandered across the hallway, taking it the nurse sitting behind a desk not far away. Suddenly, he looked up, turning towards the end of the hallway, then made his way around the desk to meet a man who had just entered my range of vision. I man I recognized with a sinking feeling as Froi Tiedoll.

He and the nurse both turned towards me, and he met my gaze. I watched his facial expression go from worried to startled, to confused, to relived, to amused within the span of about ten seconds.
Considering that Allen was still very obviously asleep against me, it didn’t take much to figure out what that last expression was about. *I am never gonna live this down.* He and the nurse both turned, and I watched as Neah entered my field of vision and jogged over to them. He was wearing his full doctor’s uniform, which made it pretty clear that he was officially on duty. Which explained why he hadn’t collected Allen. He talked animatedly with Tiedoll for a minute as the nurse headed off, before turning to look at me. *He’s fucking not even trying to hide his smirk, godsdamnit.* He turned back to Tiedoll with that shit-eating grin still plastered on his face, and led him away as they continued talking. I waited for them to come back, but as the minutes ticked by I felt my eyelids closing. Eventually, I fell asleep leaning right back up against the man that had come to mean more to me than I had ever thought possible.

---

I was awakened in the morning by movement against me. I was startled at first, but looking down to see the Moyashi blinking up at me with tired and confused eyes cleared the situation up quickly.

“Sleep well, Moyashi?” I asked him, smirking.

“It’s Allen, Bakanda! And yes, as a matter of fact I did,” he responded in a haughty voice, one that did little to distract from the blush blooming across his cheeks.

“Well, we’ll have to sleep together more often, then,” I teased, immensely pleased to see his blush grow darker.

“Shut up, Bakanda,” he finally managed to get out, though the words didn’t have the slightest bite to them.

I was just about to lean in to kiss him (Just when did I start to enjoy doing that so much? And when exactly did it become so natural?), when we were interrupted by Neah striding through the door. He wasn’t trying to hold back his grin this time, either.

“Good morning, you two! Do you want anything for breakfast?”

“Mmmm… Breakfast…” the Moyashi hummed, and I heard his stomach growl, right on cue.

I smirked at him for a moment before reality descended upon me again. “Neah, is Tiedoll here?”

“Yes,” he nodded.

“Can you get him?”

“Sure,” he answered, smiling empathetically.

The Moyashi placed a hand on mine. “Do you want me to stay?”

“Nah… Your stomach growling would totally ruin the mood.”

He stood up with a huff. “Fine, then! Have it your way!” He flashed me a quick smile before exiting the room. Neah followed him, shaking his head in amusement.

About 20 minutes later, Tiedoll was seated in silence beside my bed. The old man was usually so chipper and talkative that it was unnerving to see him so withdrawn. After a few incredibly tense minutes had ticked by, I finally broke the silence.

“What do you know? I mean, what did Neah tell you?”
“It doesn’t matter, Yuu. I want to hear what you have to say.”

I took a deep breath to steady myself. This is so much harder than it was with Allen or Neah… “I didn’t try to kill myself.” I saw him flinch, and realized I had been too blunt. “Honestly, I was in pain—literal, actual pain—and I took painkillers to get rid of it. Admittedly, the alcohol was not the wisest decision, but…” I trailed off, not quite knowing how to finish.

“But you weren’t in your right mind?” Tiedoll finished for me, eyebrows raised. My lack of answer clearly didn’t make him feel better. “Yuu, I’ve always trusted you to make your own decisions, and to make your own mistakes and then learn from them. That’s why I let you live alone, even though you aren’t even 18. Now, however, I can’t help but wonder if that trust was misplaced. I trusted you to act responsibly, so I never checked into your medical records—I viewed that as your own business, and left you handle it. Yuu, until today I was not aware that you have not filled your psychiatric medication prescriptions in years. Nor was I aware that you haven’t visited a therapist or a psychiatrist in just as long. But you have to have known that something was wrong. If you didn’t, that would concern me even more.

“The truth is, Yuu, that this entire situation is terrifying for me. I received a call from the hospital alerting me that you had attempted suicide, and my first thought was that only a few months after Daisya, I was going to lose you, too. Whether or not the label of “suicide attempt” was an accurate assessment or not is actually a little beside the point, considering that you are quite clearly suffering from mental health problems. And the worst part, for me, is that I was completely unaware of how bad it had gotten. If you had only spoken to me, I would not be questioning your judgement as much as I am. If you had told me that you were no longer seeing mental health professionals, and that you were no longer taking your medication, I would not be so concerned. There are, after all, plenty of legitimate reasons to refuse psychiatry. If you had told me that you were suffering from chronic headaches which you were trying to self-medicate, I would not be so concerned. That call would have hurt me regardless, but if I had known what was going on, I might not be questioning whether I can afford to leave you here.

“So tell me, Yuu, should I? Should I let you stay in this city, a plane ride away from me, where I will not notice if you are getting worse unless you tell me? Can I trust you to make the right decisions from now on? Can I trust you to reach out if you need help, and to not try to carry everything on your own two shoulders?”

I listened to Tiedoll’s mildly disconnected spiel in silence. He was right, of course, and his words stung for precisely that reason.

“Tiedoll, I…” I took a few deep breaths. “I don’t know if you can trust me,” I finally admitted. “I’m not used to sharing the burden, to relying on others. And there’s no denying that I’ve made some pretty poor choices. But I don’t want to leave.”

“Yuu, why do you want to stay? Is it for him? Or for you?”

I considered the question, and answered honestly. “Both. He needs me, Tiedoll, but I also need him. I want to get better, to work through this. And I genuinely feel that being by his side is going to help that happen.”

He was silent for a moment. Then he let out a breath and leaned over towards me, a soft smile on his face. “You really love him, don’t you?”

“I don’t know… Maybe? I don’t know what that word means, save for Alma.” I hesitated for a moment before continuing, “But I’m hoping he can teach me.”
Tiedoll leaned back in his seat, his smile a mixture of exasperation and resignation. “All right, Yuu, I’ll let you stay. But if this happens again, I’ll be dragging you off to the wilderness with me.”

I chuckled, “Sure.”

A few moments passed in a much more comfortable silence than before. But of course that couldn’t last, not with this man.

“So, his name’s Allen, right? What is it you like about him? And do you two often sleep like that?”

I groaned. *Kami, here we go…*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I appreciate all of you, especially those who have stuck with me through my prolonged absences. I promise, only death will prevent me from finishing this story.

Love,

Red

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!