**Arc of the World**

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at [http://archiveofourown.org/works/5634661](http://archiveofourown.org/works/5634661).

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**Arc of the World**

by [notgregarious](http://archiveofourown.org/users/notgregarious)

**Summary**

The world contains many wonders: A Captain of a Celestial Starship and his troublesome subordinates. A reclusive cartographer living alone in the jungle with a robot. Two reckless Bounty Hunters under a curse. A group of animals that can't seem to stay animals. An unrequited love, a secret and a lie... All that and a mythical starship said to hold all the world’s secrets!

**Notes**
The M rating is for swearing
Here Be Strangers

Chapter Summary

A group of Celestial Knights crash lands into Kenma's garden.

Prologue

“Sawamura!”

Daichi turned and waited with a smiled as Michimiya Yui ran up to him. She punched him lightly on the shoulder in greeting.

“You made it back just in time for the Captains’ meeting!” She said with a grin.

“Of course,” Daichi replied, “I wouldn’t miss out on seeing your beautiful face.”

“Such a charmer,” Michimiya laughed, “How was training your new recruits?”

“We have some promising ones,” Daichi winked, “I bet they could even give your squad a hard time.”

“Oh please, Sawamura,” Michimiya scoffed, “You couldn’t even give my squad a hard time.”

“Ouch,” Daichi winced.

They walked through the elaborate council room door and greeted the captains of the other squads. Daichi noticed that the shutters were closed over the windows. There had only been one other time that Daichi could remember the Conclave shutting out the light.

“Something serious must have happened,” Daichi whispered to Michimiya.

“This reminds me of five years ago,” Michimiya replied uneasily.

Daichi and Michimiya parted to take their assigned seats. Daichi noticed the seat across from him was empty. So Oikawa was skipping again. In his place was a bright red flower in a pot, most likely a tasteless prank. Michimiya had the misfortune of sitting next to it and she pinched her nose and made a face at Daichi. The room was actually full of potted red flowers, Daichi noticed. They were lined along the walls and there was a display of them in the middle of the room. Daichi wondered if someone had died.

Three members of the Conclave entered from the back of the room and lined up behind their seats at the head table. Their hoods were drawn over their faces. Daichi and the other captains stood and waited for them to speak.

“Welcome Captains of the Celestial Star Fleet,” boomed the voice of one of the Conclave members. “We thank you for your dedication this year.”

The captains bowed their heads in respect.
“Some of you may be wondering why we have decorated the Council with red flowers,” the Conclave continued solemnly, “It is to commemorate a grave loss.”

The Council room tittered with various expressions of shock and confusion.

“Five years ago, we committed an unforgivable crime. We allowed the Arc of the World to be lost to the wilderness of Yara, and what’s worse; we did not even try to recover it! Instead, we cowered in our starships!”

The room fell into a stunned silence. Daichi wondered what the hell they were even talking about. The Arc of the World? Yara? Daichi looked around the room. Most of the captain's faces mirrored his in confusion. But there were some who looked...ashamed.

“BUT WE WILL COWER NO LONGER,” the Conclave members shouted, “REMEMBER YOUR SHAME! REMEMBER YOUR COWARDICE! REMEMBER YOUR FAILURES AND YOUR DEFEATS!”

The ceiling fans turned on and wind circled the room. It tore apart the red flowers, spreading pollen and petals everywhere. Michimiya got a face full from the plant next to her and she bent over, coughing. The Conclave members’ hoods blew back and Daichi gasped. Starship Captains Ikejiri Hayato, Oikawa Tooru, and Terushima Yuji stood dressed in the Conclave's robes.

“Why?” Daichi said in shock, “Why are all of you…?”

“WE ARE NO LONGER CELESTIAL KNIGHTS! WE ARE THE ALASTOR!” Ikejiri shouted. His eyes were wild and an ecstatic expression that didn't look like his spread across his face.

“IKEJIRI!” Daichi roared, drawing his sword. He didn't understand what was going on, but the Ikejiri in front of him was not the Ikejiri he knew.

A ringing like bells echoed through the room as Celestial steel meet Celestial steel. Daichi’s eyes widened.

“Michimiya?” He whispered.

“Stand down, Sawamura,” Michimiya said coldly, “Don’t get in our way!”

Michimiya’s eyes were clouded and pale yellow dots speckled her nose. She spun her blade and Daichi stumbled back. Daichi rubbed his own nose and found the same yellow specs on the back of his hand. Pollen, from the red plants. Is that what was making Michimiya act this way? Their blades clashed together again as she attacked.

"Sorry, Michimiya," Daichi said, kicking her in the stomach. She fell against one of the tables and a pitcher of water fell on her head.

"Where is the Conclave?" Daichi asked, turning to the fake Conclave members, “Where are Shimada-San, Takinoue-San, and Mori-San!?"

“They were in the way of progress,” Oikawa said, sauntering up beside Ikejiri. “It was because of them that the Arc was lost. All that knowledge…gone!”

“I should have known the pollen wouldn’t work on you, Sawamura,” Ikejiri said, stepping towards him. “You always were thick-headed in your morals.”

“It will work on him soon enough,” Oikawa said, drawing his sword, “We just have to make him
drown in his failures, and when he struggles, he will finally breathe it in!”

Oikawa spun into an attack, his blade a shining blur. Daichi parried Oikawa’s thrusts, wielding his sword one-handed.

“Like I always say,” Oikawa grinned, “If you’re going to hit it, hit it till it breaks!”

“You can’t fight us all, Sawamura,” Terushima said, drawing his sword.

“What is wrong with all of you?” Daichi demanded.

“We are the night and shadows, the dust and darkness of the mind. We know everything you want to hide and everything you are ashamed of,” Oikawa, Ikejiri and Terushima chanted as they attacked from all sides. “We are the Alastor, the wanderers, the avengers. We will take back what was taken from us, our honour, our dignity, our knowledge!”

“Dai-Daichi! Go!” Michimiya was at his back. Her back was wet and her whole body shook. “Sorry about e-earlier!”

“Michimiya? How?” Daichi asked, blocking a strike from Terushima.

“I was thirsty,” Michimiya replied, wiping her soaked bangs out of her face.

“Get out of here and warn the others!” Michimiya ordered.

“You go instead!” Daichi argued.

“I inhaled a lot of that stuff you know! I could turn again at any moment!” Michimiya kicked a table at the three attackers.

“NOW!” She shouted.

Michimiya switched places with Daichi as he ran towards the door.

“DAICHI!” Ikejiri yelled. Michimiya met his sword with hers.

“Don’t…forget about me!” Michimiya said through gritted teeth.

Most of the other Captains were on their knees, struggling against the pollen’s affect. Some moved to block Daichi’s way but he fought through them. He made it into the hallway, a red and yellow cloud of pollen following after him. Pollen was travelling through the air ducts. Ikejiri and the others must have released the pollen throughout the entire building, Daichi realized.

Daichi turned the corner to find Suga fighting with Asahi. Suga struggled to keep up with the large man’s powerful strikes and he was being driven against a wall. Daichi drew his blade and diverted Asahi’s attack. He grabbed onto Suga’s hand and dragged him along behind him. Asahi chased after them in a blind rage.

“Daichi!” Suga sounded panicked. “What’s going on? Why is everyone going nuts?”

“Don’t breathe!” Daichi shouted over his shoulder, “It’s the pollen in the air!”

“Pollen?” Suga repeated in confusion.

“I’ll explain later,” Daichi said, “Right now we have to find our squad and escape!”
“Everyone should still be in the hangar!” Suga shouted. They ran through the hallways with Asahi close behind.

“Destroy the door!” Suga shouted as they neared the hangar. They both slashed above the doorway as they went through and the frame collapsed in a pile of rubble. They ran towards their starship. Daichi felt dread in his stomach as he heard yelling from aboard the ship.

“Captain! Hinata and Kageyama are fighting again!” Yachi shouted from the railing.

Hinata’s body suddenly came sailing towards them. Daichi caught him, falling to his knees from the impact. Kageyama jumped down from the ship. Suga drew his sword.

“Daichi, get Hinata back on the ship,” Suga ordered.

“Right,” Daichi rose to his feet, Hinata’s unconscious form in his arms. Daichi ran past Kageyama and up the gangway. Kageyama moved to attack them, but Suga blocked his blade.

“Are any of the others fighting, Hitoka-Chan?” Daichi asked Yachi as he came aboard.

“N-no!” Yachi said worriedly.

“The King just suddenly started attacking everyone,” Tsukishima said, wiping blood from a cut on his mouth.

The ship suddenly lurched and the three of them stumbled. Daichi looked over the side of the ship. The ropes that had been anchoring the starship to the dock had been cut. Suga smiled up at him.

“What are you doing?” Panic flooded through Daichi.

“TAKE THE WHEEL, YACHI!” Suga yelled, “GET OUT OF HERE!”

“Oh hell no!” Daichi was furious, “Not you too!”

Tears welled up in Yachi’s eyes as she ran towards the wheel. She steered the starship out of the port.

“SUGA, NO!” Daichi’s voice was ragged. “DON’T DO THIS!”

“Take care of the kids, Daichi,” Suga said, turning his back on him to face Kageyama, "And I'll take care of this one!"

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“Someone’s here,” Kuroo said, the red light from his laser pointer languidly drawing obscenities on the carpet. Their cat, simply named ‘Cat’, ignored him, preferring to lie in a puddle of sunshine near the window.

“Who?” Kenma asked without looking up from his game.

“Don’t know, but they seemed to be stuck in the front yard,” Kuroo answered lightly, “They’re making an absolute mess out of your demon garden.”
“It’s not a demon garden!” Kenma glared at him, “And I know you’re only telling me this because you want me to stop playing my game and pay attention to you.”

“But what if they cut Celebi’s vines?” Kuroo asked, floating over to him. Eyebrows waggled on his face panel.

“And is there any reason why you can’t go and do something about it?” Kenma asked dryly, leaning away from him.

“I wouldn’t want to ruin your lovely garden any further!” Kuroo said dramatically raising the triangular black panels that stuck up from each side of his head. Kuroo had begged Kenma to attach them, insisting they would make him more aerodynamic, but frankly he just liked to wiggle them around when he was excited and to Kenma they looked like a pair of cat ears. “You know I don’t know flowers from weeds and I don’t have a green thumb like you! Or any thumbs at all for that matter!”

“Ugh, how bad is it?” Kenma asked with a sigh. Kuroo projected the scene from the security cameras onto the wall in front of them. Three young men and a young woman were dangling from the giant pipe vine plant. Kenma had named it after his favourite legendary pokemon.

“Everything seems to be under control,” Kenma shrugged.

“Yeah, but that one has a sword,” Kuroo zoomed in on one of the men. He did indeed have a sword, one that he was desperately trying to reach. It was sheathed behind his back and he had managed to get ahold of it with his right hand but the problem was getting it out without chopping off a good portion of the back of his head.

“He’s never going to get that out,” Kenma scoffed.

“I wouldn’t say that, he looks very determined,” Kuroo rebutted, “And look at those arm muscles, I bet he’d do quite a number on Celebi’s vines with those!”

Kenma raised his eyebrows.

“Actually never mind, don’t looking at them,” Kuroo zoomed out, “Anyway, is that game really so important as to ignore the innocent lives of your fellow human beings?”

“Changing tactics?” Kenma remarked, “And here I thought you were more worried about my garden.”

“As a humanitarian and a Naturalist, I care deeply about both,” Kuroo declared.

“Okay fine,” Kenma put down his gameboy, “But only because you ‘care’ so much for their wellbeing.”

In the few seconds it took for Kenma and Kuroo to arrive on the scene, things had changed quite drastically for the worst to the misfortune of their mysterious guests. Kenma patted the giant vine plant and it released its unconscious victims, their limp bodies dropping unceremoniously to the ground.

“Are they dead…?” Kenma asked, wincing.

“Nope,” Kuroo answered as he scanned their bodies, “Just bruised and unconscious from lack of air. Celebi didn’t crush their bones yet.”
“Do they need CPR?” Kenma nudged one of their legs.

"They look fine to me," Kuroo said, hovering over them curiously.

Kenma quietly studied their appearance. The one with the arm muscles appeared tall and imposing with tanned skin and short black hair. He had gold markings decorating the Eastern angles of his face. Kenma would have guessed he was Kanani if it were not for the sleek blue, grey, and black uniform they were all wearing. He held a hand near the man's mouth and felt a warm puff of breath against his skin. So he was alive then.

The person next to him was another young man even taller than the first. This one had pale blond hair and the angular planes of his face were distinctly Northern. His glasses were broken and his left eye was bleeding from a cut just above his eyelid. Ouch. The man's eyebrows seemed drawn in a permanent scowl.

Blinking, Kenma moved on. The girl was next. She was short and petite, with the same pale skin and yellowy hair as the Northerner. Her hair was pulled to the side in a short ponytail and her face was pale and pulled into a grimace.

The last one was a rather plain-looking guy, with bright orange hair stuck in all directions and a goofy expression on his face. He was shorter than the other two men, possibly even shorter than the girl. His uniform was more wrinkled than the others and his sleeves were rolled to the elbow. Kenma wondered what such a motley crew of Celestial Knights was doing in the wild jungle of Yara.

“Let’s get them inside,” Kenma said.

It was a couple hours later when the first of them woke up. Kenma heard a yell followed by a series of crashes and bangs from the guest room. He rushed down the hall to find the muscular guy with the sword sprawled on the floor. He seemed to have banged his head on the side table and he rubbed it with a wince.

“This guy’s an asshole, I vote we throw him back to Celebi,” Came Kuroo’s petulant voice from the window. Kenma took in the broken window and guessed what happened. Kuroo’s circular body floated back into the room. His triangle ear panels were lowered and there was an angry expression on his face panel.

“What is that thing? And who are you?” The guy on the floor said with suspicion, “And where am I? Where is the rest of my squadron?”

“You guys were the ones trespassing and messing around in my front garden,” Kenma said with a frown

“And you just tossed me through the window!” Kuroo exclaimed, “After I saved your life!”

“I apologize,” the man said with embarrassment. He bowed his head, “I’m afraid my subordinates and I got lost while looking for someone. We didn’t know it was your property we wandered onto and we definitely didn’t mean to ruin your…garden.”

“Well you’re being awfully polite now,” Kuroo said with a low whistle.

“Your friends are safe,” Kenma said, “They’re in separate rooms down the hall.”

“By the honour of the Celestial Order, I thank you for your kindness and hospitality,” The man said, getting to his feet.
“So who are you? And what the hell are you doing here?” Kuroo asked.

“Pardon my rudeness!” The man blushed awkwardly and bowed his head, “My name is Sawamura Daichi, of the Celestial Knights.”

“A Celestial Knight, huh?” Kenma frowned, “And how did you end up here?”

“Our ship crashed,” He replied, with a grim look. “We ended up here by chance.”

“A Starship crashed all the way out here?” Kuroo said with a lilt to his voice, “You must’ve been taking the long way back to base, eh?”

Sawamura smiled wryly. “Something like that.”

“That’s enough, Kuroo,” Kenma said, raising his hand between them. “No need to antagonize him.”

“He threw me out the window, Kenma!” Kuroo protested.

“You probably deserved it,” Kenma replied. “Go check on his friends, see if they’ve woken up yet.”

There was a pause as Kuroo’s face panel changed to a sour expression. Kenma stared him down.

“…Fine…” Kuroo grumbled, zooming out of the room. With an internal sigh of relief, Kenma turned his attention to the stranger before him. All outward niceties evaporated from Kenma’s demeanor as he re-addressed the Celestial Knight.

“Now,” Kenma said coldly, “Tell me the real reason why you and your friends are here.”

“So these are your true colours, eh?” Sawamura said wryly.

“I have reasons not to trust Celestial Knights,” Kenma said. His amber eyes glowed in the unlit room. “Several ones.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Sawamura said seriously, “But I told you the truth. We crashed here by accident.”

“And what caused your ship to crash?” Kenma asked, “To my knowledge, starships don’t just crash. Forgive me for finding that highly suspicious.”

Sawamura fell silent. They were interrupted by a series of banging and yelling. Kenma jumped at a particularly loud crash and the eerie glow went out of his eyes.

“I think my subordinates have woken up,” Sawamura said.

Kuroo hovered nervously in front of the door of the next room. It had been easy enough to deal with the intruders when they were unconscious, but getting violently thrown out a window had given him cause for hesitation. Kenma’s garden was full of monstrous plants after all and on top of that, Kuroo was the one who had to fix the windows.

“Here goes nothing…” Kuroo muttered to himself. He floated forwards and knocked his forehead
against the door three times. Nothing happened.

“Um…room service?” Kuroo tried. The door suddenly opened. It was the short blonde girl, looking frantic as she immediately ducked into a bow.

“I-I-I-di-didn’t order any ro-ro-room se-service!” She stammered.

“No worries, I’m not actually room service!” Kuroo said cheerfully.

The girl looked up. Her face paled as she saw him and her whole body started trembling in fear. She was absolutely terrified. How on earth had she managed to become a Celestial Knight?

“Hey, hey, hey,” Kuroo said gently, “No need to be so sca-

Kuroo was cut-off mid-sentence by the sudden realization that he was busting through the wall behind him by no accord of his own. He bounced across the floor a couple times before rising up to his usual height. He turned on his scanners to make sense of what the hell just happened.

Through the crumbling hole in the wall, Kuroo’s scanners picked up the figure of the girl. Her body was tensed in a battle position, a sword of glowing celestial steel clutched tightly in her hands. Her eyes were screwed shut and her mouth was drawn in a tight line. One eye peeked open nervously.

“I-I’m going to de-defeat you and find my friends!” She declared, re-adjusting her grip.

“Listen, Girlie, you’ve got the wrong idea,” Kuroo said, floating back towards her. “I’m just your friendly neighbourhood robo-

A shining light swung towards Kuroo’s body and he ducked.

“HA!” He shouted gleefully, “You missed m-

Her second strike hit him up through the ceiling and into the attic. Dust swirled as Kuroo banged into several boxes of Kenma’s abandoned projects. A tiny wiper ejected from below Kuroo’s face panel and reached up to clear it. There was a crashing sound behind him and Kuroo whirled around to find the girl. She had jumped up after him and she was already moving to attack, her glowing sword arcing towards him.

“Shit.” Kuroo dodged through Kenma’s piles of junk. The girl quickly sliced her way through them. “Shitshitshitshit!”

“What did you do to my friends?” The girl asked, slicing right down the middle of an anatomical model.

“Stop trying to cut me in half and maybe I’ll tell you!” Kuroo yelled as her sword nearly shaved the black paint off the top of his head.

“HINATAAAA! SAWAMURA-SAAAANN!” The girl started screaming, “TSUKISHIMA-KUUNNN!”

“Oh for the love of-” Kuroo’s back clunked against something.

He turned around and realized a dusty old full-length mirror had trapped him. His camera scope adjusted with a quiet whirl as he saw the reflection of the girl in the air above him. At the last moment, she turned her sword to the side and hit him with the flat of her blade. Kuroo cursed as they both crashed through the floor and into the room below. Their landing was surprisingly soft and
feathers flew up in all directions. Kuroo realized they had fallen into the next room and if he wasn’t mistaken this room contained…

“Yachi! Are you hurt?” Said a male voice.

“Hinataaaa!” The girl’s voice was filled with relief and her eyes were teary.

“See? I didn’t do anything to your…” Kuroo trailed off as the both of them turned to him with cold looks. The orange-haired one, Hinata, drew his sword as well.

“Oh come oooonnn!” Kuroo said, backing up, “Can’t we start over?”

“What have you done with Captain and Tsukishima?” Hinata asked. The look in his eyes made Kuroo uneasy.

“He hasn’t done anything to anyone,” said a voice from the door. The three of them turned.

In the doorway was Sawamura smiling darkly at them with his arms crossed. Kenma peeked out from behind him.

“Captain!!!!” Hinata and Yachi lowered their weapons. They leapt towards him with outstretched arms.

“Idiots!” Sawamura swiftly whacked each of them on the head. “Do you just attack every kind person who saves you?”

“Eh?” Hinata blinked, “Saved us?”

“Ohmygosh…” Yachi’s face paled, “I’m so sorry!!!!”

“But we thought…” Hinata’s voice wavered, all traces of the serious and scary aura he’d had before were gone.

“We thought you were dead!” Yachi wailed. They both launched themselves at Sawamura again and this time he bore their hugs with patience.

“Why don’t we move this to the living room?” Kenma suggested quietly.

“Good idea,” Sawamura said, patting his two subordinates on the back.

Kenma lead the way out of the room. He stopped suddenly and Kuroo bumped into his back.

“Just a moment, Kuroo,” Kenma said without turning around, “Isn’t there one more?”

Kuroo sunk a bit lower in the air with a sigh.

Kenma waited poured tea for his guests in the living room. The walls shook slightly as several loud noises came from down the hall.

“Sugar and milk?” Kenma offered.
“Um, no thanks,” Sawamura said, glancing down the hallway with concern. Another loud bang echoed through the house. “Should we go help him?”

“He’ll be fine,” Kenma said calmly as he poured a tea for himself. He added two generous spoonfuls of sugar and some milk.

A couple minutes later, the last of the strangers walked into the living room with a pillowcase over his shoulder and a smirk on his face.

“You’re late, Kuroo,” Kenma scolded. Kenma was sitting in an armchair with one leg bent and tucked under his thigh, hands cupping his large mug with a disappearing Cheshire cat on it. Sawamura had been sitting in the other matching chair, but he’d risen when Tsukishima had entered the room. The other two occupied the couch.

“Gee, I’m so sorry,” Kuroo replied from inside the pillowcase.

“Tea and biscuits, really?” The tall blond said snidely, “And here I thought you guys were in danger.”

“Tsukishima, let him out of there!” Sawamura yelled, his face turning red.

Tsukishima let go of the open end of the pillowcase. It hung over Kuroo like he was a tiny ghost. Kuroo moved around, trying to get it off him, but the cotton fabric stuck to his smooth surface. Hinata and Tsukishima snickered at his attempts.

“Kenmaaa!” Kuroo wailed, floating towards him.

“Having fun?” Kenma asked Kuroo, hiding his smirk with a sip of tea.

“I would be having even more fun if you would help me get it off,” Kuroo grumbled. Kenma pulled it off him and let it drop to the floor. Kuroo breathed a sigh of relief.

“You can have a seat,” Kenma offered Tsukishima quietly. Tsukishima remained standing. The tall blond seemed a lot more apprehensive than the others, Kenma noted. Kenma and Kuroo exchanged quick glances.

“I’ll get straight to the point,” Tsukishima said, “Who are you and where are we? More importantly, how can we get out of here?”

“Oh that’s right!” Kuroo turned to Kenma, “Silly us, we haven’t even introduced ourselves! Guess we didn’t get a chance, what with all the vandalism and violence going on.”

“I’m Kenma,” Kenma said simply, “And this is Kuroo.”

“That thing has a name?” Tsukishima asked.

“I resent being called a thing,” Kuroo said, his face panel changing to a scowl. The tall blond simply shrugged.

“I’m Hinata Shouyou!” The orange-haired one grinned. Kenma blinked. Hinata’s grin was different from Kuroo’s. It was more…genuine…it felt like a ray of sunshine. “And the tall grumpy one is Tsukishima Kei and this here is Yachi Hitoka!”

“Don’t go telling them our full names!” Tsukishima hissed.

“Ahhh I’m actually A-Ally Liasis!” The girl stammered, waving her hands.
“Are you kidding me?” Tsukishima glared at her and she yelped, “That’s the worst aliases I’ve ever-”

“If Yachi gets a cool codename then I want one too!” Hinata said excitedly, “What about ‘Wind of the…Fast Wind’! Ah, wait no that has ‘wind’ in it twice.”

“…I stand corrected,” Tsukishima growled.

“And where are we exactly?” Sawamura asked.

“You’re in Yara,” Kenma answered.

“The Forest’s…The Jet-Black…” Hinata continued, in a world of his own.

“Yara…” Sawamura’s expression clouded, “So that’s why none of our navigational systems worked.”

“What’s Yara?” Hinata asked.

“Yara is what we call the parts of the world still unmapped,” Tsukishima explained grumpily, “Yara renders normal navigational systems inoperable and its inhabited by monsters, how do you not know this? The majority of the world is Yara!”

“Well sorry! I’ve never exactly gone for a stroll through the place before!” Hinata retorted.

“As I was saying earlier,” Sawamura said over his companions. “We need your help with finding something...”

“The front door is over there,” Kuroo said. An arrow appeared on his face panel.

“Kuroo, please,” Kenma held up his hand.

“Have you heard of the name ‘Ukai’?” Sawamura asked.

“Gesundheit,” Kuroo said.

Kenma studied Sawamura’s expression. His gaze was steady and his eyes clear. So he was the serious and straightforward type. Kenma wasn’t good at dealing with those.

“He retired from the Celestial Order three years ago,” Sawamura continued, “Right now, he’s our only hope.”

“Only hope for what?” Kuroo asked.

Sawamura paused before answering. “What I’m going to tell you next is top secret, you must never speak of it.”

“You’re actually going to tell them?” Tsukishima said, “Isn’t that against code or something?”

“Well maybe we don’t want to know about your mysterious homoerotic quest of friendship,” Kuroo said, slightly miffed.

“Does the code even apply anymore?” Hinata said, his expression grim. Yachi placed a hand over his and squeezed. “If we fail, this will affect them too.”

Tsukishima shut his mouth with a sour look.
“Wait, what do you mean this affects us?” Kuroo asked. Kenma stared suspiciously at Sawamura.

“The Order of Celestial Knights is no more,” Sawamura said, “We were attacked a week ago. The four of us here managed to escape but we don’t know if anyone else did.”

“Attacked by who?” Kenma asked. The four of them fell silent.

“It was an internal struggle,” Sawamura said finally.

“More like we were betrayed,” Tsukishima muttered.

“That’s not true!” Hinata shouted, standing suddenly. His fists were clenched and he scowled. “That wasn’t like him!”

“Hinata…” Yachi said worriedly.

Hinata turned his head to look at Sawamura. Sawamura wore a painful expression.

“He would never do that!” Hinata insisted.

“But he did!” Tsukishima said, “They all did…!”

“You take that back!” Hinata said, whirling around and grabbing the front of Tsukishima’s shirt.

“Hey, Kenma,” Kuroo whispered, “Don’t you think we should do something?”

"Don't wanna..." Kenma mumbled against his cup and slid further down in his chair.

“Hinata,” Sawamura’s voice was firm, “That’s enough!”

“Not until he takes back his words!” Hinata said through his teeth.

“Hinata…” Yachi’s eyes were filled with tears as she pulled on Hinata’s sleeve. “Tsukishima-Kun… too…”

Hinata let go of Tsukishima’s shirt. “Sorry…” he muttered.

“I apologize for all of this,” Sawamura said, running a hand through his short hair. “Suddenly imposing on you and asking for help.”

“Just what do you expect us to be able to do?” Kenma asked. He set his tea mug down on the coffee table. “Kuroo and I aren’t fighters or heroes or anything like that and we’ve never even heard of the person you’re looking for.”

“But you know Yara well enough to live here,” Sawamura interjected.

“We have no obligations to the Celestial Knights and I fail to see how your circumstances will come to affect us,” Kenma said forcefully, “We don’t want any trouble.”

“You said earlier that you have reasons to distrust the Celestial Knights,” Sawamura said quietly, “I am asking for your help not as a Celestial Knight, but as Sawamura Daichi.”

“We have no obligations to ‘Sawamura Daichi’ either,” Kenma said coldly. “This isn’t our fight.”

“But you might be attacked!” Yachi said.

“Do you have any idea what a war between Celestial Knights would entail?” Sawamura said.
“Nevermind politics, the collateral damage just from fighting would be disastrous!”

“Then we’ll move out of the way,” Kenma replied, “Thanks for the warning and everything but we’ve managed to hide from the rest of the world for this long and we’ll continue to do so in the future.”

“You’re just going to run?” Hinata was aghast.

“Yup,” Kenma said, standing up and picking up his mug. He began clearing the coffee table, handing their untouched teas to Kuroo.

“You can’t keep running if everything is destroyed,” Tsukishima muttered.

“Maybe we can,” Kenma said, “You may stay the night, but I want you all to leave by tomorrow morning.”

“But-!” Sawamura held up a hand to stop Hinata.

“We respect your decision,” Sawamura said, “You’re right, this is our fight and our responsibility as Celestial Knights.”

“There are maps in my study room,” Kenma said, turning towards the kitchen. “Feel free to use them.”

Kuroo nodded awkwardly at them before following Kenma out of the room.

“I handled that badly,” Sawamura said, leaning forwards and resting his head in his hands.

“I doubt even Suga-San could have won him over,” Hinata said glumly. “Do you think he escaped?”

“I don’t know,” Sawamura replied after a moment.

“Are you sure about this, Kenma?” Kuroo asked as they did the dishes. “This doesn’t seem like you.”

“What do you mean by that?” Kenma asked, placing a wet mug on the drying rack.

“I mean, aren’t you the type to help when someone needs you?” Kuroo said. He was hovering over the drying rack, his bottom compartment blowing hot air to dry the dishes. “Isn’t that why you always play the hero in those video games?”

“That’s just how the game story goes,” Kenma replied.

“But doesn’t this seem like an adventure right out of one of your games?” Kuroo persisted. “And you really could help them find that ‘Ukai’ person, I know you could!”

“I don’t want to,” Kenma replied.

“But they need your help,” Kuroo said uneasily, “Won’t you at least help them find their way out of Yara?”
“I already said NO,” Kenma said, slamming a plate down in the water. It shattered against a mug and Kenma flinched. Kuroo’s side panels lowered and he stopped drying the dishes.

“Are you hurt?” Kuroo asked.

“I’m fine,” Kenma said, waving him away, “Just…go make sure they have blankets, I’ll finish up here.” Kenma expected Kuroo to rebuke him for breaking the dish, to yell at him to get his hands out of the water before he cut himself. Instead, Kuroo just quietly muttered, “Alright…” and slunk out of the room.

Kenma stared down into the soapy water and tried not to feel guilty. It wasn't working very well.

Kuroo found Sawamura and the others in Kenma’s study. Sawamura stood with his hands clasped behind his back, staring up at Kenma’s wall of maps. Hinata and Yachi were looking through Kenma’s bookshelf and Tsukishima leaned against a wall, leafing through a book.

“No need for any maps, Ladies and Gents,” Kuroo said, floating through the doorway with what could only be described as a ‘swagger’. “For your personal tour guide has arrived!”

“Yeah, we know, we could hear you practicing what to say outside the door,” Tsukishima said without looking up.

“Geez, tough crowd,” Kuroo muttered.

“Are you and Kenma going to help us now?” Yachi asked, perking up hopefully.

“Er, well uh, Kenma’s busy,” Kuroo said, “But I’m going to help you!”

“What made you decide to help us?” Tsukishima asked, raising one eyebrow.

“I’m always this kind,” Kuroo replied.

Hinata and Tsukishima stared blankly at him.

“There’s no need to look at me like that…” Kuroo said, mildly offended.

“We appreciate your help,” Sawamura said, stretching out a hand. They both looked down at his hand awkwardly. Sawamura let his hand drop to his side.

“No problem,” Kuroo said, “Kenma might not like Celestial Knights, but I can’t recall ever having any bad experiences with them myself!”

"I'm glad to hear that," Sawamura said warmly.

“Well, until recently anyways,” Kuroo added, looking at Tsukishima and Yachi.

“Once again, I’m sorry about that…” Yachi said, bowing her head in embarrassment.

“I’m not,” Tsukishima said. Sawamura glared warningly at him.
“Anyways, where is this ‘Ukai’ of yours?” Kuroo asked.

“He lives on the island of Odalis,” Sawamura said, “But that information is years old. He could be anywhere now.”

“Do you have anything belonging to him that I could track?” Kuroo asked.

“You can track? What are you, a dog?” Tsukishima snickered.

“Do you want my help or not?” Kuroo asked him.

“We do!” Sawamura said quickly, before Tsukishima could reply. Sawamura dug through a bag clipped around his waist. “We don’t have anything personal of his, but we have a photograph.” Sawamura showed Kuroo a photograph of a muscular old man in frog-patterned swim trunks riding on top of a whale shark swimming through a river of lava.

“Incredible,” Kuroo said in amazement. “I don’t even know what to comment on first.”

“Will it help?” Sawamura asked.

“Not at all,” Kuroo replied bluntly.

“Some help you are,” Tsukishima said sarcastically.

“Hey, I can get you out of Yara for starters,” Kuroo said, “And after that, I’ll hack into some systems, see if he pops up anywhere, savvy?”

“Thanks,” Sawamura said, “You’re being a great help.”

“Nah, not really,” Kuroo said sheepishly, “I just… want to help Kenma. He says he’ll run if trouble comes across our door, but I know he likes this place and I’d like to protect it any way I can.”

“You’re surprisingly a good guy after all,” Hinata said.

“What have I been telling you?” Kuroo said in exasperation.

“Just what kind of guy is Kenma?” Tsukishima asked, “And why is there a makeup brush on his desk?”

“I don’t like how you said that,” Kuroo said testily, “And Kenma uses that to brush away his eraser bits without smudging the drawing.”

“Wait, he drew all these maps?” Sawamura asked.

“Yup!” Kuroo answered proudly, “Isn’t he good? They’re all drawn from memory too!”

Sawamura fell silent as he looked over the maps again, this time with a strange look of wonder in his eyes.

“Have you been together for a long time?” Yachi asked, walking over to them. She ran a hand lightly over Kenma’s desk.

“For as long as I can remember,” Kuroo said, “He can’t live without me!”

“Did he build you?” Hinata asked curiously.
“He sure did!” Kuroo gushed, “Isn’t he smart?”

“Whoa!” Hinata’s eyes shone with excitement, “Do you have lasers? Or x-ray vision? Or can you create force fields or something?”

“All that and more!” Kuroo’s face panel grinned.

“Why do you have a ‘w’ where your right eye should be?” Yachi asked.

“It’s my hairstyle,” Kuroo replied.

Tsukishima snorted.

“Wow, rude,” Kuroo said, faking offense.

“Don’t mind him, he’s just got a giant stick up his ass,” Hinata said, “It’s why he’s so freaking tall.”

“Do they always argue?” Kuroo asked, sidling up to Yachi.

“Well…” Yachi glanced to the side, “They aren’t usually together so much.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Kuroo asked, tilting to the side.

“We have…another team member that didn’t make it out,” Yachi explained softly, “Hinata was always with him.”

“Like me n’ Kenma?” Kuroo asked gently.

“Yeah,” Yachi tried a smile.

“Well,” Kuroo floated a bit higher in the air as if he were straightening up, “We’ll leave first thing in the morning so you guys should get some rest. I’ll prepare a few things for the trip.”


Kuroo showed the group to their rooms. One by one, the lights in the house went out. Kuroo paused in front of Kenma’s room. A quick scan showed Kenma was already asleep and Kuroo entered quietly. He flew over to the small workbench near the foot of Kenma’s bed as Kenma slept. He tucked various tools away in his compartments, things he’d need for his maintenance on the trip. Kuroo thought about leaving a note, but he didn’t know what to say. Kenma would know everything as soon as he woke up anyway.
The Boiling Sea was a relatively shallow body of water that covers a large expanse of active underwater volcanoes. It runs from the islands of Penth in the Third Quadrant to the island trio of the Delmares at the edge of the Fourth Quadrant. The city fleets usually skirt around it, rarely travelling straight through. One tumble overboard meant instant death if you were lucky, and painful and agonizing third degree burns if your fleetmates were cruel enough to scoop you out immediately.

However, during the winter months of the Third Quadrant, the occasional wandering chef or food fanatic could be seen crossing into the middle of the Boiling Sea in search of the lava shrimp, a deep purple-coloured crustacean famous for being the only thing capable of living in the Boiling Sea, as well as its sweet and tender flesh. The lava shrimp typically hangs out around the tops of the volcanoes, frustratingly within reach if not for the extremely hot steam rising off the water capable of inflicting burns a couple hundred yards up.

Often hailed as ‘The Heart of Passion’ by the culinary world, the lava shrimp is eaten alive. The shrimp is split down the middle and pinned immobile to the plate. A special spoon is used for scooping out the bright red flesh that pulses from adrenaline at being exposed to the air. One lava shrimp was a fortune. Or a mouthful if you were stupid enough to eat it.

There are several ways to go about capturing lava shrimp, all of which were heavily guarded secrets with blood-soaked reputations. This history has resulted in another name for the lava shrimp by people of less reputable means, the ‘Blood Shrimp’.

Dominus Semi peered into the insulated container full of live lava shrimp. He drew a dagger from his belt and deftly stabbed into the container. He brought a skewered shrimp to his face and inspected the colour and shape of its exterior. Steam rolled off its writhing dark purple body. He lowered it to the plate in front of him and quickly snapped the gold clamps in place around the shrimp’s middle and claws. He slit the back of the shrimp and eased it open. Its bright red insides pulsed, the orange veins popping against the scarlet.

An attendant handed him a thin golden spoon that had a sharp silver edge along one side. Dominus Semi eyed the merchant across from him before elegantly slicing into the lava shrimp with the bladed side of the spoon. The Dominus’ gaze was steely as he observed the calm look on the merchant’s face.

The merchant appeared young, no more than his second decade. He had a sweet face, round and soft at the edges with the golden tan of the upper middle class. He was thin and on the shorter side. His
brown hair was brushed back with a tuff of chemically altered blond hair hanging between his eyes. However, his frame suggested muscle and his dark eyes were sharp.

He’d strolled aboard the Dominus’ galleon with the cocky swagger of a peacock, claiming to have wares better than anything the Dominus’ had ever seen. Dominus Semi had been skeptical. He’d seen merchants like this one a million times a week, each overflowing with arrogance and pride over false trinkets that were astronomically overpriced.

Normally, the merchant would have been thrown out immediately, had he not strolled in with the container of lava shrimp tucked under his arm.

“Care for a taste of your own wares?” The Dominus asked, offering the spoon to the merchant. “Take care not to cut your mouth.”

“You are too generous, Dominus Semi,” The man said, his smile widening as he bowed graciously. The merchant brought the spoon to his mouth, neatly sliding the dull side between his lips. He moved the spoon in a circular scooping motion to avoid slicing open his lips with the bladed edge. Dominus Semi raised his eyes in surprise. Not many could eat from a lava shrimp spoon without spilling some of their blood.

“You seem cultured,” Dominus Semi remarked.

“It comes with the trade,” the merchant replied smoothly.

“So it seems.” A new spoon was placed at the Dominus’ side and he scooped out another bite of the lava shrimp. This time he partook of the flesh, rolling it around with his tongue as he explored the flavor. It was sweet and meaty, with the unique salty heat that was so sought after.

The Dominus tilted his head back slightly as he swallowed, relishing the taste.

“Is it to your satisfaction, Dominus?” The merchant asked.

“Where did you say you were from again, Mr.?” The Dominus asked as he scooped out another small bite.

“It’s Imeth, Egar Imeth,” the merchant said, “And I’m from the city fleet Osiris of the Seventh Line.”

“The Seventh Line is pretty far from the center of the Boiling Sea,” Dominus Semi remarked.

“I operate a Loneship,” Imeth replied easily, “It’s a risk, certainly, but I find such risks essential in this business.”

“You’re a shrewd businessman, Mr. Imeth,” Dominus Semi laughed, “And rare in your sense of daring.”

“We sail on dangerous seas, Dominus,” Imeth smiled, “And rarely is Ophiuchus kind to those who cross its waters.”

“You speak like a true sailor,” Dominus Semi said, setting down the spoon.

The change in his voice was subtle as his eyes narrowed. The merchant leapt to his feet. Something sharp poked the middle of his back and he cursed as he reluctantly raised his hands.

“How’d you know, Dominus?” The man drawled.
The Dominus leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"Your little performance was commendable, from your speech and actions to the tiny merchant pin of Celestial steel at your cuff. And that mirror water accompanying your single lava shrimp was an excellent trick! Your knowledge of the world must be quite vast," Dominus Cathal smirked, "However, my knowledge is even vaster, Mr. Imeth. Or should I say, The Mirage?"

"Was it too much? I really should have listened to my guts on that one," Nishinoya winced.

"You’re a fool for coming here and waltzing right inside," the Dominus gloated, "When you’re nothing more than a rat who crawled from the dirt into the water, muddying it up."

"That’s rather rude," Nishinoya grinned, "I’m just trying to make a living, same as you."

"I know what you’re after, Bounty Hunter!" the Dominus declared triumphantly, "And you can admire it all you like after I’ve mounted your head on my wall!"

The Dominus’ galleon shuttered as an explosion went off below them.

"Wha!?” The Dominus was thrown to the side and fell out of his chair with a painful thud.

Nishinoya used the confusion to slide a stiletto out from his sleeve and knife the guard behind him up between his ribs. The bounty hunter leapt on top of the table and looked down at the Dominus.

"Thanks for entertaining me, Dominus," Nishinoya grinned, "But my companion has already fetched what I came here for."

With that, Nishinoya grabbed the container of mirror water off the table and ran out of the room.

"GUARDS!" Dominus Semi yelled in outrage.

Footsteps thundered down the hall towards Nishinoya. He licked his lips as he lifted the lid of the container and tossed it behind him. The Dominus’ guards each got a face full of mirror water as they bore down on their target. The mirror water contorted their vision, multiplying everything they saw in a confusing mess of images.

Nishinoya dodged through them easily, laughing as he did so. The bounty hunter burst onto the deck to the shock of the Dominus’ crew. The thrum of a nightrider engine resounded above the ship. A rope was flung over the side and the bounty hunter grabbed onto it.

"Saeko, my darling, you have perfect timing as usual!" Nishinoya declared as he climbed aboard the small black aircraft. "I’ve got a ring for you as a token of my love!"

Nishinoya ripped the pin from a grenade with his teeth before dropping the grenade onto the deck of the Dominus’ ship.

"Thanks, Yuu-Chan!" Saeko laughed, allowing him to place it on her index finger. She swung it around as they flew off.

Saeko and Nishinoya meet up with her younger brother at the nearest inlet. He was waiting on the shore, sitting on his parked nightrider. A little ways away from him was a strange animal tethered to a tree.

"Is that the qilin?" Nishinoya asked as they drew near.

"Sure is," the younger Tanaka replied with a grin.
They walked over to it. It was a deer-like creature, with long thin legs, pale pink antlers and long lashes. Its body was covered in short golden fur with tiny gold scales on its underbelly and down its legs. It had light brown freckles across its face and down its back.

“It’s so pretty!” Saeko exclaimed.

"I read somewhere that qilins look like a giraffes,” Nishinoya remarked, “But this is way better!”

“It was easy as pie taking it right out from under the nose of that Dominus bastard!” Tanaka grinned.

“We’re going to be rich!” Nishinoya high-fived Ryuu.

“Well, give me a shout after you’ve delivered it,” Saeko said, revving her nightrider, “I’ve got places to be!”

“Later, sis!” Tanaka shouted as she drove off over the water.

Nishinoya and Tanaka set up camp quickly. Night had already fallen over the inlet and the beach glowed with fluorescent algae.

“So shall we head out first thing in the morning?” Nishinoya asked, tearing into his fried fish.

“It’ll take us about 4 hours to get to the back markets of Nokomis,” Tanaka replied, doing the same with his, “We have a couple hours after dawn before we have to leave to meet up with the Captain.”

“Have you notified her yet?” Nishinoya licked his fingertips.

“Yup,” Tanaka burst into a silly grin, his cheeks flushing, “She’s going to be so happy~!”

“Ahhh~ I can see her beautiful smile now!” Nishinoya said, his own mouth widening into a blissful smile. “And all the gold she’ll give us!”

Behind them, the qilin shook with fear on its thin legs as it listened to their conversation. The two bounty hunters didn’t notice as the qilin’s antlers flushed blood red. It reared up on its hind legs and transformed. Its fur grew into long hairs and its herbivorous teeth elongated into fangs. Its antlers grew in size and seized the two bounty hunters, raising them into the air.

“Whoa! What’s going on!?” Nishinoya panicked.

“Yuu, look down!” Tanaka shouted.

Nishinoya’s gaze followed the antlers down to the qilin’s transformed body. It had taken on a humanoid form and was dressed in golden robes. Its skin shone pearly pink and it still had the light brown freckles spread over its body. It appeared to be chanting something low and deep. Red lines appeared all over the two bounty hunters’ bodies.

“Greedy fools…” the qilin said, “You wish to sell me for gold? Then gold I shall give you!”

“It’s cursing us!” Nishinoya shouted, struggling against the qilin’s antlers.

“I didn’t know these things could do that!” Tanaka yelled back, “Aren’t they supposed to be a good omen?”

Fire started from the base of the qilin’s antlers and quickly engulfed them entirely. Nishinoya and Tanaka passed out as the flames engulfed them too.
Nishinoya woke up on the beach. His head pounded and the inside of his mouth tasted of soot and grime. The qilin was nowhere in sight.

“…Yuu…”

“Ryu…?” Nishinoya coughed and spat out a mouthful of sand.

“Did you have the same fucked up dream I did?” Tanaka groaned, “Or did we both fall into a toaster while we slept?”

Nishinoya pulled himself into a sitting position. Tanaka was beside him, curled up into a ball. Nishinoya went to shake Tanaka’s shoulder but he froze as he caught sight of his hand.

“Uh Ryu… I have good news and bad news,” Nishinoya said glumly.

“Fuck me…” Tanaka said, opening his eyes and looking at his left hand.

“Looks like pretty soon we’ll have our weight in gold,” Nishinoya said weakly. He flopped back down in the sand and groaned. His new solid gold pinky finger shone in the morning sun.

The group headed out early in the morning before Kenma woke up. Kuroo blazed a trail through the brush with his laser, swinging it back and forth. The others followed behind him.

“Are you sure you didn’t want to say goodbye to Kenma?” Yachi asked.

“It’s fine,” Kuroo lied.

“Should we be making such an obvious path?” Tsukishima said skeptically.

“If you want to clear your own path and walk into some poison ivy you can go right ahead,” Kuroo replied.

Tskuiishima grumbled, but continued following Kuroo’s laser-cleared path. The group paused as the ground rumbled beneath their feet.

“Was that an earthquake?” Yachi asked. The ground shook again and they nearly stumbled. A cloud of dust rose above the line of trees behind them.

“Um, I assume that’s not good…” Sawamura said.

A hulking figure with a pair of huge leathery grey feet trampled through the trees towards them.

"St-stay back!” Hinata drew his sword and licked his lips.

“Are you an idiot?!” Sawamura grabbed the back of his collar and dragged him back. “Get behind me!”

“Wait, are you idiots actually going to fight that thing?!” Kuroo exclaimed. “It’ll snap your fancy sword like a toothpick!”
“I’ve fought a raging elephant before,” Sawamura said, “Sure it might be bigger, but it’s nothing I can’t handle!”

Sawamura darted forwards, his blade a gleaming streak as he ran. He sliced across the beast’s front legs and it stumbled.

“See?” Sawamura panted, “Told you I got it.”

“Except that’s not an elephant,” Kuroo said flatly.

Sawamura looked up at the beast and the blood drained from his face. A giant reptilian face glared down at him. Its back had a hard shell with white spikes across the top and along the sides.

“That’s a dinosaur,” Kuroo said. “And you just gave it a paper cut.”

“An Ankylosaurus…” Tsukishima breathed in wonder.

"Not the time, Tsukishima!” Hinata said as the four of them backed up slowly.

They heard the sound of smashing wood and several trees fell from the left of the giant dinosaur.

“Get back!” Kuroo yelled, “Watch out for its tail!”

Its tail was like a mace and it nearly took off Sawamura’s head, missing it by mere centimeters. Sawamura stumbled back to the others, his eyes wide with panic.

“How the fuck do you fight a dinosaur?!” Sawamura asked Kuroo as they group ran.

“You fucking don’t!” Was Kuroo’s answer.

“Hey, Mr. Robot,” Hinata said, waving his hands to get Kuroo’s attention. “Can you maybe shoot those lasers now?”

“My lasers aren’t going to do anything to its leathery skin and shell!” Kuroo said.

“Can you at least distract him while we run away!” Tsukishima suggested.

“You think he’s going to react like a cat or something?” Kuroo retorted.

“I think it’s worth a shot!” Sawamura shouted.

Kuroo turned around and blasted his laser.

“Over there, big guy!” Kuroo shouted, “Go chase the dot!”

The Ankylosaurus stopped chasing them. It regarded the burning red dot suspiciously, following it with its eyes. Kuroo swung the laser back and forth, singeing a small line in the dirt. The Ankylosaurus’ big dumb head followed its every move.

“I can’t believe this…” Kuroo said in amazement. He drew a dick on a tree behind the dinosaur and it head-butted into it, smashing the tree to pieces. Kuroo moved the laser to another tree. The Ankylosaurus regarded it curiously, seemingly surprised to see it still intact. Tsukishima moved closer to Kuroo.

“Hey, let me try,” Tsukishima said.
“What? No, it’s my laser!” Kuroo said.

“So? Let me have a turn!” Tsukishima insisted.

“I want to try too!” Hinata said, jumping in. He jumped and snatched Kuroo’s body out of the air.

“Ah! Hinata, you asshole!” Tsukishima said angrily.

“Whahahaha! Look he’s dancing!” Hinata laughed as he moved Kuroo’s body in circles. The Ankylosaurus’ head jerked from side to side as it tried to keep up with Kuroo’s laser.

“Chibi-Chan…please…” Kuroo said uneasily, “I’m getting dizzy!”

“Ahaha! It’s kinda cute,” Hinata said, “Hey, can we keep it?”

“Absolutely not,” Sawamura said firmly.

“Ehh? But I’ll take care of it!” Hinata pouted.

“Just how do you plan on taking care of a twenty-foot dinosaur?” Sawamura asked, his patience wearing thin.

“You’re getting fingerprints on my face panel!” Kuroo complained.

“Yeah, Hinata’s definitely not mature enough to take care of a pet,” Tsukishima smirked, “I, on the other hand-”

“We are not keeping a dinosaur as a pet and that’s final,” Sawamura interrupted.

“Over there, Tobio!” Hinata said, waving Kuroo’s laser, “That’s a good boy!”

“Tobio?” Tsukishima seemed personally affronted by Hinata’s name choice.

“Doesn’t its tail remind you of a volleyball?” Hinata said. “And he’s all prickly just like Kageyama and both of our first meetings were horrible! It totally fits!”

“I can’t argue with that,” Sawamura remarked. Even Tsukishima was at a loss for a rebuttal.

“Come with us, Tobio!” Hinata said. He walked along the path backwards, leading the Ankylosaurus behind them.

“You aren’t seriously going to let them bring this thing along, are you?” Kuroo asked Sawamura in a panic. “Can’t you control your children?”

Sawamura searched his brain for something clever to say, but settled for, “Single parenting is hard.”

“Hey, do you think Tobio will let us ride on his back?” Hinata said excitedly.

“His back is covered in spikes!” Tsukishima pointed out.

“Not entirely,” Hinata argued, “Come on, don’t you want to try riding a dinosaur?”

Tsukishima did want to try riding a dinosaur.
“We got lost.”

The look on Kenma's face was withering. The broken fragments of Kenma’s precious disappearing Cheshire cat mug were scattered all over the front step and Kenma’s slippers were splattered with tea.

“I know what you’re thinking and you’re entirely right!” Kuroo said quickly, “I should have told you before leaving or at least left a note!”

“Where’s my garden?” Kenma’s voice was colder than Kuroo had ever heard it before. Kuroo seemed to physically shrink under Kenma’s stare.

“Um…Tobio ate it…” Kuroo mumbled.

“Tobio?”

“The dinosaur,” Kuroo laughed awkwardly. “Man, that’s a story! First it was chasing us and trying to eat us, but then Chibi-Chan managed to befriend it somehow and turns out he’s a vegetarian, who would have thought?”

Kenma’s expression was absolutely freezing.

“Do you think we should help him out?” Hinata whispered. The four of them were sitting on top of Tobio’s back. The Ankylosaurus’ back was surprisingly easy to sit on since it was mostly flat and its thick skin provided many places to hold on. The spikes functioned as nice backrests too.

“He’s the one who got us lost,” Tsukishima said with a shrug. “And frankly, I’m glad Tobio ate that stupid plant.”

“Still, I feel kinda bad about it,” Yachi said.

“Then do you want to get off Tobio’s back and dodge his feet again?” Tsukishima asked.

“I-I’ll stay up here!” Yachi squeaked.

“Honestly, I don’t think any of us could get down from here even if we wanted to,” Sawamura said.

Without Kuroo’s laser to (distract) guide it, the Ankylosaurus had thrown itself into eating. Celebi’s vines had been one of the first to fall victim to Tobio’s jaws, much to Tsukishima’s delight. Now, having worked its way through Kenma’s garden, Tobio occupied itself by munching on nearby shrubs.

Kenma raised both hands to his head and rubbed his temples.

“You’re going to go with them no matter what I say, aren’t you?” He sighed.

“Does that mean you’re going to come with us?” Kuroo perked up.

“I don’t seem to have a choice,” Kenma replied flatly, “You might show up in the remains of my garden with a dragon next time if I don’t.”

“That’s right!” Kuroo said gleefully.

“Let me get my stuff…” Kenma muttered.
“Woohoo! Roadtrip!” Kuroo cheered, flying in circles around Kenma.

Kenma packed quickly. The presence of a huge bored dinosaur wandering around his front lawn did wonders for his motivation. Kuroo was practically bouncing up and down as he watched Kenma pack and generally got in the way. Cat meowed from the floor as he weaved between Kenma’s legs.

“Now what am I going to do about you?” Kenma said to himself. He bent down to scratch under Cat’s chin.

“We won’t be gone for long,” Kuroo said, “We can leave food out for him and there’s the pond in the back for water if his dish runs dry. He was originally a wild cat anyway.”

“That’s true…” Kenma pulled Cat into his arms and pressed his face into Cat’s warm fur. Cat meowed impatiently and Kenma kissed the top of his head before letting him go.

“We’ll be back soon, okay Cat?” Kenma said, rising to his feet, “Stay out of trouble!”

The Ankylosaurus had moved onto the foliage in the backyard by the time Kenma was ready. Kenma stared up at the giant dinosaur. Hinata waved down at him.

“Here we go!” Two metal arms extended out of Kuroo’s body and lifted Kenma into the air. Kuroo gently placed Kenma on the Ankylosaurus’ back next to the others. Kenma sat down with his legs bent and the bottoms of his feet together.

“You couldn’t have lifted us onto the dinosaur’s back?” Tsukishima said, shooting Kuroo a dirty look.

“You and Sawamura are too heavy and Chibi-chan and Yachi were on before I could offer,” Kuroo replied.

“Wait, if Kuroo didn’t lift you then how did you get on?” Kenma asked.

“Oh, we jumped up!” Hinata said, throwing an arm around Yachi’s shoulders.

“You…jumped up…?” Kenma echoed.

“He grabbed Yachi’s hand jumped onto its head like an idiot, stepped right between its eyes,” Tsukishima added, “Sawamura and I climbed a tree and then dropped down.”

“I see…” Kenma said.

“I’m grateful you’re joining us,” Sawamura said, clapping Kenma on the back. “Lead the way!”

“Alright…but how do you steer this thing?” Kenma asked.

“Like this!” Hinata shouted, jumping up and grabbing Kuroo.

“Not again!” Kuroo groaned as Hinata pointed him forwards. Kuroo reluctantly turned on his laser and Hinata swung him around as a demonstration. Kenma lifted a hand to his mouth as he stifled a laugh.

“Ah! Kenma laughed!” Hinata said excitedly. “It’s the first time I’ve seen it!”

Kenma jumped at Hinata’s outburst and immediately lowered his hand. His cheeks turned a slight pink as he turned his head to the side in embarrassment.
“Come on, Kenma!” Hinata coaxed, “I need your help with steering Tobio!”

“You’re going the wrong way,” Kenma said, “Turn him 35 degrees south.”

“That’s to this way, right?” Hinata asked. Hinata turned Kuroo sharply and the dinosaur veered to the right, nearly throwing them off its back.

“Um, maybe Kuroo should steer us?” Kenma said dizzily.

“How? He got us lost earlier,” Tsukishima said dourly.

“Just hand him to me,” Kenma said, reaching for him. Hinata handed Kuroo over and Kenma placed him in his lap. Kenma rooted through his bag and pulled out a small screwdriver.

“I installed a homing gps inside him after he wandered off and got lost one time,” Kenma explained. He opened up a small 3 cm by 3 cm panel that hide four buttons.

“You did what?!” Kuroo squawked.

“So now if Kuroo is ever lost then he’ll end up circling back home without realizing it,” Kenma continued, ignoring him. Kenma pulled a stylus pen out of his bag and used it to press the bottom button and Kuroo’s face panel changed to a menu screen. “It’s kinda like a mental leash.”

“And you never told me about this?” Kuroo exclaimed, “Why did you never tell me about this?!”

“Too troublesome,” Kenma replied. Kenma quickly clicked through Kuroo’s settings until he got to the screen he wanted. He input their route and then pressed the first button on Kuroo's side and Kuroo’s face came back with a petulant expression. Kenma replaced Kuroo’s panel and tucked the stylus back into his bag.

“So can he direct us out of Yara now?” Tsukishima said.

“I can direct you to my shiny robot ass,” Kuroo muttered.

“I put our route in his gps,” Kenma said as Kuroo floated out of his lap.

“You have to manually input things?” Tsukishima snorted, “Why is your robot so useless?”

“Oh my gosh! Kenma! “Kuroo said, floating around aimlessly, “I’ve picked up a strange reading! It seems we’re right next to a huge salt deposit!”

Kuroo floated over to Tsukishima.

“Beep! Beep! Beep!” Kuroo feigned surprise, “Oh! Looks like I found it!”

Kuroo dodged gleefully as Tsukishima swatted at him in annoyance.

“That’s nice,” Kenma said disinterestedly, “Can you steer the dinosaur now?”

“Welcome to the Tobio Express! The only dino-powered, uh, dino available for human and robot transportation!” Kuroo said, switching to an announcer’s voice as he floated back to the Ankylosaurus’ head. Kuroo switched on his laser. “Please keep your hands and legs on the dinosaur at all times!”

Kenma was filled with immediate regret as the dinosaur lurched into motion.
“You alright?” Sawamura asked, moving over to brace him.

“M’fine,” Kenma said, holding a hand over his mouth.

“Are you motion sick?” Yachi asked worriedly. “I have medicine!”

“It’s alright,” Kenma said.

A couple minutes later Kenma accepted the offered medicine with a queasy look of gratitude.

“So what do we do now?” Tanaka asked.

They’d been following the qilin’s hoof-prints along the beach on their nightriders since dawn. It had taken them two rounds of the entire island before they accepted with grim certainty that the trail of the qilin’s hoof-prints really did loop the entire beach.

“You think it walked in a circle on purpose just to fuck with us?” Nishinoya said idly. At this point, he’d accepted their shitty fate enough to make jokes in an attempt to make himself feel better about it. So far, it wasn’t working.

“So turning us into hunks of metal wasn’t enough?” Tanaka kicked the side of his nightrider. “Where did it even go? Do they have wings we don’t know about?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” Nishinoya said glumly. He was sitting cross-legged on his nightrider and his chin rested on his hands. “Ahh…what are we going to tell Kiyoko-San now?”

“Better start coming up with something,” Tanaka said, turning on his engine, “Because we have to meet up with her in roughly 4 hours.”

“Do you think there’s a way to speed up this curse?” Nishinoya asked weakly.

“In four hours?” Tanaka sighed, “We can only hope.”

“Whatcha got there?” Hinata asked.

Kenma tilted his game screen away as Hinata edged closer. “Umm…a game…”

Hinata watched in fascination as Kenma played.

“Whoa! You’re really good at this!” He exclaimed.

“Thanks,” Kenma said.

“My Kenma is a man of many talents~” Kuroo bragged.
“You’re a cartographer too, aren’t you?” Sawamura said amiably, “I noticed all the maps in your house were all hand-drawn.”

“I guess,” Kenma muttered.

“How long do you think it’ll take us to get to Odalis?” Sawamura asked.

“At this pace…” Kenma thought for a moment, “About two days to get out of Yara maybe…and then it’ll be another three to Odalis.”

“So how exactly do you know so much about the world when you live in the middle of nowhere and never leave it?” Tsukishima asked.

“That’s none of your business,” Kenma mumbled, shutting down.

“I think it is if you’re going to be guiding us,” Tsukishima argued, “For all we know, you could be leading us to our deaths.”

“We could,” Kuroo said warningly.

“We don’t know anything about you either,” Kenma said quietly.

“Yeah, why don’t you tell us some of your Celestial Secrets before you start digging into our personal life?” Kuroo added.

“I’ll answer any questions you have,” Sawamura said, “I don’t expect you to do the same but if we’re going to be travelling together, I’d like to build up some trust between us.”

“I don’t have any questions,” Kenma said quietly.

“Well, I do!” Kuroo said, “What’s up with your swords? Why do they glow and sound all weird?”

“Have you ever encountered Celestial steel?” Sawamura asked.

He drew his sword and laid it down on the dinosaur’s back in front of him. The shining blade was about 3 and a half feet long with a slight curve along the top. The hilt was simple, gilded with a European design. A quiet humming seemed to be coming from the sword. Kenma held a hand over the blade. He could feel energy pulsating off the metal.

“Celestial steel is both lighter and stronger than regular metals,” Sawamura explained, “The stardust inside it resonates with those meant to be Celestial Knights.”

“Stardust? Is that some kind of drug?” Kuroo asked.

“Stardust is what we call the energy of the universe,” Sawamura explained with admirable patience. “Down here, the quantity is too small to be visible to people who aren’t Celestial Knights but if you ever come to our home base you’d see it everywhere.”

“What do they look like?” Kuroo asked, genuinely interested in spite of himself.

“Like…shining lights,” Yachi said, struggling to articulate her thoughts. “It’s like…when dust floats through sunlight…like the air itself is shining.”

“I feel like I can almost picture it…weird,” Kuroo said slowly. Something hovered at the edges of Kuroo’s mind, like a fuzzy silhouette waiting on the other side of a window made of frosted glass.
“Do they all look the same?” Kenma asked, breaking the silence.

“Every Celestial sword is forged by the knight who wields it,” Sawamura said. He reached over and ruffled Hinata’s hair. “These three however, have yet to complete their swords.”

Yachi pulled out her sword and laid it next to Sawamura’s. Her blade was shorter and wider. The hilt was undecorated and plain and its blade was thick, almost like a flat and lumpy baseball bat.

“So that’s why it didn’t cut me in half,” Kuroo remarked.

“Normally, new knights would forge their blade in a ceremony held by the Conclave after passing a series of trials,” Sawamura said.


“The Conclave is the group of 12 chosen individuals that govern the Celestial Order,” Sawamura explained.

“Wait,” Kuroo said slowly, “You’re telling me that the group of people in charge of the Celestial Knights are called the ‘Conclave’?”

“Yes?” Sawamura said. Kenma glanced over at Kuroo and thought about stopping him, but decided it was too much effort.

“So then that makes them,” Kuroo struggled to contain himself, “The Conclave of Celestial Knights?”

“Yes…” Sawamura said hesitantly.

“Which makes their acronym…C.O.C.K?” Kuroo said, struggling to retain a note of innocence in his voice.

“I suppose…” Sawamura sighed deeply. He lifted a hand to his forehead and massaged his temples.

“Is that why you didn’t want to get promoted?” Tsukishima snorted.

“That’s not why,” Sawamura replied flatly.

“Did you just not feel ‘up’ to it?” Kuroo sniggered.

“Don’t be so self-conscious, Captain,” Tsukishima said, laughing outright, “I’m sure you could have ‘risen’ to the challenge if needed!”

“Would you please just cut it out?” Sawamura growled, his cheeks growing pink. Kuroo and Tsukishima exchanged glances and the two of them burst into giggles. Hinata and Yachi glanced nervously between Sawamura and the two laughing idiots. Kenma’s face was practically glued to his game screen in his determination to stay out of it.

“Um, guys…that probably isn’t a good idea…” Hinata whispered.

“He-he said ‘would’,” Tsukishima said in a high-pitched voice between laughs.

“Tsukishima, I’m this close to kicking you off the dinosaur and making you follow behind us on foot,” Sawamura said coolly.

They’ve done it now, Hinata and Yachi thought simultaneously. Tsukishima swallowed his laughter
as he caught sight of Sawamura’s face. Kuroo didn’t notice the boiling anger under Sawamura’s calm expression.

“Aw, don’t be so ‘hard’ on him, Captain,” Kuroo said, still laughing.

“Kuroo have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a satellite?” Sawamura asked with a scary smile, “Because I can arrange for you to have a first-hand experience.”

A shiver ran through Kuroo and his laughter quieted with a small cough.

“I’m good, thanks,” he said, sheepishly.

Saeko leaned back on her stool and fanned herself. It was a hot day in Caelum and the market bustled with shoppers weighed down by their pockets and merchants eager to relieve them of their monetary burdens. Saeko herself, had a tarp covered in products spread out before her. Not that she was actually looking to sell any of that junk. No, her real wares much more valuable.

Information was Saeko's currency. There was power in information and it was worth more than anything mere money could buy. Silver was nice, but her words were gold.

Saeko yawned. She'd gotten back late last night after helping out her younger brother and his friend with their job. Ryuu would probably give her a nice pair of shoes or maybe a new case for her favourite gun in exchange for that favour, though it wasn't like she expected him to. The Tanaka siblings might seem crass, but they genuinely cared about each other and their friends. Besides, helping out her younger bro was her duty as the older sister.

She idly watched as two men went from stall to stall handing out papers to each vendor. One was unusually tall with a ridiculously muscular build and short olive-brown hair. He looked stoic and intimidating. His companion had a small build and calm grey-brown eyes. He was rather plain looking with copper coloured hair parted unevenly into two sides. Someone leaned over to whisper in the copper-haired one’s ear. They suddenly glanced over at her.

“Yikes,” Saeko said to herself, “I hope they’re customers…”

Saeko realized that the first man was even taller than she’d first thought as the two of them walked up to her.

“Can I interest you gentlemen in knickknacks from the Mediterranean?” Saeko said in her sales voice.

The big one moved in front and looked down at her with piercing dark olive eyes. A chill ran through Saeko. There was something unnatural about his eyes, something inhumane. Saeko’s fingers subtly reached for the handgun holstered behind her back.

“I am a cow,” the man said seriously, “Nice to meet you.”
“What he means to say is that he’s a cow farmer!” His companion interjected quickly. “I’m Shirabu Kenjiro and this is Ushijima Wakatoshi!”

“A cow farmer…?” Saeko repeated. Well he certainly had the build of someone who worked outdoors. “The name’s Tanaka, Tanaka Saeko!”

She stuck out her hand and grinned.

“So what brings the two of you to the big city of Nokomis?”

“We were almost eaten,” Ushijima said. Saeko had a hard time believing that considering his size and all, but he looked seriously concerned about it.

“Well the countryside can be pretty dangerous, especially around Yara,” Saeko said, patting the big guy on the shoulder, “This city’s pretty safe from monsters and creatures though!” Rather it was the creatures and monsters who had reason to fear the city with all its traffickers.

“We’re currently looking for jobs and we heard you’d be the one to talk to about that!” The copper-haired man nudged his partner and they both handed Saeko a sheet of paper.

Saeko glanced down at what she assumed were their resumes. Shirabu’s appeared to be fairly normal, written in a neat format that while simple, was easy to read. Although there was a few odd phrases here and there like, ‘fast listener’ and ‘strong compassion feelings’. In comparison, Ushijima’s was mostly in bullet points. Under ‘work objective’ he’d simply wrote ‘the human warmth’ and in his ‘work experience’ section were things like:

- Being human
- Eating grass
- Pants
- Using phork

An ‘a’ was written in pen between ‘using’ and ‘phork’. Saeko tried for a friendly smile.

“Are you looking for something in the same line of work?” She asked.

“Definitely not!” Shirabu looked uncomfortable, “We don’t have a lot of work experience but we’re fast learners!”

“I can put on pants by myself,” Ushijima added.

Saeko couldn’t tell if he was joking but she forced a laugh anyway.
“We were thinking something in retail,” Shirabu said, pushing his partner behind him. “But we’re not choosey! Anything will do!”

“Well…” Saeko said slowly, “I know of a…cruise ship in need of a waiter and a bartender. It sails along the Fifth Line, skirting the Boiling Sea and the islands of the Delmares. Have you ever been to sea before?”

“We crossed the bay to get here,” Shirabu said excitedly. Ushijima nodded, although his face looked a little green from the memory.

“The ship is called the Virago and lucky for you it just docked here about an hour ago. So what do you say? If you’re free now we can head over together and I’ll put in a good word for you,” Saeko winked.

“Thank you so much!” Shirabu said, bowing deeply. He grabbed Ushijima and forced him into a bow as well. The large man muttered ‘Thanks’ with an awkward smile.

“That’s the spirit!” Saeko laughed, “Let’s get going!”

Saeko led the two of them down the street towards the harbor. Among several large merchant ships was one with a figurehead of a woman’s torso, her head turned slightly and laughing coyly into her hand. The Virago was emblazoned proudly along her side.

Shirabu felt shivers down his spine as he took in the sight of the ship. He glanced nervously up at Ushijima and inched closer to his companion.

“So that bitch is here again,” whispered a person passing by.

“What business has she got here now?” Spat another.

“Hasn’t any of them blood dealers got the balls to lock her and her filthy-”

The man hit the dock with a heavy thud as Saeko’s fist caved in his forehead.

“Anyone else got something to say about the sweet ladies of the Virago?” Saeko called out cheerfully.

The malicious whispers quieted as the crowd resumed their business. Someone silently picked up the man Saeko had punched and dragged him off to the side of the docks.

“Hold on,” Shirabu grabbed Saeko’s arm angrily, “I thought you said this was a cruise ship! Do you take us for idiots? That’s clearly a pirate ship!”

Saeko turned slowly. Her gaze was cold as she locked eyes with Shirabu. Shirabu felt fear run through him and his body started trembling. He clenched his hand into a fist and steeled his resolve.

“You lied to us!” Shirabu said, holding her gaze.

“You lied to me first,” Saeko replied. “You had your reasons and I have mine.”

“That sounds suspicious as hell!” Shirabu hissed, thrusting Saeko’s arm away from him as he released it. “Let’s go, Ushijima!”

“Wait!” Saeko grabbed his arm this time, “I was serious about the job! It’s not anything sketchy, I promi-”
Saeko didn’t see Ushijima move. His fist was suddenly less than a centimeter before her face. The energy raging around him didn’t feel like anything she had ever encountered before. He felt like a giant mass of power. His eyes were red and Saeko thought she could see sharp curled horns on his head. She quickly let go of Shirabu’s arm.

The malicious energy Ushijima was radiating dissipated and he nodded politely to her before turning around and walking away. Saeko almost sank to her knees. She braced her hands on her knees as she bent over and took deep breaths.

“Hoo boy, now I have to make sure you two get on that ship,” Saeko said to herself, “For your own good.”

“You’re late.”

Nishinoya and Tanaka felt themselves physically shrink under Kiyoko’s gaze. She sat across from them at her desk. Her First and Second Mates were with her, their gazes just as cold.

“Ha ha…about that…” Nishinoya trailed off.

“And empty-handed it seems,” Misaki Hana, Kiyoko’s brown-haired First Mate said from her side.

“Yamaguchi Tadashi, the qilin,” Kiyoko said coldly, “Where are they?”

“…We don’t know…” Tanaka said quietly.

“It cursed us and then ran away,” Nishinoya added. The two of them lifted their cursed hands. Their golden pinkies glinted.

“New fashion trend? I don’t think it’ll catch on,” Ennoshita Chikara, Kiyoko’s Second Mate said sarcastically.

“I wish,” Nishinoya said, wiggling his golden digit around. “It felt numb at first but gradually I’ve been able to move it, although I can’t really feel with it.”

“They can curse?” Kiyoko frowned, “That wasn’t included in our information. Do you know the details of your curses?”

“It seems to be a slow one,” Nishinoya said, “It’s been roughly 11 hours since we were cursed and the gold hasn’t spread.”

“But if it’s a time triggered curse then it could spread all at once after a certain point,” Misaki said grimly, “We won’t know until it spreads.”

“And as for stopping it, we have no idea what to do,” Nishinoya added, “I’ve never heard of a curse like this before.”

“Maybe we should cut off your pinkies,” Ennoshita said.

“I was afraid you were going to suggest that,” Tanaka said, wincing.
“Well, if no one has any better ideas then we might as well get it over with, Ryuu,” Nishinoya pulled out his dagger. “Any other suggestions? Anyone? Going once, going twice?”

The cabin was silent. Nishinoya and Tanaka exchanged glances.

“Oh three?” Tanaka said weakly.

“Three!” Nishinoya said. They both cut the base of their pinky fingers in a swift motion. Metal clanged against metal.

“I guess we missed?” Nishinoya said, looking down at their unharmed fingers.

“Oh shit,” Tanaka swore.

They both attacked their fingers, vigorously hacking away at their hand. There was a cling as the blades of their daggers broke and flung about the room.

“Does anyone have a chainsaw?” Nishinoya asked jokingly.

“A finger’s not so bad to lose but I don’t think I want to lose a whole hand if I don’t have to, Noya,” Tanaka replied.

The clock on the wall struck twelve, echoing through the wooden cabin. Nishinoya and Tanaka looked down at their hands as the gold spread to their ring fingers all at once. So it was a timed curse.

“We may not have a choice…” Nishinoya said glumly.

“You know, I only ever expected to see gold on that finger after I got married, preferably to Kiyoko,” Tanaka remarked.

“You two are awfully calm about this,” Misaki said with a glare, “Do you realize the seriousness of this situation?”

“Trust us, we know,” Nishinoya said, holding a hand up to her, “We already went through the six stages of grief on our way here.”

“Your composure is annoying,” Misaki frowned, “It’d be nice to see you actually worried for once.”

“Only if you agree to comfort me,” Nishinoya winked. Misaki cast him a withering look in response.

“We have to find the qilin again,” Kiyoko said, interrupting them, “Especially if you two want to return your flesh to normal.”

“Easier said than done,” Misaki said, “It took us five years already to get a solid lead on Yamaguchi’s whereabouts and we only managed that because he wandered into Dominus Semi’s property.”

“Everyone knows you don’t find qilins, you encounter them by chance,” Ennoshita added.

“So what? Are we just supposed to be resigned to our fates and become statues?” Tanaka exclaimed, rubbing his head in frustration.

“I have a better idea,” Kiyoko said suddenly.

“OOhhh!” Tanaka and Nishinoya edged closer to her in excitement.
“All you have to do is increase your luck,” She said, smiling cryptically.

Qilins were mysterious creatures. Some thought they were unicorns while others scoffed, insisting they were just giraffes. However, anyone who actually believed qilins to be unicorns or giraffes had clearly never seen a qilin. They were rare creatures and shy to being seen. Part of the reason they were so hard to find, even to each other, was that they were always on the move.

A lone pair of hoof prints wound their way through the muddy jungle underbrush. They started in mid-step, as if something had suddenly appeared there or fallen down from the sky. The trail stopped at a large wooden house with a front yard full of ravaged plants. At the end of the trail of hoof-prints stood a qilin.

It pawed at the remains of what appeared to have been a garden.

‘How sad,’ it thought, ‘Someone had been taking good care of this garden.’

It lowered its head and wept. Fresh green tendrils sprouted from its tears. Its goal accomplished, the qilin continued on and walked up to the front door. It was locked but there was an open flap near the bottom. The qilin regarded it curiously.

There appeared to be a person stuck in the cat door.

Kenma’s cat sat down in front of them and stared. They had long brown hair with flecks of gold and a small pair of pink antlers grew out of the top of their head. Not a person then.

“How sad,” the not-person whimpered. Cat jumped onto the kitchen counter and undid the lock with his paw. Cat leaned on the door handle and it swung open.

Cat realized the not-person was completely naked. Their skin was pink and soft with light brown freckles down its back. They appeared to have lengthier limbs than Kenma and their wide doe-like eyes blinked away tears.

“Thank you so much!” The stranger said, struggling to get out of Cat’s door. Cat couldn’t help them with that. They finally managed to wiggle out and they sat back with a sigh of relief. Freckles bridged the stranger’s nose and gold scales edged the sides of their face and down the sides of their arms and legs. They rubbed at the red marks on their skin from being stuck in the door.

“Does anyone live here?” They asked Cat. Cat meowed and the qilin listened carefully.

“He sounds like a wonderful person,” the qilin said with a smile, “I’m sure he’ll be back soon.”

The qilin got to their feet and swayed unsteadily. Curiously, their feet didn’t touch the ground but floated above it by several inches.
“Do you think he’d mind terribly if I borrowed some clothes?” The qilin asked shyly.

Cat meowed and then walked off towards the back of the house. The qilin followed. Cat rubbed against Kenma’s bedroom door. The qilin opened the door and looked around. The room had a lived-in feel to it that was homely and warm. A book was left open on the windowsill, waiting for its reader to return to it.

The qilin walked over to the closet and opened it. Some things appeared to be missing, taken along by their owner the qilin assumed. The qilin took out a red tracksuit and black shirt. It dressed clumsily as it sorted out which body parts belonged through what holes. The tracksuit was a little too small and the qilin’s arms stuck out the ends of the sleeves. The pants were also too short and ended a foot above the qilin’s ankles. It would have to do. Cat wound around the qilin’s legs.

“I walked here from across the ocean,” the qilin answered, “I won’t stay long, I must search for others of my kind.”

Cat sat down and lowered his head. The qilin knelt and gently caressed Cat’s head.

“You are lonely…and you wish to take care of your owner’s house while they are away,” the qilin said softly, “Shall I grant you a wish before I go?”

Cat meowed loudly and purred, pressing his head against the qilin’s thigh. The qilin stroked Cat’s back, from the top of his head all the way to the tip of his tail. Cat’s short black fur shed away with each of the qilin’s strokes. Pale skin was underneath. The qilin appeared to grow smaller until Cat realized that it was actually he who was growing bigger.

“For the one who helped me so kindly, I grant you a form in which you can achieve your desires,” the qilin said, “I name you ‘Shouhei’ for the selfless invitation you gave me to your home and ‘Fukunaga’ for my blessing I bestow upon you.”

Cat, now Shouhei, stared down at his hands. He bent and extended his fingers, marveling at the way they moved.

“Th…thank you…” he said, unaccustomed to his new voice.

“You’re welcome,” the qilin smiled. “Do you feel strange?”

“A little…but I don’t dislike it…it’s interesting,” Shouhei rubbed his temple with the back of his hand. “And a little cold.”

The qilin rose and walked back over the Kenma’s closet.

“Clothing is a necessity while in that form,” the qilin explained, “Although these may not fit you very well since I made you the same height as me.” The qilin tossed another pair of Kenma’s clothes to Shouhei.

Shouhei dressed clumsily. He sniffed the shirt as he pulled it on. It smelled like detergent and Shouhei thought of how nice it was to lie on piles of Kenma’s freshly washed clothes. He wondered if it would feel any different sleeping on them while in his new form.

“Do you have a name?” Shouhei asked the qilin curiously as he zipped up one of Kenma’s red jerseys.

“Tadashi,” the qilin answered, tucking a strand of hair behind its ear, “Yamaguchi Tadashi. Although not many call me by that.”
“Why not?” Shouhei asked.

“There isn’t anyone left to,” Tadashi replied. “We were scattered long ago.”

“Scattered?”

“The wind took us away from each other,” Tadashi explained, “One day, five years ago.”

They fell silent. Shouhei leaned against Tadashi in an expression of sympathy and comfort that animals know best.

“Will you be alright by yourself here?” Tadashi asked, patting Shouhei on the head.

“I was …an abandoned cat,” Shouhei said quietly. “I can hunt.”

It had been cold the day Kenma and Kuroo had found him. Warm arms had held him, dried him off roughly but kindly. Shouhei lifted his right hand and rubbed it against his cheek. Yes, the feeling had been something like this.

“I see,” the qilin said softly, “Your friends sure are lucky to have someone like you to protect their home.”

“It is I, who is lucky,” Shouhei replied.

“Are you ever afraid they might not return?” Tadashi asked hesitantly.

“Sometimes,” Shouhei replied thoughtfully, “But I believe they will return.”

“What gives you such faith?” Tadashi asked.

“They’re my family,” Shouhei replied simply, as if it was obvious. “I believe they’ll find their way back. In my experience, people who share bonds always seem to find their way to each other. And so I believe that you’ll find your way to your family one day too.”

The qilin flashed a tentative smile. “Qilins are hard to find, my friend.”

“Maybe they’ll have good eyesight,” Shohei replied.

“I can’t fucking see,” Tsukishima said, waving a hand in front of his face. His broken glasses were tucked into the chest pocket of his uniform.

“Come on, Tsukishima, practice with me!” Hinata begged. He’d been asking for the past hour and showed no signs of giving up. “Let’s spar! Come on!”

Celestial steel rang together as Sawamura sparred against Yachi. Kuroo had thought that Yachi’s skills were pretty scary but the Captain held her off with ease. Kenma had been watching earlier, but his attention was quickly drawn back to his game.

“Go spar with the Sawamura and Yachi!” Tsukishima replied angrily.
“But they’re busy sparring against each other and you know how long Yachi can fight for!” Hinata complained. “Come on, my skills are getting rusty sitting here!”

“Too bad,” Tsukishima said, leaning away from him, “Come back during business hours!”

“Laaammme,” Hinata said, “What kind of Celestial Knight can’t fight without his glasses?”

“The visually impaired ones,” Tsukishima growled.

“How bad is your vision?” Kuroo asked Tsukishima. “What does everyone look like to you?”

“Tanned, Blonde, annoying, pudding and a furry ball,” Tsukishima replied, listing them off.

“So Captain, Yachi…pudding must be Kenma and…” Hinata said counting on his fingers, “Hey! Annoying isn’t an appearance!”

“Pu…pudding?!” Kenma said in shock.

“Gahahahaha!” Kuroo burst out.

The Ankylosaurus stopped suddenly.

“Oi, watch where you’re driving!” Tsukishima complained.

“It’s not my fault,” Kuroo protested, “Tobio just stopped on his own!”

“Come on, Tobio-Chan!” Hinata said, crawling onto the dinosaur’s head, “Let’s go! Good boy, come on! Forwards! Giddy-up! Yip yip!”

"What the he-?" Kuroo detected an extremely high-pitched sound similar to a dog whistle.

Kuroo’s body smacked into Tsukishima’s face as the dinosaur took off in a dead run. Kenma was sliding off the side, his hands scrambling for a hold. Hinata chased after him and managed to grab onto him just in time. Hinata pulled Kenma back ontop of the dinosaur and threw an arm over him, bracing them both flat against the dinosaur’s back.

“What the fuck is going on?” Tsukishima shouted. He was holding onto one of the anklyosaurus’ spikes for dear life, Kuroo tucked under his arm.

“AHHHHH!” Yachi screamed. Daichi grabbed onto her just before she tumbled off the back end of the dinosaur. They both clung to the dinosaur’s tail as it swung back and forth.

“SOMETHING MUST HAVE SPOOKED IT!” Kuroo yelled.

“NO SHIT,” Tsukishima shouted back, “DID YOUR ROBOT SENSORS TELL YOU THAT?”

“This isn’t good!” Kenma said to Hinata, “He’s taking us too far off course!”

“EVERYBODY HOLD ON!” Sawamura roared.

The dinosaur raced through the jungle for nearly twenty minutes, trampling everything before it underfoot. The trees suddenly cleared and heat washed over the group as the dinosaur finally slowed down.

“Phew, Tobio that was a wild ride you just took us on!” Hinata said, lifting his head. Kenma didn’t move but Hinata could hear him muttering calculations under his breath.
“Why’s it so hot all of a sudden?” Tsukishima asked, blinking rapidly, “And fucking bright?”

“We’ve entered the desert,” Kenma said, still lying face-down.

The group looked around. White sand spanned as far as the eye could see. The jungle was a mere line in the distance behind them.

“I’ve always hated the desert,” Tsukishima said.

“This is the first time you’ve been to it,” Sawamura said.

“And so far I’m not impressed,” Tsukishima replied.

“UWwaahhhh!” Hinata exclaimed, his eyes lighting up, “There’s sand everywhere! Hey, do you think we could play beach volleyball here?”

“Where are we?” Sawamura asked as he and Yachi climbed back up the dinosaur’s back.

“We are in so much shit,” Kenma replied.

“Does that mean we’re lost?” Tsukishima asked.

“No, unfortunately I know exactly where we are,” Kenma answered grimly, “And I’d rather be lost.”

“Really?” Tsukishima said sarcastically, “Because it looks like it’s going to be all sunshine and happiness.”

“Save your salt for sweat, Tsukishima,” Sawamura said, “Let’s all try to deal with this situation the best we can.”

“Captain’s right,” Yachi said, “Fighting and arguing isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

“Where do we go from here, Kenma?” Sawamura asked.

“It’s best to let the ankylosaurus lead us out of the desert,” Kenma answered, “This desert is constantly moving. Even if I steer us in the shortest path to an exit, the desert could move in the same direction and render our progress useless.”

“Wait, what do you mean the desert moves?” Hinata asked.

“Have you ever heard of the Sabulo Desert?” Kenma asked.

“I have,” Yachi said, raising her hand, “The textbooks said it was…alive and has a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding forest, but I didn’t understand what it meant by that.”

“It’s the sand,” Kenma explained, “The sand of the Sabulo desert is in some sense, alive. It moves to eat, gorging itself on minerals in the ground and the forest moves out of the way to accommodate it. The sand removes impurities from the soil, waste and pollution even. It then turns these impurities into precious gemstones with the heat from the sun and immense pressure.”

“Whoa, you mean under all this sand are rubies and sapphires and emeralds and stuff!?” Hinata exclaimed, “We could get rich!”

“But this desert is very dangerous,” Kenma continued, “Some have tried to mine the gemstones but they often either get trapped in sinkholes and crushed under the sand or they can never find their way out of the desert and die, only to be absorbed by the sand as well.”
“Ulp, nevermind,” Hinata paled.

“And that’s not the only danger,” Kenma said darkly.

“Oh how lovely, more danger,” Tsukishima said.

“We have to look out for mirages,” Kenma said.

“That’s a relatively normal concern for being in a desert,” Sawamura said with a sigh of relief.

“Just no one get off of Tobio,” Hinata said confidently, “That should keep us out of harm!”

“Let’s hope so,” Kenma said quietly.

The group sat in silence as Tobio plodded on through the desert. Tsukishima’s head was lowered in his arms. Even Hinata was slumped over with sweat coursing down his face. Sawamura quietly counted and recounted their supplies, rationing out water every so often.

“Hey, Yachi, Tsukishima, let’s play eye spy,” Hinata said.

“No,” Tsukishima replied flatly.

“Yachiieee,” Hinata said.

“Eh?” Yachi jerked out of her daze and looked over at him, “Sure, you go first.”

“I spy with my little eye,” Hinata trailed off, “…something bright.”

“Is it the sun?” Yachi asked.

“Yes. Now your turn.” “I spy with my little eye…something beige.”

“What’s ‘beige’?” Hinata asked listlessly, ”You can’t just make up colours.”

“Beige is a tan-brown,” Tsukishima said irritably, “You moron.”

“How can the colour brown get a tan?” Hinata scoffed.

“It’s sand, you idiot,” Tsukishima snapped.

“Shut up, Four-Eyes you’re not even playing,” Hinata retorted. “Is it a rock, Yachi?”

“No, it’s sand,” Yachi responded listlessly.

“I was about to guess that,” Hinata said. “Hey, Kenma want to play with us?”

Kenma’s eyes slid over to Hinata’s prone body.

“No thanks,” he said quietly. It was too much energy.

“I’ll play,” Kuroo said from Kenma’s lap. He whirled back to life and looked around with his scanners. “I spy with my little camera…something yellow and black.”

“Is it the sun?” Hinata asked. “Oh wait! Is it Yachi’s hair?”

“He said yellow and black,” Tsukishima said, “It’s obviously Kenma’s hair.”
“Is it Kenma’s hair?” Hinata asked.

“You got it, Short Stop.” Kuroo answered.

“No, he didn’t, I did,” Tsukishima growled.

“You’re not even looking!” Hinata rolled over and glared at Tsukishima.

“That’s because it’s so obvious I don’t need to look,” Tsukishima replied.

“Fine then,” Hinata sat up and quietly edged closer to Tsukishima. Hinata lifted a beetle from Tobio’s back and held it in front of Tsukishima’s lowered head. “I spy with my little eye something that is brown!”

“Tobio’s shit,” Tsukishima said.

“Ew, how vulgar! At least say ‘poop!’” Hinata exclaimed, “And you’re completely wrong!”

Tsukishima raised his head in annoyance. His eyes widened in surprise at the sight of the beetle so close to his face and he jerked back with a scowl.

“Get that away from me!” Tsukishima reached out and tried to slap the beetle out of Hinata’s hand. Hinata dodged, moving his hand out of the way and then right back in Tsukishima’s face.


“Guys…don’t…fight…” Yachi said weakly.

“Get it out of my face!” Tsukishima snapped.

“It’s not in your face, it’s in my hand,” Hinata replied with a smirk.

“It’s about to be shoved up your-!”

“You’re both about to be overboard in a minute!” Sawamura interrupted tersely.

“We wouldn’t be in this mess if the stupid robot had just keep the dinosaur on track!” Tsukishima said sourly.

“It’s thanks to the ‘stupid robot’ that you’re currently alive and able to complain,” Kuroo said testily.

“Yeah, what’d you do that for?” Hinata said.

“I’d take that over sweating to death in this desert,” Tsukishima said sourly.

“Then why don’t you walk your useless ass back to the jungle, it’d be doing us all a favour,” Kuroo said.

“This, coming from a glorified basketball,” Tsukishima sneered.

“One more word and I swear I’ll turn this dinosaur back around!” Kuroo snapped.

“You don’t even know where ‘back around’ is!” Tsukishima retorted.

“Kenma, let’s ditch these losers,” Kuroo said huffily. "Screw all of this! I want to go home!"

“I thought you wanted to help them?” Kenma said to Kuroo.
“Yeah, before I had to spend five hours in the blazing heat riding on a dinosaur with them,” Kuroo replied. “I liked them better when I didn’t know them.”

“I share the same sentiments for once,” Tsukishima remarked.

Kenma closed his eyes and tried to block out their arguing. The tall one was right though; Kuroo probably didn’t know where they were. The heat had to be messing with his functions by now and Kenma didn’t know how that would affect him. He was already acting strangely, getting all heated up over a stupid argument wasn’t like him.

“The heat’s making everyone testy,” Sawamura said, rubbing the sweat from his forehead. “We won’t be able to last much longer like this. Tobio has slowed down to, he must be getting dehydrated.”

Sawamura squinted as he looked out at the huge expanse of sand before them.

“Stop,” Kenma stretched out a hand over Sawamura’s eyes, “It’s dangerous to look too long.”

“Ah, sand blindness?” Sawamura said, blinking rapidly. “Thanks for warning me, I think my vision was getting blurry for a bit there.”

Kenma stiffened the slightest bit.

“Did you see anything?” He asked.

“Not really,” Sawamura answered, surprised by the seriousness of Kenma’s tone. “Just, you know, the blurriness of a mirage.”

Kenma looked out at the horizon. He could see waves of heat rolling off the sand dunes and the line between the sand and sky blurred together.

“This isn’t good,” Kenma said, a grim expression on his face. “We’ve already entered in too far.”

“Entered what?” Sawamura asked.

“The mirage,” Kenma answered, his pupils dilating as he rambled on in a panic. “This is my fault, I should have noticed earlier, I just…I didn’t think-! The chances of us running into one was extremely low and-”

“Kenma!” Hinata shook him by the shoulders, “Take a deep breath! What’s the matter?”

“It’s a Cave of Wonders,” Kenma said after breathing deeply, “The Sabulo Desert shouldn’t be able to support one, it’s too shallow. But a mirage zone like this means that we’ve wandered across a Cave of Wonders.”

“A Cave of Wonders?” Hinata tilted his head in confusion.

“Isn’t that a thing from a fairy tale?” Yachi asked hesitantly.

“They go by several names,” Kenma said, “Sometimes they’re called dungeons, or towers, but whatever they’re called and whatever they look like, they’re all definitely the same thing and it’s bad, real bad.”

“And that is…?” Tsukishima prodded.

“Tangible desires,” Kenma said, “They give shape to whatever’s in your unconscious mind. Your
secrets, your shame, your desire, and your pride – it knows everything about you that you don’t even know about yourself. You’ll get trapped inside of it.”

“Uwahh, sounds scary!” Hinata looked queasy, “Why does it do that?”

“I don’t think a cave like that is capable of reason,” Tsukishima said.

“That’s not quite true,” Kenma struggled to explain, “They just…love humanity…they’re attracted to emotional conflict.”

“Then we’ll just have to harden our hearts to its temptations,” Sawamura said confidently, “We don’t have time to waste getting trapped inside a cave!”

At Sawamura’s words, Hinata, Yachi, and even Tsukishima brightened noticeably.

"It's not going to be that easy," Kenma warned. Sawamura clasped a hand onto Kenma's shoulder reassuringly.

"We'll get through this," he said with a smile.

“Now there’s a leader,” Kuroo said bemused.

The group waited anxiously and tried not to stare at the horizon. Now that they knew they were trapped in a mirage zone, it was glaringly obvious that their surroundings have been the same for the past hour. They were unmoving; the ankylosaurus still plodding along but never getting anywhere.

“We can wait it out,” Kenma had told them, “As long as Tobio keeps moving, we’ll exit the desert before the Cave finds us. Make sure no one leaves the dinosaur’s back!”

“All right, stay away from a giant cave, noted,” Tsukishima said sarcastically, “Sounds pretty straightforward to me.”

“It won’t approach us in the form of a cave,” Kenma explained with a hint of annoyance, “It’ll approach us in the form of something we desire.”

“Like a giant meatbun?” Hinata asked, drooling slightly.

“Don’t you dare leave Tobio’s back for a meatbun!” Sawamura said sternly.

“I’ll keep my eyes closed!” Yachi said, squeezing her eyes shut. She lasted about 30 seconds before opening one. “It’s way too scary to keep my eyes shut, I can’t tell if everyone is still here!”

“Let’s all hold hands then!” Hinata suggested, offering her his hand. She took it gratefully.

Hinata turned grudgingly to Tsukishima and offered his other hand. Tsukishima looked down at it in disgust. Hinata grabbed it before Tsukishima could move away. He held on smugly as Tsukishima tried in vain to shake him off.

Sawamura suppressed a fatherly smile at the sight of the two of them fighting. It was nice to see them getting back to normal, Hinata in particular. Sawamura didn’t like to think about how Hinata was during their escape from base, how glassy-eyed and empty he’d been. He just stared out the back window into the black void of space the entire time they were adrift. It wasn’t until their ship had run out of fuel and got pulled into the planet’s atmosphere that he’d snapped out of it.

They had been lost, adrift in space for too long trapped with the shock of betrayal and loss. The whirlwind of events since landing on Yara had changed all of them. It had grounded them, in more
ways than one. Sawamura glanced over at Kenma and Kuroo and felt a surge of gratitude in his chest. He had a feeling that things were going to be all right if they were with them. For some reason, their presence was reassuring.

“Captain!” Yachi was holding out her hand to him.

Sawamura looked over at her and started to smile as he reached for it.

“Captain…?” Yachi’s voice wavered in concern as she saw Sawamura’s smile freeze and his eyes widen.

“Huh?” Yachi felt her hair blow in the wind as Sawamura passed her.

He leapt off the dinosaur’s back and for a brief moment it looked as though he was flying. And then his feet touched the sand. Sawamura could feel the burning of the sand beneath his shoes. He could feel it flying into his eyes, summoning tears from their grittiness. He refused to blink, to lose the image that captivated his sight. He ran, stumbling about and picking himself back up before he’d even fallen.

He barely registered the appearance of the Cave as he entered its gaping maw, chasing after the slim silver-haired figure ahead of him.

The evening breeze was cool. Two men, one tall with long brown hair pulled back from his face and the other shorter with silvery hair stood among rose bushes crafted from bronze. They wore rich black garments with silver accents.

“How do you like my new additions?” Oikawa said, walking up to them. He gestured to the metal roses. “I had such a hard time coming up with a way to spread the pollen outside. The plants wouldn’t be able to live out here after all.”

“You made them?” Asahi reached out to caress the metal petals. The roses contained vials of perfume that saturated the air.

“There’s a tiny fan at the base that blows the perfume through the petals,” Oikawa explained, “Since there’s no wind in space to spread it I had to make my own.”

“You’re terribly clever when it comes to this kind of thing,” Sugawara remarked.

“Art?” Oikawa said lightly.

“Blowing air,” Sugawara said bluntly, “Only you could find a way to spread perfume through the vacuum of space, or rather only you would find a need for it.”

“If you dislike them so much then why stand among them?” Oikawa smirked.

“I feel as though there’s something I need to do that I’ve forgotten,” Sugawara replied. “This perfume intensifies that feeling, the need to do something. It feels as though I’ll remember it if I just stand here a little longer.”

“We have all lost something dear to us,” Oikawa said. His voice was seductive, as it always was.
“Come with us to the lower world.”

“This again?” Sugawara frowned. “Our place is among the stars, what use would descending to the lower world now do?”

“What are you after, Oikawa?” Asahi asked. His expression was pained. He fought against the fog in his mind.

“The Arc,” Oikawa answered, his eyes shining, “We’re going to find it.”

“The Arc…” Sugawara repeated in a whisper. His head felt clouded and he pressed a hand against his temple.

“Don’t you have someone you want to find?” Oikawa said. A smiling face popped into Sugawara’s mind.

“Daichi…” Sugawara’s face contorted in pain. His head was pounding and his chest ached. “Why did he betray us?” And why did he take the kids with him? Sugawara thought of Kageyama, alone and stone-faced, listless every since Hinata had left with Daichi.

Asahi placed a hand on his shoulder.

“We can get them back, we’ll be able to find them with the power of the Arc!” Oikawa pressed on, “There’s no one that can hide from the Arc of the World!”

“I’ll go.”

Sugawara, Asahi, and Oikawa turned. Kageyama stood behind them. For the first time in weeks, Kageyama’s face showed something other than apathy. His dark blue eyes burned with intensity. A flash of panic ran through Sugawara at his expression.

“You shouldn’t-” he started.

“You can’t stop me,” Kageyama interrupted. Sugawara bit his lower lip.

“My starship leaves tomorrow at 0800 hours,” Oikawa said with a smile.

“Then we’ll go as well,” Asahi said.

Chapter End Notes

sorry it's been so long
Here be Pirates

Chapter Summary

A flashback to the past. A Cave of Wonders. A sleazy circus.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

12 years ago

Tanaka Saeko saw the descending starship outside the window first. She nudged her younger brother, Ryuunosuke beside her and motioned with her eyes when he turned around. Ryuunosuke nodded slightly and the corner of his mouth turned up at what Saeko was suggesting. The party was supposedly for Saeko’s 14th birthday, but their parents had taken the occasion as an opportunity for strengthening their political connections instead. Saeko was sick of it all. The air felt thick with greed and the snobbery. Saeko and Ryuunosuke slipped unnoticed into the array of silks, satin, and tulle.

They found Nishinoya Yuu quickly, his hand deep in the pockets of a bearded gentleman by the buffet table. He snagged a tart as he left, slipping the gentleman’s wallet into his own pocket as they left. The air outside was deliciously cool against their skin and they lifted their feathered party masks away from their faces as soon as they were far enough away from the party.

Saeko looked up, searching for the dark outline of the ship far above them. The floating cities of Amaranth to the south, Rie to the west, and Cathal in the north completed the triangle of ARC. If Caelum hadn’t been located directly in the middle of all of them, the descending ship would have been nearly impossible to spot against the dark of the cities’ undersides. Saeko squinted.

It looked like the starship was falling haphazardly instead of landing. The three of them stared in confusion at the flickering red and orange lights spreading across the airship before realizing it must be fire. The trio burst into a sprint, Saeko leading the way. They found the crashed starship in the park, its wreckage scattered across the sand and playground equipment. They stood panting, staring in shock as the flames consumed the wreckage of the starship.

“Do you think there are any survivors?” Yuu asked, tugging on Saeko’s shirtsleeve.

“No way,” Saeko replied uneasily, “Even if the fall didn’t kill them, those flames…”

Saeko trailed off as she recognized the charred insignia on the side of the starship.

“What’s a Celestial starship doing here?” She wondered out loud.

“Saeko, look!” Ryuunosuke tugged on her other sleeve and pointed towards the inferno before them.

Through the flames they could see the tall slender figure of a girl as she walked through the fire. She walked slowly as if the heat didn’t affect her. Smoke rose from her skin as she stepped out of the flames. Her skin was gold in the light of the fire and black hair hung in messy strands down to her shoulders. She wore a plain shapeless white shirt and pants to match, the kind that hospital patients
wear. She appeared to be around eighteen or nineteen years old and she towered over them in height.

Her head turned towards them. Y uu and Ryuunosuke left Saeko’s side and walked towards the girl, their expressions captivated by her.

“Hey! Wait, you guys!” Saeko scrambled out after them. She looked down, trying to avoid being entranced as well.

“You’re beautiful…” Ryuunosuke breathed, his eyes shining as he stared at her.

“Incredibly…” Y uu added breathlessly. The half-eaten tart fell from his hand.

Saeko swallowed hard as she stood before her. Ryuunosuke and Y uu were right; she was beautiful, far more so than any of the girls at the party had been. There was almost an ethereal air of vitality about her that reached even the strands of her hair floating gently in the wind.

“Who are you?” Saeko asked suspiciously.

“I am Shimizu Kiyoko,” The girl replied, “But they called me ‘Subject 15’.”

“Shimizu Kiyoko…” Y uu repeated, “It suits you beautifully.”

“Yeah…” Ryuunosuke agreed.

“Subject 15…?” Saeko said under her breath, “What does that mean?”

“What do you think?” The girl said, her expression darkening.

“Why did the Celestial Knights have you?” Saeko asked. An uneasy feeling grew in her gut.

“I don’t think it’s any of your business,” she said warily.

“If you’re escaping, we can help you,” Ryuunosuke offered eagerly as he stepped towards her.

“We know the back ends of this city better than anyone!” Y uu boasted.

“Why would you help me?” The girl narrowed her eyes suspiciously, “Who are you three?”

“Tanaka, Tanaka Saeko!” Saeko said, stepping in front of her brother and friend, sticking an arm out protectively. “This is my beloved little brother Ryuunosuke and our friend Nishinoya Y uu. And we’d never turn our backs on someone who needs our help!”

“Hey, Sis,” Ryuunosuke placed a hand on Saeko’s shoulder, “We should be getting our of here, I can hear people coming.”

It must be the fire drawing people’s attention, Saeko realized. The flames had mostly burned out on the sand of the playground, but several large pieces had fallen near buildings.

“You heard him,” Saeko said without taking her eyes off the strange girl before them, “To be honest, I don’t trust you, but I don’t like the insinuation that we’re bad people. Let’s get going!”

Caelum was a city of skyscrapers. The buildings were so tall that it seemed like they were trying to reach the domain of the floating cities above it. Vines that bore different kinds of vegetables and fruits grew thickly, covering buildings and even creating suspension bridges between them in a fight for sunlight. The top half of the city above the Green Belt of vines was populated with the rich while the poor were forced to live in the darkness below.
Saeko glanced back as they ran away and saw with relief that the girl was following them. Their shoes clacked against the wooden boards of the street bridges that connected each building.

“We need to go under!” Saeko shouted to the boys.

“Roger that!” Yuu and Ryunosuke grinned as they each jumped over opposite sides of the bridge with barely suppressed whoops of delight.

“What are you-?”

“Just trust us!” Saeko interrupted, grabbing the girl around the waist and leaping over the edge of the bridge. To her credit, the girl didn’t scream but instead glared fiercely at the side of Saeko’s head.

“Try to roll,” Saeko said with a smile as she let go of the girl.

The girl’s eyes widened in shock and her mouth let loose an impressive stream of profanities. Saeko committed a few of them to memory.

Saeko rolled neatly as she hit the Green Belt, its vines dipping under her sudden weight. She heard a dull thud behind her as she stood up. The girl was lying on her back, a grimace on her beautiful face. Saeko offered her a hand.

“Are you people always this insane?” The girl groaned, getting up without taking Saeko’s hand.

“Hey, it wasn’t such a bad landing was it? The vines are pretty cushiony, even if the fall knocks the breath out of ya,” Saeko grinned.

“Hurry up, you two!” Ryunosuke shouted.

“First to the hideout gets to wear the crown!” Yuu added, jumping up and down.

“Just you wait, you rascals!” Saeko shouted back, “That crown is mine!”

Ryuunosuke made a silly face at them before sprinting away with Yuu.

“Follow me, I know a short cut!” Saeko said, grabbing the girl’s arm and dragging her along. The girl’s wrist was slim and smooth and Saeko realized that rather than skin, the girl had small diamond-shaped scales. Just what was this girl? Saeko felt a shiver go through her.

Saeko and the girl skidded to a stop at the front of a lopsided shack just before Ryuunosuke and Yuu.

“Aww no fair!” Ryunosuke pouted, “You have longer legs!”

“Ah well, I’m personally not opposed to having a couple of Queens rule our fort,” Yuu said with a wink.

“Welcome to our hideout,” Saeko said to the girl. She grabbed Yuu, tucking his head under her arm and gave him an affectionate noogie. “It’s small, but it’s ours!”

The hideout was a mess of wooden planks that had fallen from bridge streets during construction and various parts stolen from the city dump. It had random walls and rooms all attached crudely together. The door was really just a wall that wasn’t completely fastened to the rest of it. Saeko and the boys ducked into the shack. The girl followed hesitantly, wondering how the structure even managed to stay upright.
The inside was surprisingly spacious. A couple old mattresses had been shoved together in one corner of the room with blankets and pillows scattered over them. Leaning towers of books and magazines occupied another corner. Several wooden crates served as a table that Saeko and the boys all sat around. Saeko spun a crinkled yellow paper crown around her finger.

“You’ll be safe here,” Ryuunosuke said reassuringly. The girl blinked in surprise.

“Do you all live here?” She asked.

“We do now,” Saeko said decisively. Ryuunosuke and Yuu looked at her in surprise.

“What do you mean, Sis?” Ryuunosuke said.

“Exactly what I said,” Saeko said, “From now on, we’re all going to live here together.”

“But what about your parents?” Yuu asked worriedly, “They won’t let you.”

Saeko suddenly stood up and unzipped her dress.

“Whoa! What are you doing, Sis?” Ryuunosuke shouted, covering his eyes.

“Ryu, you strip too,” Saeko said, “We’re going to burn our clothes and then we’re planting them where the starship crashed. Hurry up, we don’t have much time to get back there before the whole site is searched!”

Ryuunosuke’s eyes lit up with understanding and he grinned as he pulled off his shirt and pants.

“Are you guys sure about this?” Yuu asked, his voice filled with emotion.

“We’ve been meaning to for a while now,” Ryuunosuke said, “For a few months now. The timing was just never right.”

“We couldn’t just leave you alone down here,” Saeko said, bunching up her dress under her arm. She stood with her hand on her hip and grinned at them in her slip. “Let’s get going Ryuu!”

“We’ll be back soon!” Ryuunosuke said, only in his boxers.

He blew them a kiss as the two of them left and sprinted through the darkness in their underwear.

“Wait for us, Yuu, Kiyoko,” Saeko said. Kiyoko. The girl jumped as her name was said.

“You guys are like a whirlwind,” Kiyoko said after they left.

“You’re the second person to say that about us,” Yuu said with a small smile.

His mood was suddenly down and Kiyoko wondered what was wrong.

“I didn’t used to live here alone,” Yuu said after a moment of silence. “I’m from the underside, below even the Green Belt. The buildings down there are made of steel and cement. Everything is grey and dark. People only live there because they have nowhere else to go. There was a small group of us who would climb through the Green Belt to the topside and steal from the pockets of the rich. But most of us got caught until there were only two of us left. We built this hideout together.”

“And then one day, we picked Saeko’s pocket,” Yuu said fondly, ”I knew as soon as I’d sunk my hand into her purse that she detected me but she acted like she hadn’t noticed. Later, She and Ryuu caught us in an alleyway. I thought they were going to turn us in, but instead they befriended us and helped us.”
Kiyoko listened with fascination as Yuu told her about his life with Saeko and Ryuunosuke, hidden on the Green Belt.

“And your friend, where is he now?” Kiyoko asked softly.

“I don’t know,” Yuu whispered, “One day, he was just…gone.”

Kiyoko fell silent. She didn’t know what to say.

“Saeko and Ryu have stuck around with me as much as they can. They have to go back up topside most of the time, or at least, they did before tonight.” Yuu explained as he fiddled with a pocketknife. “They have parents up there. They’re Dominus, you know, practically royalty even though they don’t want to be.”

“Too much responsibility, too much power,” Kiyoko muttered, “I know what that’s like.”

“Really?” Yuu said. “I was kidnapped because I’m too powerful,” Kiyoko said. She drew her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. She looked down at the floor as she spoke, as if afraid to see Yuu’s reaction to her next words. “The scientists at Amaranth said I was a demuto, an animal demon disguised as a human.”

“Are you?” Yuu asked, innocently cocking his head to the side. There was no judgment in his voice and Kiyoko felt the tension in her body ease slightly.

“I don’t think so,” she answered, “I didn’t mean to become human, I just didn’t want to be what I was, what I am.”

“And what is that?” Saeko’s voice came from the doorway.

Kiyoko jumped. They had returned far sooner than she’d expected them to. But then, they probably knew even more shortcuts around the city than the few they had showed her on their way here. Saeko must have seen the apprehension on Kiyoko’s face.

“You don’t have to tell us if you don’t want to,” Saeko said, sitting down next to her, “It doesn’t matter to us.”

“You’re already one of us, as far as I’m concerned.” Ryuunosuke said, coming in after Saeko.

Kiyoko looked around at all of them, the ones who’d found her and brought her into their hideout – their home. She took a deep breath.

“A dragon,” Kiyoko said.

The three of them stared at her.

“Whoaaa really?” Ryuunosuke and Yuu exclaimed together.

“Can you breathe fire and stuff?” Saeko asked, her eyes lighting up with excitement.

Kiyoko smiled and then blew gently. A small lick of white-hot flame shot out from between her lips.

“So that’s why the Celestial Knights wanted you,” Saeko said, leaning back with a strange look on her face.

Ryuunosuke and Yuu clamored over to Kiyoko’s side and began bombarding her with questions. The excitement on their faces made Saeko smile.
“Hey, can you fly?”

“Yes.”

“What other powers do you have?”

“Um-”

“Are there lots of dragons around where you’re from?”

“Well-”

“How old are you?”

“Uh, I don’t know human years-”

“Are all dragons this beautiful?”

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“Alright that’s enough!” Saeko cuffed the two of them over the head. “You guys are in charge of supper, so get collecting!”

“Awww,” Ryuunosuke and Yuu pouted as they got up. They grabbed two baskets that were hanging on the wall and headed out. While the vegetables and fruits produced by the vines were smaller than the ones grown at the top, they were still plentiful enough.

"Whoever gets more food wins!" Ryuunosuke said as they left.

"You're on, Ryuu!” Yuu grinned.

“Geez, those boys have no tact!” Saeko muttered, shaking her head. “But they’re good kids.”

“I can tell,” Kiyoko smiled. “They seem lively.”

“They used to be even more wild,” Saeko said, sitting back down again, “I swore I was gonna get grey hairs because of them and I’m only 14 you know! Barely even a teenager!”

Saeko smiled but it seemed tinged with sadness this time.

“Yuu told me a friend of yours disappeared,” Kiyoko said hesitantly.

“He didn’t disappear,” Saeko said quietly. Fine muscles in her face moved as she struggled to control her expression. “The Celestial Knights took him away. I saw it…and I couldn’t stop them. He was… he was covered in light and his feet…they floated above the ground. We never saw him again after that.”

“Was he demuto?” Kiyoko asked.

“Who knows,” Saeko said, “He could have been.”

“I’m sorry,” Kiyoko said.

“Don’t be, it was a long time ago,” Saeko said, “Besides, we took you from those star bastards! So it feels like we’ve gained a family member from them!”

“A fa-family member?” Kiyoko stammered, her face flushing. “You’re too kind, I’ve only just met
“It looks like a lion,” Hinata said in awe.

The Cave of Wonders indeed had the head of a lion, shaped out by sand. It stared at them for a moment before opening its gaping maw and letting out a roar that cut through the heavy air. The group jumped.

“Should we go in after him?” Yachi asked worriedly.

“No, it’s too dangerous,” Kenma replied, scowling. Things had quickly turned from bad to shit.

“Obviously, the robot should go in,” Tsukishima said.

“What do you mean by ‘obviously’?” Kuroo asked.

“I hate to agree with Tsukishima,” Hinata said with a frown. There was a pause as the group waited for the rest of Hinata’s sentence.

“But?” Tsukishima prompted irritably.

“Huh? Oh, no that’s it, I just hate agreeing with you,” Hinata replied.

“He’s the one who’s immune to human desires!” Tsukishima said, glaring at Hinata, “It’s logical that he should go in!”

“Actually he can’t,” Kenma interrupted.

“Yeah, I mean, even though I’m not currently in my real body, I’ll still be affected,” Kuroo added.

The three celestial knights turned and stared at Kuroo.

“Your real body? What do you mean your real body?” Tsukishima said blankly.

“My human body, it’s at a prison currently and frankly the guards still think I’m in it,” Kuroo explained.

“YOU HAVE A HUMAN BODY?” Tsukishima bellowed.

“COOL!” Hinata exclaimed.

“Ho-how?” Yachi asked, seemingly speechless.
“Of course I have a human body, what did you think I was?” Kuroo scoffed, “Some sort of conscious robot?”

“What the hell else would we have thought?!” Tsukishima said.

“You know those don’t exist, right?” Kuroo said with a pitying voice.

“This, coming from a…a whatever it is that you are!” Tsukishima said, pointing a finger at him.

“Hey I’m a regular person just like any of you,” Kuroo retorted, “Just think of this robot body as a wheelchair. For my soul.”

“So is your brain actually in there?” Yachi asked curiously.

“Ew, no! Kenma is a genius, not a mad scientist,” Kuroo scoffed, “He simply copied my memories and thought patterns and programmed them into this robot body.”

“Of course,” Tsukishima said sarcastically.

“So as I was saying, going in there would affect me too because I’m still technically human,” Kuroo continued.

“Are you really? In that state, I mean?” Tsukishima asked doubtfully.

“Human mind, human desires,” Kuroo replied tersely.

“So then what do we do?” Yachi asked, looking worried. Her mind whirled with various bad scenarios, most of them ending with death and destruction.

“We go after the Captain, of course,” Hinata said, as if it were obvious. He turned to Kenma and Kuroo. “Thanks for guiding us this far, we’ll take it from here.”

“But it’s too dangerous!” Kuroo interjected, “You’ll get trapped in there!”

“Thanks for your concern,” Yachi said gently, “But we’re Celestial Knights, we will survive this and complete our mission. That’s our duty.”

“Duty?” Kuroo repeated in surprise.

“Sorry for dragging you two out here and putting your lives in danger,” Hinata said, bowing deeply, “We are in your debt.”

“Now, hold on-!” Kuroo sputtered. He whirled around to Kenma for backup. “Kenma!”

Kenma had sat quietly throughout the conversation, his expression unreadable.

“There’s probably another way to save Sawamura,” Kenma said quietly, “We should think this through.”

“And how long will that take?” Tsukishima asked, his gaze hard, “We don’t have time!”

“So you’ll just go in after him blindly?” Kenma snapped, “You’ll just get yourselves….” …Killed. Kenma stopped as he noticed the expressions on their faces. They already know, he realized bitterly. Idiots.

“…Trapped.” Kenma finished, averting his eyes.
“Ehehehe….” Kenma looked up in surprise. Hinata was giggling, his arm rubbing the back of his head in happy embarrassment.

“What…?” Kenma was baffled.

“It’s just…” Hinata blushed as he smiled, “I didn’t think you cared so much about us! I’m kinda happy…”

“That’s true,” Yachi joined in, blushing happily as well. “I thought we were being a bother to you, Kenma-San.”

“You’re incredibly bothersome to me…” Kenma said in astonishment.

“Only because you care about us!” Hinata said, elbowing him.

“I-I do not!” Kenma burst out. He could feel a blush creeping up his cheeks and he pulled his hood down over his face.

"Do too~" Kuroo teased, floating around Kenma's head.

"Do not!" Kenma could hear Kuroo guffawing in amusement.

“Don’t worry too much about us, Kenma!” Hinata said, clasping Kenma around the shoulders, “We’re going to go rescue Captain and then we’ll catch up with you!”

“You’re still going on about that stupid plan?” Kenma muttered, peaking out from under his hood and glaring at Hinata. Hinata let go of Kenma’s shoulders and stepped beside Yachi and Tsukishima.

“We’ll be back soon,” Hinata smiled, “I promise!”


“S-sorry, Kenma,” Hinata said, his expression faltering. There was a strange look in Hinata’s eyes that was incredibly sad. Kenma felt like clutching his chest. There was something familiar in that expression that Kenma didn’t want to think about.

“Forget it,” Kenma said. Was that anger in his voice? Kenma clenched his hands into fists, “Just leave already!”

“Kenma…” Kuroo said with a mixture of shock and disappointment.

“Then we’ll be on our way,” Tsukishima said, getting up. He looked down at Kenma coolly, “Sorry for troubling you.”

“Goodbye, Kenma-San, Kuroo-San,” Yachi said, bowing deeply before following Tsukishima.

“Se-see you, Kenma,” Hinata said dejectedly. Kenma refused to look at him as he left.

“Hey, wait!” Kuroo floated back and forth between them and Kenma in a panic. Tsukishima, Hinata, and Yachi started climbing down from the dinosaur.

“Bye-bye, Tobio-Chan,” Yachi said on her way down.

For a moment, Hinata lingered, his hand on one of Tobio’s spikes.

“Hinata?” Yachi said.
“Coming~!” Hinata said quickly. Hinata slid down Tobio’s side and jumped down beside Tsukishima. Their figures walked across the sand grew smaller and smaller in the distance.

Tobio passed through the mirage zone an hour later. Lush green vegetation dotted the horizon.


He wished he could kick something, punch something – actually do something for gods’ sake! He settled for blasting a rock with his laser. It wasn’t satisfying.

“Why did you let them go?” He shouted, whirling around at Kenma. He regretted his harsh tone almost immediately. Kenma’s head was cradled in his arms and his knees were drawn up to his chest.

“Kenma?” Kuroo said in a gently tone. He floated down to him and bumped his arm.

“This is why I hate Celestial Knights,” Kenma muttered darkly, “They always do whatever they want with no regard for others! They’re too ready to do something dumb instead of thinking things through rationally!”

Kenma finally raised his head slightly and Kuroo balked at the ferocity of his gaze. Kuroo gulped. Kenma wasn’t depressed; he was fucking pissed.

The giant sand lion stared down at them as they approached. It opened its golden mouth with a roar. Golden stairs descended down its throat. The three of them exchanged nervous glances before stepping inside.

“Remember, we’re in, finding Sawamura, then we’re out,” Tsukishima said stonily, “No wandering around like a fucking tourist.”

“Lighten up, Tsukishima,” Hinata said cheerily, “It’s a Cave of Wonders, how bad could it be?”

“You’ve just jinxed us with that stupidly optimistic sentence,” Tsukishima said flatly.

“Maybe we’ll find a magic carpet!” Hinata said, ignoring Tsukishima’s pessimism.

“I wish Sawamura-San were still with us,” Yachi said, walking closer to Tsukishima’s large frame.

“Please don’t say that like he’s dead,” Tsukishima said grimly.

The staircase descended into a huge cavern filled with piles of gold. Tsukishima looked down and realized that the sand beneath their feet had also changed to gold without their noticing.

“Sawamura-Saaaaan?” Yachi called, cupping her hands around her mouth.

“Captaaaaaiinn?” Hinata joined in, “CAPTAAIIIIINN!!”

The group walked on through the mountains of gold and jewels, calling for Sawamura. Hinata stopped suddenly and Tsukishima nearly ran him over.
“Did you hear that?” Hinata asked, whipping his head around.

“Hear what?” Yachi asked, looking around as well.

“Whatever it was, it had better have been Sawamura,” Tsukishima snapped, “Otherwise, I don’t care.”

“It sounded like…footsteps…” Hinata turned around and gulped, “From behind us.”

Wordlessly, the three of them burst into a sprint. Their feet pounded against the metal of gold beneath their feet, scattering gold coins as they ran. A fourth thudding of feet chased after them. Hinata risked a glance backwards and his face paled. He almost tripped, but Tsukishima yanked him back to his feet before he could fall completely.

“What’s chasing us?” Tsukishima asked.

“I-its…its invisible!” Hinata squeaked out. “I could see where the footsteps were landing but there was nothing chasing us!”

Tsukishima glanced behind them. Sure enough, gold coins sprung into the air as if two feet had flung them in their haste.

“Divide,” Tsukishima said, turning back around. Yachi and Hinata nodded.

Yachi and Hinata jumped to the left while Tsukishima went right. Hinata linked his hands together and Yachi stepped up. He launched Yachi into the air above them. Tsukishima and Hinata ducked low, their hands bracing them against the ground with one leg stretched out. They whirled around, legs slicing through the air above a pair of shoes.

To their shock, their legs passed through nothing and the footsteps continued on past them. Yachi descended from above, spinning with her blade drawn. Her blunt sword hit the ground where the invisible person should have been. The shoes skidded to a stop ahead of them and then turned around.

“What…” Yachi gaped at the moving shoes.

“Running shoes…?” Hinata straightened up, “Are they alive? Or is something tiny inside them?”

The shoes jumped up on their tiptoes and displayed their empty insides.

“Waaahhh awesome!” Hinata gushed. The shoes twirled around as if they were showing off.

“And here I thought it was something scary,” Yachi said, smiling, “But they seem nice!”

“We don’t know that for sure,” Tsukishima said gruffly, standing up and crossing his arms.

“Hey, can you dance?” Hinata asked, stepping towards the shoes. He hopped from one foot to the other in an awkward little dance. The shoes appeared to study his movements for a bit before joining in. Hinata laughed with delight. The shoes mimicked Hinata’s movements.

“Amazing!” Yachi applauded as Hinata and the shoes did the moonwalk.

“I read a story about dancing shoes once,” Tsukishima said coldly, “They cursed their wearer to dance forever.”

The shoes seemed to balk under Tsukishima’s glare. They ran behind Hinata and hid.
“Don’t be a bully, Tsukishima!” Hinata scolded, sticking out his tongue. The shoes stomped in indignant agreement.

“It’s alright,” Yachi said, bending down to comfort the pair of shoes, “He’s always grumpy like that.”

The shoes stepped out from behind Hinata. The left shoe slide in front of the right at a perpendicular angle, as if an invisible person wearing them were bowing at Yachi. She giggled and then curtsied. The shoes jumped in delight, scattering gold coins as it tap danced around her.

“Alright, enough fooling around,” Tsukishima said crossly, “We have to find Sawamura, remember?”

“I bet I’ll find Captain really fast if I put these shoes on!” Hinata said, sitting down and pulling off his boots. The shoes jumped in front of him and lined themselves up before his feet to be put on. They seemed to be excited by the prospect of being worn.

“Don’t blame me if you get cursed to dance forever,” Tsukishima remarked.

Hinata pulled on the magic shoes. The laces tied themselves up and Hinata grinned as he stood up.

“These feel great!” Hinata said, jumping up and down and stretching his legs, “My feet feel so light! It feels like I could flyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy! Whooaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh”

Hinata jumped and shot up in the air. Tsukishima and Yachi’s mouths dropped open. Hinata landed a couple seconds later and fell backwards on his butt.

“Holy crap…!” He said, breathing heavily, “I flew…I really flew…”

“….” Tsukishima’s eyes bulged out of his head as his mouth opened and closed silently like a goldfish.

“How’s that for cursed, eh Tsukishima?” Hinata couldn’t resist bragging, “I have superpowers now!”

Hinata jumped again and soared through the air once. Yachi and Tsukishima could hear his laughter echoing through the cavern.

“Last one to find the Captain is a rotten egg!” Hinata shouted, leaping off into the distance.

“Hey, you idiot!” Tsukishima yelled, “We’re supposed to stick together, moron!”

Tsukishima kicked a pile of gold coins in frustration.

“I knew those shoes were evil,” he muttered.

“We have to go after him!” Yachi said, running towards where Hinata had disappeared. Tsukishima sighed angrily before following her.

They entered a long hallway filled with gigantic marble statues of mythical creatures and warriors in strange armors.

“What are these…?” Yachi wondered aloud as they ran through.

The room was cold and snowflakes fell slowly from the ceiling. A shock jolted through Yachi as one of the snowflakes touched her skin.
Hitoka looked up at the tall, full figure of her mother as her attendants dressed her in silken robes. Her eyes followed the colourful cloth winding around her mother’s waist as it forced the air out of her mother’s lungs. A stiff brassiere held her mother’s breasts in high beautiful mounds and her collar bones rose in pale and delicate arcs beneath her neck. The cloth of her skirt fell like a waterfall to the floor, swaying hypnotically with every move her mother made.

Yachi slowed and held a hand to her eyes. What just happened?

“Yachi, hurry up,” Tsukishima called from ahead of her.

“Yeah… just a minute…” Yachi responded in a daze. Her feet slowed. Another snowflake landed on her upper arm and sunk wetly into her skin.

An attendant held her mother’s hand tightly as the other slipped the towering red heels onto her mother’s feet. Her mother’s long auburn hair was pulled back from her face and tied it in a high ponytail of curls that swayed just below her hips.

“Mother…?” Yachi said quietly, standing still among the statues.

“Your hat, miss?” asked one of the attendants.

“Yes,” she bowed her head as the attendant pulled her long ponytail through the center hole in her broad circular straw hat.

The attendant adjusted the thin white veil attached to the brim so that it surrounded her evenly to shield her from the sun. Hitoka gazed at the scene in envy. Her mother and her pale skinned attendants stood picturesque against the morning light.

“Where are you going, Mother?” Hitoka asked, squeezing the arm of her stuffed toy. “When will you come back?”

Her mother smiled down at her, her eyes hidden by the brim of her hat, “Be good.”

Her mother glided out the door followed by her attendants. Hitoka reached for her mother as she passed by, but her fine silks slid through Hitoka’s clumsy fingers. The doors shut behind them with a loud hollow bang.

Warm fingers wiped at Yachi’s cheeks. Yachi jolted. Before her stood a tall woman, a golden straw hat with a veil draped to the floor covered her face. Yachi’s fingers tingled where she remembers the silky feel of fabric sliding through them.

Yachi stepped into the warm embrace, the veil closing around her.

“I thought I might find you up here,” Saeko said from the top of the ladder to the crow’s nest. She rested her arms on the floor, propping her head up with her hand.

“Just enjoying the night breeze,” Kiyoko said without turning around.

“Enjoy the night breeze?” Saeko snorted. “I can’t imagine how you find the northern winds enjoyable.”
“What do you mean? I love freezing temperatures,” Kiyoko replied dryly.

“That’s a strange preference for a dragon,” Saeko raised her eyebrows.

“Hm,” Kiyoko finally turned around, leaning against the railing of the crow’s nest. “If you’re here for Tanaka, he and Nishinoya are below deck.”

“I’m also ‘Tanaka’, you know,” Saeko said lightly. Kiyoko let the dig pass unremarked. Saeko sighed at the lack of a response before continuing. “Actually I’m here to talk to you.”

Kiyoko noted the calm expression on her face with surprise. So she didn’t know about the curse yet…

“Go on,” Kiyoko said, curious as to what brought Saeko all the way to her ship in the middle of the night.

“I’ve found two more demuto,” Saeko said, holding up two fingers in a ‘V’ sign. “They seem to be fairly recent too.”

“Demuto? In this city?” Kiyoko’s face filled with concern. “How much do they know?”

“Nothing, it seems. I tried to get them to come with me here but…” Saeko said, wincing at the memory. “They grew suspicious of your pirate ship.”

“They’re in danger,” Kiyoko said, turning back to the city beyond the harbor. “This city’s full of blood dealers and black hawkers!”

“And pirates,” Saeko grinned, “So what’daya say, Captain? Mind lending me some of your lovely crew for a fetch mission?”

“Take Misaki, Narita, and Kinoshita with you,” Kiyoko said, crossing her arms and smiling, “And bring me back two demuto!”

“Aye, aye!” Saeko winked and saluted before descending the ladder.

“One more thing before you leave,” Kiyoko called after her.

“What’s up?” Saeko’s head popped up again with a curious look.

“Your brother and Nishinoya were cursed by the qilin,” Kiyoko said.

“Ehhh?!” Saeko’s jaw dropped.

“It’s nothing serious,” Kiyoko quickly followed up, “They’re turning to gold, one finger at a time every six hours.”

Saeko sank against the ladder in relief. “Man, you had me worried! If it’s a slow curse then we have time to figure out what to do about it. It’s not the first time they’ve gotten themselves in a mess like this.”

“Ennoshita and I have a plan to help them,” Kiyoko said confidently, “You just focus on the demuto and leave your brother and Nishinoya to me.”

“Man, I bet those two would be fired up to hear you say that,” Saeko laughed. “But seriously, thanks for having their backs.”
“I owe you guys that much at least,” Kiyoko said softly. “After you found me.”

Saeko remembers that night. It felt so long ago now, like a whole other life.

“You were like a shooting star,” she said quietly, reminiscing.

“More like a flaming comet,” Kiyoko snorted.

“Same thing,” Saeko laughed.

The two of them giggled together and for a moment they were just two girls, not a pirate captain or a dragon or a runaway or an information broker. Kiyoko fell silent first, like always. Saeko tried not to feel hurt by it. She failed, as always, a familiar little pang in her chest tugged the smile from her face.

“See you later, Kiyoko,” Saeko said as she left, disappearing below.

“See you…” Kiyoko replied, silence where used to be ‘Saeko’.

“We’re not hiring.”

Shirabu sighs in defeat. They’d been rejected 7 times already and it was starting to wear him down. Ushijima places a hand on his shoulder.

“Thanks, Wakatoshi,” Shirabu said, flashing him a weak smile, “Let’s try the next place, yeah?”

“Are you two gentlemen looking for a job?” A voice from behind them asks smoothly.

They turned around to see a well-dressed man with slanted eyes smiling at them. Thick dark hair was swept neatly to the left side of his face. He was taller than Shirabu, but shorter than Ushijima (as most people were). He wore a long red overcoat with a complex pattern woven into it in a darker red thread. His 3-piece suit underneath the overcoat consisted of a grey pinstripes with a sleek black vest with gold buttons and a golden chain closing the front. He tipped a black bowler hat as he approached.

“Suspicious…” Shirabu muttered.

“No need to be apprehensive of me, gentlemen!” The man said, “My name is Daisho Suguru. I was finishing my drink at the establishment you were just at and happened to overhear your conversation with the bar’s owner. Finding work at this time of year is always rough and I sympathized with your situation!”

“So you decided to offer us jobs?” Shirabu said, eyes narrowed, “You’re awfully generous offering two strangers work without even looking at their resumes.”

“Ah, I can understand your suspicion,” Daisho said wincing, “But please hear me out! There is a reason why your appearance would strike me as more than qualified for the work I am offering you than your credentials, as impressive as they surely are! You see, I am scouting for people with ability to do hard work, people with muscles and strength! It is legitimate work, you know, stuff like helping little old ladies carry their groceries or stack some crates on freighters. Sometimes we also put on shows for the enjoyment of the public!”
“…Really?” Shirabu felt his defenses lower at the mention of honest work. He even felt a twinge of hope bloom in his chest. “And the pay?”

“We’re a bit of an odd job company,” Daisho explained, “You will receive payment after each job you complete. The payment amount depends on the job, so it’s possible to make $1000 in one night!”

“Are you for real?” Shirabu asked, but his voice was filled with amazement instead of suspicion.

“As real as can be,” Daisho smiled, his arms spread open wide. He moved forwards, his arms around Shirabu and Ushijima, ushering them down the street. “Now gentlemen, let’s say we go back to my company and discuss the details further?”

“Huh, wait, uh…” Shirabu felt his protests grow weaker as Daisho spoke, his promises sounding like honey to Shirabu’s ears. Maybe this would work out after all, Shirabu thought to himself. The little bloom of hope in his chest swelled with each step towards their mysterious destination.

Suckers, Daishi thought, subtly licking his lips. He sniffed quietly and tried not to let a grin take over his face at their scent. Demuto were such lovely, lovely, idiots.

A banner over the front of the tent was emblazoned with the words Cirque Du Sanguine. Shirabu and Ushijima passed under it without a second glance, their attention held captive by Daisho’s animated speech.

“Like I mentioned before, we’re a circus company that also does odd jobs for the public!” Daisho said. Shirabu vaguely felt like his explanation was slightly different from before, but he didn’t care.

“Kenjirou, with your serious attitude and intelligence are perfect for balancing acts!” Daisho exclaimed. Shirabu felt a flush of happiness run through him at the praise.

“And Wakatoshi, my man, you can be our strongman! There’s nothing stronger than a bull!” Daisho gushed, running a hand over Ushijima’s muscled arm.

Shirabu suddenly stopped in his tracks and jerked away from Daisho.

“What’s wrong, Kenjirou?” Daisho asked in concern. He smiled warmly but his gaze was cold.

“What do you mean by ‘stronger than a bull’?” Shirabu asked.

“Hm? Isn’t that an expression of speech?” Daisho tilted his head innocently to the side, “Are you unfamiliar with it?”

Shirabu relaxed slightly.

“An expression of speech?” He asked cautiously.

“Yes, it’s quite a common phrase around these parts,” Daisho explained.

“I see,” Shirabu said, blushing with embarrassment, “I apologize for my outburst, I misunderstood you.”

“No worries, no worries,” Daisho patted him on the back amiably, “We have people from all different cultures in our company here!”

“Oooii Boss,” A tall young man with messy hair and droopy eyes waved at Daisho, “One of the demuto escaped from its cage.”
Daisho moved before Shirabu realized what was happening. His head was suddenly slammed against the floor and Daisho’s weight pinned him down.

“Don’t move or I’ll shoot your friend,” Daisho said to Ushijima. Shirabu felt the cold press of a gun against his head. Ushijima trembled with anger but didn’t move. Daisho sneered, his thin tongue slid across his upper lip.

“Ah, sorry Boss, did I ruin your ploy?” The young man asked in a dull voice.

“You don’t sound very sorry, Kuguri,” Daisho hissed.

“Well, I’m not,” Kuguri replied, “Exposing you doesn’t make any difference in the end anyway.”

“That’s not the point,” Daisho pouted as someone shot something at Ushijima. Ushijima fell, a needle poking out from his neck. “At least try to do something about your lack of enthusiasm, we’re entertainers after all.”

Kuguri’s snort was the last thing Shirabu heard before he felt a prick at the back of his neck and the world went black.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't really mean for Kiyoko x Saeko but it happened

i honestly doubt Hinata could do the moonwalk but this is an au and anything is possible
Here Be Allies

Chapter Summary

you can always find allies in dark twisting alleys. also black hawkers have the coolest stuff.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I don’t say this often, but I don’t think this is a very good idea,” Kuroo said as Kenma fiddled around with his controls.

His protests were met with an icy silence that Kenma had been exuding ever since they had left behind the group of Celestial Knights. Kenma suddenly snapped Kuroo’s control panel shut and Kuroo’s body shimmered for a second before disappearing entirely.

“Watch Tobio while I’m gone,” Kenma ordered.

“Can’t we just leave the big dumb dinosaur by itself?” Kuroo persisted.

Tobio’s giant body was somewhat hidden by the trees but he wasn’t exactly inconspicuous.

“No,” Kenma glared at Kuroo, “Make sure he doesn’t cause any trouble.”

Kenma straightened up and pulled his hood over his head.

“If that’s supposed to be a disguise, it sticks out like a literal sore thumb,” Kuroo remarked, eyeing Kenma’s bright red tracksuit, “and if you actually think I’m going to let you go off into an unfamiliar city by yourself you’re crazy.”

“It’s too dangerous for you to go with me,” Kenma said, “if I need you, I’ll activate my tracker and then you can come find me. That’s IF I need you. And IF you have to come after me, do it discreetly.”

Kenma started walking.

“Wait, Kenma, you’re not seriously leaving me here?” Kuroo called after him.

Kenma continued walking, ignoring Kuroo’s protests.

“Keenmmmaaaa!”

Kenma turned around and glared at Kuroo, jabbing his finger at him and then in Tobio’s direction. Kuroo sunk down. Kenma disappeared into the bushes.

“Come back safe…” Kuroo said defeatedly.

Kenma left Kuroo and Tobio at the outskirts of the village. He hoped he left them far away enough from the village to not be noticed. The last thing he wanted to deal with was an actual blood dealer trying to steal their ride. Kenma fingered the edge of his red hoodie nervously as he turned down one
of the alleyways.

He moved quickly with his head ducked to avoid eye contact. The streets were getting narrower and shot off in weird twisting paths that were peppered with darkened doorways. The windows were tinted black and there were barely any people around. Kenma stopped in front of one of the doorways. The rusted sign hanging above it was illegible from grime.

Kenma knocked on the door. A peephole slide open revealing a pair of dark eyes with long eyelashes.

“And what are you supposed to be?” They asked suspiciously.

“A blood dealer,” Kenma replied.

“Proof?”

Kenma showed him the palm of his hand where he’d drawn an intricate guild insignia with red pen. He hoped it was convincing.

“Come in.” There was a small click as the door unlatched and swung open.

The person on the other side was androgynous with short black hair and pale skin. They wore a slim-fitting black turtleneck with half-sleeves and black gloves. Black leather pants clung to their shapely legs and a katana hung at their hip. They motioned for Kenma to descend a flight of dimly lit stairs.

“Are you going to announce me?” Kenma asked as they descended.

“No, he’s already heard you coming,” they replied.

The stairs led to a huge open-spaced room with a long walkway with thin railings. Looking closer, Kenma realized the railing bars were actually swords. Underneath the walkway was all water. Kenma could see numerous fishes and other various dark shapes swimming below. The walkway led to an oval platform that was comfortably furnished like a game room with couches and pillows. A video game was projected onto the opposing wall and a man sat in front of it, spinning wildly on a rotating stool.

“Mortal Kombat?” Kenma blurted out.

“And Player 2 has stepped into the riiiiinnnggg!” The man on the stool announced.

He pushed off with both feet and rolled towards his visitor. The man had wild black and white streaked hair slicked into two peaks and he was wearing a set of fuzzy owl pajamas.

“What’s your name, Player 2?” The man asked.

“Kozume…” Kenma said.

“…Kenma,” Kenma finished reluctantly.

“Nice ta meetcha, Kenma!” Bokuto said, “I’m Bokuto Koutarou! And this is Akaashi Keiji!”

“Nice to meet you,” Akaashi said with a polite nod.

“Akaashi, find me the other controller,” Bokuto said, waving his hand towards a coffee table with
drawers.

“Yes, Bokuto-San,” Akaashi replied.

“I’m not here to play games,” Kenma began, but stopped as Bokuto waved his hand to silence him.

“You’re here to do business with me, yes?” He turned to Kenma and grinned with wide milky-white eyes. “Then you’re here to play games!"

“Then…” Kenma eyed the controller in Akaashi’s outstretched hand, “if I win?”

“If you win, then you win,” Bokuto answered cryptically.

He pressed a button and Mortal Kombat disappeared, replaced with a different, but similar-looking game. The screen was mostly black with a floating wooden platform in the middle. The title simply read ‘Auction’ in dramatic red letters.

Bokuto pressed start and the character selection screen came up. He selected a pixel character with the same black and white streaked hairstyle as himself. Where the character name should be was the number ‘4’. A second line of text sandwiched between arrow keys was below the number. Bokuto quickly switched through the options before locking in his choice.

Kenma jumped as the controller pricked him. Blood seeped into the controller from his right index finger. The character slot for player 2 suddenly appeared with a pixel character with blonde hair and dark roots. The number ‘5’ appeared below it. Kenma figured the second line of text was some kind of attack mode but the names made no sense to him. He switched back and forth a few times before deciding on ‘random’.

“Now for the bid!” Bokuto said excitedly, “Type in what you want from me. I won’t look, I promise!”

Bokuto burst out laughing at his own joke as Kenma typed.

“Sounds like a big request,” Bokuto grinned, “That’ll make this more interesting!”

Kenma hit enter and the screen changed to a cutscene. The camera angle showed rows of seats filled with shadowed figures looking down at a lowered circular stage. Dramatic music played as a pixel character that looked vaguely like Akaashi appeared at the bottom of the screen.

“All bid-winners have been entered!” The Auctioneer announced with a deadpanned expression, “Congratulations to Mr. 4 and Mr. 5, the right to win the bid is yours!”

Two seats lit up scarlet with the bid numbers 4 and 5 hovering in gold light above the heads of their pixel occupants. The camera panned across the walls of the lowered stage, showing the various beasts and monsters contained in numbered cages. The camera moved to cages 4 and 5 as they slid out from the walls and lowered onto the stage.

A huge hulking beast with a glowing red number 4 hovering over its head crawled out of Bokuto’s cage. It was a giant owl with curled horns and blazing yellow eyes. It has six legs with four toes, the front three ending in ten-inch talons. It screeched and Kenma’s ears rang with the sound.

Kenma looked down at his cage in anticipation for the fighter. A small black paw stepped out, followed by a tiny black fuzzy body with triangle ears and a curled tail. A red number 5 floated over its head as it sat down and licked his paw. Kenma felt like banging his body against a wall in
frustration.

“Kenma, what did you choose? I don’t hear anything?” Bokuto asked.

“It’s a kitten, a tiny black one,” Kenma answered.

“A kitten?” Bokuto burst out laughing, “Oh man, that brings me back…”

There was note of nostalgia in his voice, but Kenma had other things to think about – like how in the hell he was going to use a tiny black kitten to fight off a giant owl monster thing. Kenma frantically pressed buttons to no avail.

“This game doesn’t work like that,” Bokuto said, reaching over and pushing down Kenma’s controller, “from here on, it’s all voice command. Don’t worry, each bid-winner only responds to its owner’s voice.”

‘FIGHT’ appeared in the middle of the screen in bold letters.

“Here we go!” Bokuto shouted, “Stikini, kick his butt!”

“Run away!” Kenma shouted. The kitten flicked its ear, ignoring Kenma completely. “What the? It’s not working! Black Kitten, run! Dodge the attack!”

“Hahaha! You don’t control your bid-winner,” Bokuto said, his hands on his hips, “You cheer them on. The louder and more heartfelt the cheer, the harder your bid-winner fights for you!”

Stikini, the owl monster lunged towards the kitten with its talons outstretched.

“DODGE IT!” Kenma screamed.

The kitten reacted instinctively and jumped lightly out of the way. It landed in a battle stance, its black tail curled like a scorpion’s. Kenma’s eyes widened as he saw that the kitten’s tail was actually a black viper.

“Bokuto-San, it appears it’s actually a chimera,” Akaashi said, “not a black kitten.”

“Doesn’t change a thing!” Bokuto said confidently, “I have absolute faith in Stikini! Right, partner?”

The owl monster roared viciously and attacked the kitten again.

“Don’t get hurt! Dodge him!” Kenma shouted at the screen.

“Get him, Stikini! You got this! Woohoo!” Bokuto cheered, pumping his fists in the air.

Stikini started landing more hits on the kitten. From the looks of the fight so far, Bokuto was definitely going to win. Kenma stuck his tongue between his lips.

“GET READY FOR OUR SUPER COMBO ULTRA POWER MODE!” Bokuto shouted.

The owl monster suddenly glowed and the screen changed to a starry background as the owl turned white with a pulsating aura. It charged the kitten and rammed it into the air with its horns.

“No…” Kenma’s heart stopped as the kitten’s body tumbled through the air. He felt nausea rising in his stomach the more he watched. No wonder Bokuto was so good at this game, Kenma thought bitterly. How could anyone stand to watch the brutality on the screen?
The black kitten was lying on its side. Bokuto’s owl monster approached slowly, toying with its prey now. Kenma fell to his knees, staring blankly at the screen, at the black kitten. *It’s your fault he’s like this. No…it’s not. You destroyed him. I-I didn’t. Ripped him apart. I didn’t know. You didn’t care.*

“Bokuto-San,” Akaashi touched Bokuto’s shoulder, “there’s something wrong with the kid.”

“What do you mean?” Bokuto asked.

“I’m sorry…” Kenma said under his breath. Tears streamed down each side of his face.

The screen changed again, this time to an entirely black background. The kitten grew into a black lion with a red aura around it. Its viper tail elongated and thickened into a bigger snake. Wings sprouted from its back and it roared fire at the owl monster. This time, the owl monster’s health took a beating as the chimera finally attacked back. The chimera swung its tail like a whip that knocked the stikini over. The chimera then pinned it down as its viper tail bit it over and over again. Then the owl monster swiped its talons across the chimera’s face in defense. That was all it took. The screen split into WINNER and LOSER.

The group was quiet for a moment.

“You’re not a blood dealer, are you, Kenma?” Bokuto said finally, spinning around on his stool.

Kenma’s hand moved to the hidden knife in his sweater. Bokuto moved before Kenma could and Kenma braced himself for an attack. It didn’t come. Bokuto was stopped in front of Akaashi, hand lightly stopping Akaashi from drawing his katana.

“No need for that, Akaashi,” Bokuto said with a smile, “He’s not going to attack us.”

“He moved for a weapon,” Akaashi’s eyes narrowed.

Kenma swallowed nervously. Bokuto simply patted Akaashi’s shoulder and then turned back to Kenma.

“So why do you want gear for travelling through tangible desire spots?” He asked amiably.

“You knew what I typed?” Kenma said, surprised.

“I could hear it, the letters all sound different you know,” Bokuto said, “it would make sense for a blood dealer to want to go into tangible desire spots for various items and creatures, but anyone who can play this game isn’t the type of person who sells creatures for a living.”

“I didn’t beat you thought,” Kenma said, glancing at the word ‘LOSER’ written on his half of the split-screen.

“That’s because I’m awesome!” Bokuto said proudly, “but you were able to make your bid-winner evolve and use a special move!”

“Why haven’t you kicked me out if you know I’m not a blood dealer?” Kenma asked.

“We invited you in because you weren’t a blood dealer,” Bokuto said, “I hate dealing with those guys, they’re creepy!”

“But you’re black hawkers…” Kenma said.

“STOP!” Bokuto threw out his hand for dramatic effect, “black hawkers are entirely different from
blood dealers. If you think that just because black hawkers and blood dealers like to frequent the same black markets and sell illegal and illustrious items that they’re the same, you’re wrong! Us, black hawkers deal in objects, things that don’t think, don’t feel. We’re not like blood dealers whose only wares have had their freedom taken from them.”

“Oh…sorry,” Kenma said.

“That being said, there are many black hawkers who do intermingle with blood dealers,” Bokuto stuck out his tongue, “like the ones who created the Auction.”

“You mean the video game we played?” Kenma asked.

“The Auction's not just a video game, it’s a real game and its played live,” Bokuto said, his tone turning serious, “Me, Akaashi n’ a friend of ours made this game from what we witnessed there as a test for whoever we deal with.”

Kenma turned pale and looked back up at the screen.

“But enough of that,” Bokuto turned off the projector and the screen disappeared. “What did you come to us for?”

“I need to save some people,” Kenma said quietly.

“Friends?” Bokuto asked.

“No!” Kenma said quickly, his face flushing. “They’re just…I agreed to guide them to where they needed to go but we travelled too close to a Cave of Wonders and one of them ran inside. The rest of them followed him to get him back and now they’re probably all trapped inside.”

“So they owe you payment,” Akaashi said.

“No, not really,” Kenma muttered.

“Then why do you want to help them?” Bokuto asked, “It sounds like they went inside of their own accord.”

“They’re idiots!” Kenma said, scowling, “They…they’ll die if I don’t help them…”

Bokuto reached out and ruffled Kenma’s hair. Kenma jumped at the sudden gentle contact.

“No need to look so sad, we’ll help ya!” Bokuto said gently.

“I thought you were blind…” Kenma sniffled, wiping his face with his sleeve.

“Don’t mind the small stuff! I can feel your sad expression in my heart!” Bokuto said cheerfully, “Next time, let me feel your happy expression instead!”

“Is he always this cheerful?” Kenma mumbled at Akaashi.

“Bokuto-San is the epitome of emotion,” Akaashi answered flatly.

“Let’s get moving, gang!” Bokuto said, hopping to his feet.

He placed a hand on his hip and then pointed dramatically with his other hand.

“Hit the switch, Akaashi!”
“The switch?” Kenma watched curiously as Akaashi walked over to the coffee table and picked up what looked like a tv remote.

Bokuto hopped over the sword railing and Kenma’s eyes widened in surprise when he didn’t immediately fall into the water. He turned towards Kenma’s direction and stomped.

“Projection or glass, wanna bet which?” Bokuto asked with a huge grin.

Bokuto’s question was answered when Akaashi pressed a button and a compartment opened up in the floor beside him. A table covered in equipment rose out of the compartment.

“Awww, at least wait till he guesses, Akaashi!” Bokuto complained.

“We’re wasting time, Bokuto-San,” Akaashi replied.

He opened a gate in the sword railing and stepped out towards Bokuto. Kenma followed. He looked down at the projection on the floor as he walked over it. More than a projection, the floor was like a giant screen. Kenma wondered idly what the projected image was from.

“First, put this on,” Bokuto tossed two pair of clothes folded in a plastic bag in their general direction.

Akaashi caught them easily and handed one to Kenma. Kenma opened his and took the clothes out. He made a face of absolute disgust as the suit unraveled. It was a skin-tight black leather bodysuit with neon yellow accent lines. Kenma was speechless with a mixture of shock and revulsion. He looked over at Bokuto to see if he was actually serious about the clothing selection. He immediately regretted that decision as he saw the full view of Bokuto’s bare ass as he shimmed into his own black bodysuit.

“Whoa, what are you doing?” Kenma asked, quickly averting his eyes.

“These suits protect against tangible desire,” Akaashi explained, opening his own plastic bag.

“Wait, are you two coming with me?” Kenma asked.

“Can’t we?” Bokuto asked.

“Why would you go to so much trouble for me…you don’t even know me,” Kenma said.

“Because it sounded like fun!” Bokuto declared.

“Besides, we go to tangible desire spots all the time, so helping you out isn’t a big deal,” Akaashi added.

“…Thanks,” Kenma said, looking down at the suit in his hands.

“Hm?” Akaashi’s voice was muffled by his shirt as he pulled it over his head. He had a slender, but muscular build and his skin was marked with numerous scars. He neatly folded his shirt before placing it on the floor. His hands went to his belt buckle next.

“UWAH!” Kenma covered his eyes as Akaashi’s pants dropped to the floor.

“Oh, are you embarrassed changing in front of people?” Akaashi asked, sounding genuinely surprised at the notion. “You don’t have to worry, Bokuto-San’s blind after all.”

“With all due respect, you’re not blind, Akaashi-San,” Kenma muttered, his head still turned to the
Akaashi pulled up the suit and zipped up the front.

“You can change behind a screen if you’re embarrassed,” Akaashi said, tapping another button on the remote.

An elaborate paper folding screen rose from another compartment in the floor.

“Thanks,” Kenma said quickly, walking over to the folding screen.

Once behind the screen, Kenma realized one more significant problem with his current state of dress.

“Hey, Kenma, you ready yet? We’ve already packed all the gear!” Bokuto called.

“I’m coming!” Kenma replied. He clenched his fists. So he didn’t have a choice, he just had to grin and bear it for now. He walked out from behind the screen; his clothes bundled tightly under his arm. It was funny, Kenma thought, how he felt completely exposed despite the suit covering almost every inch of his body.

“Ah, Bokuto-San, you forgot to give him a dancer’s belt,” Akaashi said.

“A what?” Kenma asked.

“You know, it’s for covering…” Akaashi gestured around his waist. Kenma’s face grew red.

“Dancer’s belt, who needs one of those?” Bokuto waved his hand dismissively. “I prefer to go without!”

There was a notable jiggle in Bokuto’s suit as he struck a determined pose with his hands on his hips.

“Yes, we can see that, Bokuto-San,” Akaashi said darkly.

Akaashi found Kenma and Bokuto dancer’s belts to go with their bodysuits and the two changed again. This time, the annoying feeling of a wedgie drove away any feelings of exposure Kenma had felt the first time coming out from behind the screen. Akaashi and Bokuto already had the equipment packed in backpacks. Akaashi handed Kenma his own backpack as he walked over to them.

“Should we take a kestrel?” Akaashi asked Bokuto.

“Ah, I actually have a ride already,” Kenma said, raising his hand, “Probably.”

“What do you mean you have a ride ‘probably’?” Akaashi asked.

“I don’t know if it’s still there, I’ve been gone for a while,” Kenma replied.

“So it might have gotten stolen then?” Bokuto said, crossing his arms and holding his chin thoughtfully, “That would be a problem.”

“I highly doubt that,” Kenma replied flatly, “But it might have wandered off.”

“Just what kind of ride…”
“Tobio-Chan, I’ve just been struck with how ridiculously ironic our situation is,” Kuroo said, floating around the dinosaur’s head. “Look at you, just look at you! You’re huge! You stick out! You’re so damn noticeable! Meanwhile, I’m literally invisible! And even when I’m not invisible, I might as well be! No one pays attention to the floating metal ball…”

Tobio grunted as he foraged through some shrubs.

“You understand me, right? You’ve seen how the others take advantage of me! They’re always complaining about how I get them lost when if it weren’t for me they’d still be stuck in the garden! And you would have crushed them if I weren’t there for our first meeting! And then like idiots they decide to wander off into a Cave of Wonders and now Kenma’s angry at ME!”

Tobio munched on some leaves.

“Exactly! I tried my best to stop them!”

Kuroo moved back and forth, as if he were pacing restlessly. He slowed down suddenly as another thought occurred to him.

“I tried and failed to stop Kenma too, didn’t I?”

Kuroo drifted off, sinking lower to the ground in his depression.

“I’m completely useless…”

Kuroo jerked around. Someone had said the exact same words as he had, and in tandem too! The bush next to him was trembling.

“Uwah! Is there a ghost around? Oh no, I hope not!” Said a bush.

Upon closer inspection, there seemed to be a person inside the bush. What Kuroo had originally thought were some sort of pink wood branches moved. Kuroo floated closer.

“Boo.”

“UWAH!!!!”

A person leapt out of the bush screaming in an extremely high-pitched scream. Kuroo recognized the high frequency and he turned frantically back to Tobio. As he feared, the dinosaur had bolted off into a run, trampling through the forest.

“Kenma’s going to be pissed,” Kuroo whispered.

“Oh no, I did it again…” the stranger said miserably.

Kuroo turned back to him with a glare. The stranger was strangely pretty, with long shiny brown hair and the aforementioned pink antlers.

“Oi, do you have any idea how much trouble you’ve just caused?” He said, looming over the terrified creature/person.

“I’M SO SORRY!” They shouted, covering their face with their hands. Kuroo suddenly recognized the red tracksuit they were wearing. Kuroo felt his heart stop. Kenma.
“Hey, where did you get that outfit?” Kuroo said, his voice dangerously low.

“Eh?” They gulped, “I-I borrowed it…”

“Is that so? Somehow I doubt that…” Kuroo replied nastily.

“Wh-who are you? Are you an angry spirit?” They asked, trembling all over.

“Oh I’m an angry spirit all right,” Kuroo answered, “And I’ve got a mind to haunt you real good if you don’t spill all you know about that tracksuit you’ve got there.”

“Yo-you can’t haunt a qilin! W-we’re blessed creatures!” They protested desperately.

Well if they’re that desperate about it, it sounds like they don’t actually know if that’s true, Kuroo surmised.

“I’m a vengeful spirit from Hell, I don’t give a shit about you being ‘blessed’ or whatever,” Kuroo leered, “Now speak up.”

The qilin swallowed nervously.

“Just what kind of ride-”

“Something big’s approaching the village,” Bokuto said, interrupting Akaashi.

“Something big?” Kenma repeated.

“Yeah, I hear a lot of crashing and panic,” Bokuto said, his face beaming with excitement. “Let’s go see what it is!”

Kenma followed Bokuto and Akaashi back up the stairs to their front door. The front entrance was blasted away as they walked up. Wood and plaster debris was scattered at their feet. Akaashi and Kenma stared, stunned, at the mayhem outside.

“Akaashi, what’s going on? What’s rampaging?” Bokuto asked, jumping up and down like an excited child.

“It’s…a giant dinosaur…” Akaashi said.

“It’s my ride,” Kenma said grimly. His expression was dark. Akaashi wondered why he suddenly seemed pissed.

“Man, you sure ride in style!” Bokuto said, slapping Kenma on the back.

“For now, we should catch it,” Akaashi said, turning towards Kenma.

“Please don’t look at me,” Kenma said flatly, “I just ride the thing. How would I know how to stop it from rampaging?”

“How do you normally ride it then?” Akaashi asked.
“We bait it with a laser pointer,” Kenma answered.

“Alright so we just need to bait it then! Leave it to me!” Bokuto said, swinging his arm around.

“Good luck,” Kenma said.

“I’ll lock up first,” Akaashi said, pulling out a small button. He pressed it and a metal panel slid down, closing off the entrance down to Bokuto’s game room. “Okay, Bokuto-San let’s get the-”

Akaashi fell silent. Bokuto was already running down the street after the dinosaur, laughing like a maniac.

“Sorry about this,” Kenma said.

“Nah, Bokuto-San is always like that,” Akaashi said, setting down his backpack, “We might as well wait for him to bring it back.”

“Will he be able to?” Kenma asked doubtfully.

“Bokuto-San may be blind,” Akaashi smiled, “But that has never stopped him from doing what he’s set his mind on.”

Almost as if on cue, Bokuto and the dinosaur turned the corner back towards them. Bokuto jumped up and down on top of the dinosaur’s head and waved. In his other hand, he held a sword with a rope tied to the end. A basket of fruit dangled from the other end of the rope in front of the ankylosaurus’ nose.

“He’s smarter than he looks,” Kenma remarked.

“He is,” Akaashi smiled, “But don’t tell him that.”

“Too late, Akaashi! I already heard it!” Bokuto yelled. “I am totally awesome!”

“Yes, yes, yay for Bokuto-San. Amazing!” Akaashi said, clapping.

“Alllllboard the dino-express!” Bokuto cheered. “Does this bad boy have a name?”

“It’s Tobio,” Kenma answered.

“Weird name for a land dinosaur,” Bokuto remarked, “Don’t the characters for Tobio mean ‘flying hero’?”

“I didn’t choose it, one of my companions did,” Kenma explained, “I think it has to do with… volleyball…or something.”

“Kenma-San, you know a lot of different people,” Akaashi said.

“Not intentionally,” Kenma replied with a sigh.

Akaashi helped Kenma climb up onto the dinosaur’s back.

“I feel kind of bad about the damage,” Kenma said, looking down at the street.

“Don’t worry about it, nearly everyone here is a black hawker. We’re used to such events,” Akaashi said nonchalantly, “The town will rebuild itself in a couple days.”
“You people are weird,” Kenma said.

“Coming from someone who rides a dinosaur around that they can’t control,” Akaashi replied.

“There were circumstances,” Kenma said darkly.

“Where are we headed, guys?” Bokuto asked over his shoulder.

“Um, please head towards the forest,” Kenma said, “There’s a friend waiting for me.”

“So you have another companion?” Bokuto asked excitedly.

“He’s the one who was supposed to watch the dinosaur,” Kenma said flatly.

Akaashi patted Kenma’s shoulder in understanding.

“So you still have the guts to lie to my face…” Kuroo growled.

The qilin backed up against a tree. Tears were streaming down their pale face as they stammered apologies and excuses. It was nothing but one insane lie after another. Kuroo was slightly impressed with the guy’s ability to keep spitting out lies even while terrified. Honestly, they didn’t even make sense. He turned Cat into a person? Like hell!

“Kuroo? Kurooooo?”

Kuroo perked up. That was Kenma’s voice!

“Kenmaaaa!” Kuroo yelled, looking around.

The sound of underbrush getting trampled underfoot was unmistakable.

“Tobio-Chan?!” Kuroo shouted happily at the sight of the dinosaur making its way through the trees. He immediately froze at the sight of Kenma’s glare.

“Is that your friend, Kenma? With the pink antlers?”

Kuroo realized in shock that Kenma wasn’t alone. There were two other people with him, a wild-looking hooligan with wacky dyed hair and a dark-haired beauty. And what’s more, all three of them were wearing some strange bondage type bodysuits.

“No, I’ve never seen that before,” Kenma answered, “My companion is invisible at the moment.”

“Kenma, who are they?” Kuroo asked, floating up to Kenma.

“Bokuto Koutarou and Akaashi Keiji,” Kenma said, “They’re black hawkers.”

“Huh? Aren’t black hawkers thie-” Kuroo was quickly snatched out of the air by a pair of hands that were not Kenma’s.
“WHOA! So cool! He feels like metal, is he a robot?” The wild one asked, feeling all over Kuroo’s panels.

“That is my companion, Kuroo,” Kenma said.

“Nice to meet you,” Akaashi said. “By the way, we’re not thieves.”

“We’re more like treasure hunters, right Akaashi?” Bokuto laughed.

“Hey! Let go of me!” Kuroo yelled, “I’m not your damn toy!”

“Pass him to me, Bokuto-San,” Kenma said, holding out his arms, “I need to have a strict talk with him.”

“Here you go, Kenma!” Bokuto said, handing Kuroo over.

“What should we do with the other guy?” Akaashi asked, staring down at him.

The creature/person was frozen stiff, eyes wide as they stared at the dinosaur in front of them.

“How’d you run into this guy, anyway?” Kenma asked Kuroo once he was visible again.

“He just popped up all of a sudden and scared Tobio-Chan,” Kuroo pouted.

“Hey, who are you?” Bokuto called down to them.

"Ya-Yamaguchi Tadashi…I’m a qilin…” they answered.

“A qilin?” Kenma walked over to the edge of Tobio’s back and looked down at them. “Why are you wearing my clothes?”

“I’m sorry! I borrowed them from your cat!” They said, bowing deeply.

“My cat?” Kenma repeated in confusion.

“Don’t listen to him, Kenma, all he says are lies!” Kuroo said, floating next to Kenma’s head.

“Wait, I thought you were a ghost?” The qilin said, pointing up at Kuroo.

“I never said I was a ghost, I said I was an angry spirit,” Kuroo replied. “Which I am.”

“We’re wasting time here,” Kenma said, “It’s already been a full day since we left the others in that Cave of Wonders.”

“Hey, qilin, get on the dinosaur!” Kuroo shouted, “I’m not through with you and we’re on a tight schedule!”

“Eh?!” The qilin jumped, “I-I apologized though…”

“So?” Kuroo snarled, “Because of you spooking Tobio-Chan earlier several of our comrades have gotten trapped in a Cave of Wonders!”

“EEHHH?! I’M SO SORRY!” Yamaguchi said profusely, tears in the corners of his eyes.

“Then get on and help us go find them!” Kuroo demanded, “You owe us now!”

“So we’re taking him too?” Akaashi asked Kenma.
“Might as well,” Kenma shrugged, “I have a couple questions for him too.”

Yamaguchi reluctantly climbed onto the dinosaur’s back. He sat between Akaashi and Kenma with his legs drawn up to his chest and curled up as small as possible for someone with a nearly 6 foot frame.

“Alright! Let’s goooooo!” Bokuto pumped a fist in the air and spurred Tobio back into action.

Yamaguchi wondered just what he had gotten himself into.

Sawamura felt as light as air. He felt so light he didn’t know if his legs were moving, only that the scenery rushed past him in a blur. Suga’s name repeated over and over in his mind with his heartbeat. Ba-dump. Ba-dump. Ba-dump. Su-ga. Su-ga. Su-ga.

There was a splash and Sawamura realized he was wading through a room of water that came up to his knees. Sawamura looked down in surprise. The water had the consistency of oil and it shimmered around his feet. Mirror water, Sawamura noted in awe. The silvery shine of the water reminded Sawamura of his goal and he looked back up, regretting having taken his eyes off the silver figure he was chasing.

There was a strange misty haze that floated 3 feet above the water. Sawamura waded forwards, waving his hands at the mist. He could hear water falling and moved towards the sound. The far wall was a curtain of falling mirror water. Sawamura saw his own shocked expression before seeing the figure before him.

He stood with his back turned to him, yet Sawamura knew he was aware of his presence from the slight tilt of his silvery head and the hands lightly clasped behind his back. Sawamura felt like Suga was smiling. His mouth felt dry and his head was light with words he wanted to say. The world was still; nothing seemed to move but his thundering heart. He wanted to take a step towards him but he was afraid that if he moved this trance-like moment would undo and Suga would vanish into ripples.

“Suga…” he finally breathed, the tremor in his voice revealing his relief at finding him.

“Daichi?” Suga’s voice was light and Sawamura felt tears prick the edges of his eyes at the familiar tone. “You’re Daichi, right?”

“Yeah, Suga,” he said, smiling tenderly, “It’s me.”

Suga’s laughter echoed throughout the room. “Daichi, Daichi, Daichi!”

Suga chanted Sawamura’s name as he disappeared into the mist. Sawamura could hear his footsteps splashing just ahead of him. Sawamura felt his legs move again, sloshing through the mirror water. He picked up speed and the back of Suga’s head came into view. Suga’s heels kicked up mirror water behind him, splashing Sawamura in the oily drops. It was like a million little Suga’s were falling before his eyes, disappearing into the water.

Suga splashed to a stop before the waterfall again. He finally turned around and for a moment Sawamura’s heart rose to the top of his throat in fear that Suga’s face would be missing, replaced by mirror water. Sawamura saw a smile, a blur of silver lashes and a straight nose before Suga stepped
backwards into the waterfall and mirror water crashed down over him.

Sawamura leapt forwards and grabbed Suga’s hand. He was afraid his hand might go through Suga’s arm like water, but his hand found a solid grip and then the waterfall roared around his ears, soaking him from head to toe.


“I’m so glad you found me, Daichi,” Suga said into Sawamura’s ear.

“Me too,” Sawamura said, his voice strained as he buried his face against Suga’s warm shoulder. He breathed in Suga’s familiar scent and his mind finally calmed.

“Let’s stay here together forever,” Suga whispered. His eye sockets gleamed with mirror water.

Chapter End Notes

And so Yamaguchi sloppily joins the party.

I really wish I could have fit in a bit about someone attacking Bokuto in his game room cus it’s outfitted with a shit ton of traps and weapons. Maybe the opportunity will arise later.

side note: tobio the dinosaur was never meant to stick around for so long but now i dont know how to get rid of him. he wasn't even in my original plan for this fic. why does my mind wander so much.
Here be Dreams

Chapter Summary

It looks like a few of our mains are a bit 'in over their head'. The Cave of Wonders isn't exactly what the Celestial Knights expected. And it looks like Kenma knows more than he lets on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“WOOOHHOOOOOO!”

Hinata glanced behind him. The others were nowhere in sight. Those slowpokes were sure missing out, he thought as he leapt through the air. These magic shoes were amazing though, he had been leaping for hours and instead of exhausted he felt better than ever! He glanced behind him again. He had the niggling feeling that he was used to looking back for someone chasing after him. It didn’t make much sense, who would chase after him? And why would they be chasing him? Hinata felt a twinge of pain whenever he kept chasing that train of thought. He looked back again.

“I guess I’m too fast for…” who?

Hinata suddenly heard padded footprints from behind him. He turned around in excitement.

A small lion of sand bounded towards him. Hinata felt a strange mixture of disappointment and fascination. What exactly was he expecting? Or who?

“Are you going to race me?” Hinata asked with a grin.

The sand lion sped up in response. Hinata turned back around and bounded off, his magic shoes flashing with gold.

“You’re a fast one!” The sand lion said, catching up to Hinata.

“Whoa! You can talk?” Hinata laughed with excitement.

“Yup! My name is Lev!” The sand lion grinned, “You’re a lot shorter up close!”

“Hey! You’re also tiny!” Hinata snapped back.

“I’m actually much bigger!” Lev said, hopping alongside Hinata. With every hop he grew in size until he towered over Hinata. “I can be as big as I want to be!”

Hinata swallowed nervously.

“You’re not going to eat me, are you?” He asked it.

“Ew, why would I want to?” The sand lion wrinkled its nose in disgust.

“But aren’t you a lion?” Hinata asked.
“That’s just how I choose to look,” Lev explained, “I’m actually a Cave of Wonders!”

The sand lion glanced over at Hinata expectantly. He was not disappointed. Hinata’s eyes glowed with admiration and awe.

“WOW you’re the Cave of Wonders? That’s amazing!” Hinata gushed, jumping up and down as they continued moving forwards.

“It’s no big deal,” Lev said proudly, “I’m just the Hero Maker, the Place of Dreams, Desire made Tangible.”

“UWAAHHH! SO COOL!”

“Do you have any dreams, Shorty?” Lev asked.

“No…” Hinata paused and a look of sadness and confusion came over his face.

His feet slowed and they came to a stand still in midair over a room filled with water.

“Well there is something that’s on my mind…I don’t know if it’s a dream or not…maybe it’s a memory.”

“Ahh,” Lev said knowingly.

Sand blew off his back into the shape of a silhouette that was taller than Hinata.

“How are you doing that?” Hinata asked in a quiet voice. He walked closer to the figure made of sand and touched its scowling face. “And why couldn’t I remember him?”

“Maybe you wanted to forget him,” Lev said, “But you couldn’t.”

Hinata traced a finger down the figure’s arm of sand. He lingered at the figure’s hand. The figure moved suddenly and grabbed Hinata’s hand. Hinata jumped and looked up at the figure’s face in surprise. It wore the same scowl as before, but its expression was softening. Hinata’s heart beat faster and he pulled his hand away. His hand broke through the figure’s fingers in a puff of sand.

“I’m sorry!” Hinata blurted out, clutching his own hand to his chest.

Sand slowly blew back into the shape of the figure’s hand, which fell to its side limply.

“Are you afraid of him?” Lev asked, cocking his head to the side.

Hinata’s heart raced looking at the figure and its familiar yet strange expression. The eyes shaped in sand weren’t blue enough, his hair not dark enough. A name formed on Hinata’s lips but no sound escaped. Was he afraid? His chest hurt and his mind was muddled.

“He’s…he was my teammate…and my rival,” Hinata stammered, “We…I…he…”

Hinata’s face grew red as he stuttered.

The expression on the sand figure’s face changed once more. It scowled deeper and a sword formed in its hand. Hinata immediately reached for his own sword. His body was trembling and the Celestial steel glinted as it shook in Hinata’s hands.

“What’s happening, Lev?” Hinata asked fearfully.
“Like I said,” Lev said with a low voice. His back was arched like a frenzied cat. “This is a place of
dreams...all dreams…”

The sand turned black as the figure raised its sword above its head. The Nightmare towered over
Hinata like a god of death. Its sword descended towards Hinata in a powerful swing, Hinata
squeezed his eyes shut and braced for the blow.

“Let’s stay here together forever,” Suga whispered into Sawamura’s ear.

“I wish I could,” Sawamura said wistfully, “But you’re not Suga.”

The Fake Suga in his arms stiffened slightly and Sawamura pulled back out of their embrace and
smiled at him.

“How did you know?” Fake Suga asked, almost pouting.

“Because the real Suga would have punched me in the gut for leaving the kids and running after
him,” Sawamura laughed. He cupped Fake Suga’s face in his hands. “Did you really think I
wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between someone I would run off into the desert after just for
the possibility of seeing and some fake?”

“It wouldn’t be strange,” Fake Suga said, “People always think they know their loved one and they
fall for fakes like me all the time.”

“I’ve been told that there’s two ways of knowing someone,” Sawamura said, tucking a strand of hair
behind Fake Suga’s ear. “There’s knowing their facts like their name, age, birth parents, what they
look like, whatever. And then there’s knowing what makes them laugh, cry, burst out in a rage and
what expression their face makes when they do. People might mistake the first kind of knowing, but
give them some time and they’ll never mistake the second kind of knowing.”

Fake Suga made a sour face and pulled away from Sawamura’s arms.

“What do you know? You mere human…” Fake Suga muttered. A spray of mirror water rose
between them. When it fell he was gone.

Sawamura looked down at his reflection.

“You can’t hide there, you know,” he said.

His reflection looked startled before turning red with embarrassment.

“Couldn’t you have let me have my dramatic exit?” His reflection pouted.

Sawamura didn’t know his face could make such an expression and he laughed.

“Sorry, but it was rather rude of you to leave in the middle of a conversation. I have more I want to
talk with you about as well.”

“Like what?”
Sawamura’s reflection rose out of the mirror water at his feet and morphed into a new form. He was shorter than Sawamura expected, with short light brown hair and matching eyes.

“Are you part of the Cave of Wonders? Or are you a separate entity?” Sawamura asked curiously.

“I’m an inhio, currently a denizen of the Cave of Wonders,” Fake Suga answered airily, “I go by Yaku Morisuke.”


“I know,” Yaku winked, “Is that all you wanted to know?”

“Not quite,” Sawamura replied with a wry smile. He then turned serious.

“What do you know about the Arc?”

Kenma sneezed. Tobio had re-entered the desert and sand was flying everywhere.

“How are we going to find the Cave when your tracks are covered like this?” Akaashi asked Kenma.

“Don’t worry, I know where it is,” Kenma said, waving his off. “I’m a guide.”

Akaashi looked skeptical, but didn’t say anything in response.

“I think we’re getting close,” Kuroo said from his position near Bokuto at Tobio’s head.

Kenma stood up and walked over to them. Before Bokuto and Akaashi realized it, Kenma had opened one of Kuroo’s panels and pressed a switch. The light from Kuroo’s face panel turned off and he fell neatly into Kenma’s awaiting arms.

“Hey, what did you do to it-him?” Akaashi asked, jumping up.

“I turned him off,” Kenma said, “Our gear won’t protect him from the tangible desire.”

“Oh…that makes sense,” Akaashi said.

Kenma held Kuroo’s body out to Akaashi.

“Akaashi-San, could you take care of him while we’re inside the Cave, please?” Kenma asked.

Akaashi stared at him questioningly for a second before nodding politely and taking Kuroo from him.

“Thank you,” Kenma said with a note of relief in his voice.

Akaashi put Kuroo’s body into his bag. The area around them suddenly cleared of sand and their surroundings looked hazy.

“We’ve entered the mirage zone,” Kenma said. He turned to the qilin that was hunched up in a ball. “You don’t have to come with us, but I would appreciate it if you looked after Tobio while we’re
“It’s the least I can do for causing you all this trouble in the first place,” the qilin said meekly.

“Come on, Kenma! Let’s get moving!” Bokuto shouted from the ground. He’d already hopped off Tobio and was jogging in place on the sand. Akaashi was beside him with Kuroo in his bag. Kenma joined them quickly. Yamaguchi watched as the group walked away towards the giant sand lion that was the Cave of Wonders.

The inside of the Cave reminded Akaashi and Bokuto of their home entrance with the long staircase, only this one descended for what seemed like forever.

“Bokuto-San, please be careful,” Akaashi said as Bokuto skipped down the stairs.

“This is so much fun! It’s like an expedition!” Bokuto laughed.

“We go into tangible desire spots like this all the time,” Akaashi pointed out.

“But never with new friends!” Bokuto said.

He stopped suddenly and Akaashi nearly bumped into his back.

“What’s the matter?” Akaashi asked him.

“Only two…” Bokuto tilted his head to the side in confusion. “Kenma?”

Akaashi turned around. There was no pudding-headed person on the staircase behind him.

“I guess this is why he wanted me to hang onto his friend,” Akaashi remarked.

“Awwwww man!” Bokuto whined, “Just when I thought we were getting along!”

“We’ll split up, I’ll look for Kenma, you search for his friends,” Akaashi instructed.

“What? Me go off by myself?” Bokuto looked aghast at the thought, “But Akaashi! I’ll be lonely!”

“No, you won’t, Bokuto-San,” Akaashi said patiently, “You have new friends to meet.”

With that, Bokuto’s face lit up again and he grinned in Akaashi’s direction.

“I’m going to make so many new friends!” Bokuto exclaimed, leaping down the stairs with a reckless abandon, “See you later, Akaashi!”

“Later, Bokuto-San,” Akaashi waved out of habit.

Bokuto quickly disappeared behind mountains of gold and jewels. Akaashi turned around and looked up at the stairs they had descended. It was rare that he had moments to himself and while he didn’t dislike Bokuto’s constant presence, he felt the most at ease when he was alone. Akaashi’s skin rippled as he let go of his glamour. He took off his atmask and took a deep breath. He didn’t need to use the protective gear in tangible desire spots.

Akaashi looked at his reflection in the golden walls and winced. As a Distortionist, he was as hard to look at as ever, making even his own eyes hurt. At least Bokuto was blind; it made him easier to live with, but if Akaashi ever let go of his glamour completely even Bokuto’s hearing would be impaired by Akaashi’s irrational physiology. The Cursed Children of Yara, Distortionists were like living glitches that disrupted reality and physicality.
Immediately the area surrounding Akaashi began to twist and distort. Akaashi pulled the space of the Cave around him; taking it apart and putting it back together. It was malleable, tangible desire always was, and he could move through it with minimal effort. A room with large statues caught Akaashi’s attention.

A hairtie with a star on it was lying on the floor. Akaashi could feel the traces of a portal. He picked up the hairtie. Something told him he’d found out where one of Kenma’s friends had been…

Tsukishima let loose a stream of profanities as he ran. Of course the damn shorty had to run off and of course the other damn shorty had to disappear from behind him. He wondered just how much the Cave of Wonders responds to human desires because right now his only desire was to murder both of them.

Tsukishima turned a corner and found himself in a long hallway filled with closed doors. He tried one of the doors. It was locked. Tsukishima silently drew his sword, his eyes blazing with annoyance. He slashed through the wood and kicked it in. The room beyond it was an empty void of darkness.

“FUCK YOU!” Tsukishima shouted into it.

“FUCK YOOOUUUUUUU” his voice echoed through it.

“This is such bullshit,” Tsukishima said, moving onto the next door.

“FUCK YOOOUUUUUUU. FUCK YOOOUUUUUUUU. FUCK YOOOUUUUUUUU,” the void behind the doors repeated as Tsukishima made his destructive way down the hall.

After the fifth door, Tsukishima put on his headphones. Tsukishima felt his mood lifting after smashing in about thirty doors. It was surprisingly calming wrecking stuff out of annoyance, especially now that he couldn’t hear the door’s constantly repetition of “fuck you” over his music. He was even getting into a rhythm. Smash, kick, scream from the void, smash, kick, scream from the void.

The 42nd door however, did not open to the void. Instead, it contained a golden pedestal with a shining pair of glasses. Tsukishima rolled his eyes.

“I’m not a fucking idiot,” Tsukishima said before turning and moving on to the next door.

The next door contained the same pair of glasses. So did the next. And the next. In the 60th room Tsukishima finally lost it and tried smashing the pair of glasses. His sword crashed against them and ricocheted off, nearly causing him to drop it. The glasses remained on the pedestal, whole and without a scratch. Just what kind of glasses were these? Tsukishima scowled.

“That was fucking rude, man.” Tsukishima looked around. The room was dark but he could see that it was empty.

“Over here, numbnuts,” the strange voice said again. Tsukishima looked down at the glasses.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he said flatly.
“Harsh, dude, I got feelings you know,” the glasses said, “And my name is Oculus.”

“I don’t care,” Tsukishima said bluntly.

“Wow, okay, that hurt,” the glasses said, “You’re a pretty unlikable guy, you know that?”

“I’m leaving,” Tsukishima said, turning around.

“Wait! Wait! At least hear me out!” Oculus called after him, “Oh come on man, doesn’t a magical talking pair of glasses interest you? I could help you find your friends!”

“What do you know about my friends?” Tsukishima asked suspiciously.

“Well I for one, find it surprising that they exist but besides that I’m a magical pair of glasses, why wouldn’t I be able to find your friends?” Oculus pointed out, “Just trust me!”

“Why should I?” Tsukishima said, pausing by the doorway, “Isn’t this whole place a trap?”

“A trap? Who told you that? This is the place where people come to become heroes!” Oculus said.

“Heroes?” Tsukishima snorted, “You can’t fool me with that.”

“Haven’t you ever wanted to be a hero?” Oculus asked desperately.

“No,” Tsukishima replied, walking out the door.

How stupid, Tsukishima thought. He kicked down another door. He raised his arm over his face as a gust of wind blew past him. Something hard knocked him to the ground and his teeth rattled in his skull.

Instinct told him to roll to his side. Something smashed the ground where he had been just moments before. Tsukishima opened his eyes.

“You’ve gotten better, Kei,” said a familiar voice.

Tsukishima squinted up at the tall figure outline in the sun. Akiteru smiled down at him.

“Nii-san,” Tsukishima mumbled.

He stood up and brushed himself off. He appeared to be back at home, near the stables of his family’s farm. Was this one of his memories? It was probably the power of the Cave, Tsukishima surmised. He looked at his older brother. He was younger than when Tsukishima last saw him. Tsukishima looked down at his own body and realized that he was also younger in appearance.

“The Master will never take you in if you can only fight like this,” Akiteru said, changing his stance.

“I’m gonna get better, just you wait!” The words came out of Tsukishima’s mouth against his will. It was weird, feeling his memory talk and move through him. It was also equal parts humiliating and aggravating hearing him spout embarrassing things from when he was a kid.

Tsukishima clenched his teeth as Akiteru threw him to the ground. He quickly rolled to the side before Akiteru’s foot could crush his belly. Tsukishima swung into a kick, bracing his hands against the hard ground as his long legs flew into the air, arcing towards the back of Akiteru’s knee. Nimblly as a cat, Akiteru danced out of the way. With a flick of his ankle, he redirected Tsukishima’s feet to his hands, where he grabbed hold of Tsukishima’s ankles and swung him to the side like a sack of potatoes. Tsukishima crashed into a pile of hay.
“You’re too obvious,” Akiteru said, looking down at him, “A blind monkey could guess your movements!”

“Sorry for being an amateur in the art of hitting,” Tsukishima retorted weakly.

“If you had as much creativity for fighting as you do for snide remarks, you’d be unparalleled,” Akiteru said.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“I’d rather you’d use it as motivation for thinking about your actions!” Akiteru scolded lightly.

“I’ll beat you next time,” Tsukishima said, climbing out of the hay, “I’ll have you begging for mercy!”

“Say that when you can last for more than 5 minutes sparring against me,” Akiteru teased.

“I’m not done yet!” Tsukishima said, moving back into a stance. “I’m going to be a hero just like dad and fight to protect the village!”

A proud expression crossed Akiteru’s face and he ruffled Tsukishima’s hair. The wind blew again and the memory faded away, leaving Tsukishima behind in an empty room.

“Don’t ever do that again,” Tsukishima said quietly. He was shaking with rage. He whirled around.

“DON’T FUCKING EVER TOUCH MY MEMORIES AGAIN!”

“There is just no pleasing you, is there?” Oculus pouted, “I showed you a nice memory too.”

“There’s nothing nice about that memory,” Tsukishima said coldly.

“Huh? Friendly sparing between you and your beloved older bro isn’t a nice memory? Sheesh, you’re a tough crowd kid,” the glasses remarked.

“Leave me alone,” Tsukishima snapped.

“No can do, brah,” Oculus said, “Unfortunately for the both of us, you’re the one I’ve been waiting for, my destined wearer.”

“Find someone else,” Tsukishima replied.

“Dude, do you know the definition of ‘destined’?” Oculus drawled, “It means no second choices, or any choices at all really.”

“Too bad,” Tsukishima said.

“Man, you really don’t make this easy,” Oculus sighed, “At least take me with you, then I’ll shut up about it.”

“No, why should I ta-?”

The glasses vanished from the pedestal and reappeared hanging onto Tsukishima’s front jacket pocket. Tsukishima’s broken pair of glasses appeared on the pedestal in the magic glasses’ place.

“Deal with it,” Oculus said simply, tightening its arm over the breast pocket of Tsukishima’s uniform. Tsukishima rubbed his fingertips over the glasses lenses, leaving smudges all over them.
“Hey! What the-! That’s not fucking cool, man!” Oculus complained.

“Deal with it,” Tsukishima replied with a smirk.

“You are insufferable,” Oculus muttered.

“Then find a new destined wearer,” Tsukishima replied coldly.

“I told ya it doesn’t work like that,” Oculus grumbled as Tsukishima left the room and continued smashing doors in as he walked down the hallway.

“Then what if I had never came along? Would you have been stuck there forever?” Tsukishima asked, “That seems like some pretty impossible odds if there is only one destined wearer for you.”

“You have no idea how this place works, do you?” Oculus snorted, “Well Mr. Smarty-pants, the truth is I was created for you. Lev kindly granted me with life and a charming personality just for you to wear!”

So that was how the Cave of Wonders worked, Tsukishima thought to himself.

“Can I have the receipt?” Tsukishima asked.

“No refunds or exchanges,” Oculus replied flatly. “Oh come on, you seriously aren’t even the littlest bit impressed or wowed by a magical pair of glasses made just for you? Not even a little? Don’t lie to me, bud.”

“I’d be more impressed if you couldn’t talk,” Tsukishima said.

“Well after that hurtful comment, I wish you couldn’t talk,” Oculus grumbled.

The hallway finally ended and Tsukishima found himself facing a room filled with water. The doorway rippled like the surface of the ocean and Tsukishima could see multitudes of fish and various other underwater creatures swimming around. The most unusual part about it however, was that there was two feet gap of air along the floor underneath the water.

“This has to be a trap,” Tsukishima said.

“What is it with you and traps, man? Is everything a trap to you?” Oculus asked.

Tsukishima knelt down and stuck his hand under the water. It stayed floating above his hand. He glanced back at the hallway behind him.

“So my choices are move forward and possibly drown or get eaten by a weird sea thing or go back to the screaming hallway.”

“Man, you’re like the antithesis of joy, you know that?” Oculus remarked, "Do you also walk around with a steel umbrella in case a meteor strikes?"

“If it does come crashing down on me at least then I’ll drown and won’t have to deal with you any longer,” Tsukishima said.

“It’s not going to crash down on you,” Oculus said with a sigh.

Tsukishima lied down on his stomach and crawled forwards through the door. It was a weird feeling whenever one of his long limbs reached too high and got wet from the water above him.
“Can’t you turn around once and let me see something other than the floor?” Oculus whined, “This is the first time I’ve been out of that room in my entire existence!”

“Which according to you, has only been like fifteen minutes,” Tsukishima remarked in annoyance. But he was mildly curious about what was swimming around above him so he turned slowly, trying not to get his shoulder wet. Even he couldn’t help but let out a gasp at the sight before him.

The surface of the water above him rippled slightly. A school of giant neon parrotfish looked at him curiously as they swam past. The water was clear and it appeared that there was air even further above him as well as pockets of air throughout the water. There were also other doors leading into the room from various places in the room. An empty door frame floated to the right and a closed door was in the ceiling on the other end of the water.

Tsukishima inched forwards on his back as he looked up at the water and the fish. A large dark shape swam overhead and Tsukishima identified the figure as a shark of some kind.

“Hey, you absolutely certain this water won’t fall on top of us?” Tsukishima asked Oculus.

“Like I said, it doesn’t work like that in here,” Oculous said.

Tsukishima banged his head against something.

“Fuck!” He shouted, “What the hell was that?”

He tilted his head back and saw a metal bar, almost like a ladder rung attached to the floor. He rolled over and realized that he was on top of a closed door in the floor.

“Try to ignore that,” Oculus said as Tsukishima reached over to grab the doorknob.

The knob turned easily in his hand. Tsukishima’s entire body suddenly fell upwards and splashed into the water as the door opened. He grabbed at the swinging door with a yelp, barely managing to keep his head above (below?) water. He felt nauseas as his sense of gravity flipped.

“What the hell?!” Tsukishima swore, “I thought you said this room wasn’t a trap?!”

“I said that the water wouldn’t fall onto you, not that you wouldn’t fall into the water,” Oculus huffed, “And besides, you wouldn’t have fallen in if you hadn’t grabbed onto the door and switched your gravity orientation.”

“What does that have to do with it?” Tsukishima asked through gritted teeth as he tried to climb up the door and into the next room.

“This room consists of coexistent gravities,” Oculus explained, “Let go of the door and we’ll fall back onto the ceiling.”

“That’s the ceiling?” Tsukishima said, pointing upwards at what used to be the floor.

“It is now, at any rate, considering the gravity you’ve entered,” Oculus said.

“This room makes no sense!” Tsukishima hissed, letting go of the door against his better judgment.

Tsukishima fell upwards onto the ceiling beside the now open door with a wet thud. He landed flat on his back with the air knocked out of him.

“I can’t fucking wait to get out of this place,” Tsukishima muttered, “Just how in the hell is it a tangible desire spot?”
“You don’t feel any desire in here?” Oculus asked curiously, “None at all?”

“The only overwhelming desire I have right now is to leave,” Tsukishima said with a glare. He rolled over onto his side and started crawling forwards again.

“Don’t you have anything you want? Anything you dream of?” Oculus asked softly. Tsukishima was silent. “What about that memory I saw?”

“Forget it,” Tsukishima said, “That was a long time ago.”

“Tsukishima Kei.” Tsukishima stopped moving.

The glasses had vanished from his pocket and now lay in front of him on the floor.

“What do you want now?” Tsukishima muttered.

There was a picture forming on the glasses lenses. Tsukishima saw blue skies with rolling clouds over a meadow of golden wheat, a herd of white and grey sheep following a looping dirt road to a farmhouse on a hill, two figures behind a stable full of horses.

“It never looked like that,” Tsukishima whispered.

The sky was never so blue and the clouds were never so white and fluffy. The sheep were always getting lost or eating poisonous plants and the horses were unfriendly and liked to kick.

“You say that, but this is the images from your mind,” Oculus said, “If you keep refusing to look, you’ll never see the truth.”

“This, coming from a magical pair of glasses,” Tsukishima retorted.

"Yes," Oculus repeated, "A magical pair of glasses."

The blue sky was covered by grey clouds that swept away the sunlight. The wheat was weighed down and crushed by a heavy pelt of rain as a storm raged across the landscape. A small boy with golden hair knelt in the mud by the stables before a dented miner’s helmet.

“He lied to me,” Tsukishima said without meaning to. Oculus remained silent for once but the picture zoomed in on the helmet.

The light on the front was smashed and it flickered dimly.

“No, I made him lie to me,” Tsukishima said. And in reality, he had known that his brother was lying. The truth was in the callouses on his hands, the dirt on his clothes, the weariness weighing down his body. His brother had not been training in the mountains with a secret Master, he’d been working in the mines like all the other men whose farms weren’t yielding enough crops.

Akiteru had given Kei a dream, made him believe that he could leave farm life for something more glamorous, more important, something like serving a Master of Martial Arts.

“How lame,” Tsukishima muttered.

The image disappeared from Oculus’ lenses. In its place was the reflection of the water above them. Tsukishima blankly watched the school of parrotfish swarm around something. Then he noticed a shock of orange hair through the neon bodies. Tsukishima turned around back onto his back and swore.
Hinata was floating limply in the water above him. His face was blue and those goddamned flying shoes were still on his feet.

The mouth of the Cave of Wonders closed after Akaashi and Bokuto entered, leaving Kenma stuck outside. The Sand Lion’s mouth curled into a giant smile.

“You came back!” the Sand Lion said excitedly, “I didn’t think you would.”

“I wasn’t going to,” Kenma replied, “But my…acquaintances are inside.”

The Sand Lion reared its head back and laughed.

“You won’t even say they’re your friends! Stubborn to the very end!”

“They aren’t my friends,” Kenma said, clenching his fists.

“Well I’m your friend at least,” the Sand Lion grinned, “You’re very own imaginary friend! The best friend you could ever dream up!”

“You’re just a Cave of Wonders,” Kenma mumbled.

“But you created me, just like you created th-”

“That’s enough!” Kenma held up a hand, “I didn’t come here to talk to you. I want you to release those you have inside.”

“But I want to meet them,” the Sand Lion pouted, “I even came here out of my way so I could see what the people you decided to help were like!”

“You’ve had them for full day already,” Kenma said.

“And they’re fascinating!” The Sand Lion said excitedly, “One of them, the short orange one, he found my flying shoes! And they all have such interesting desires! Did you know one of them isn’t human?”

“I don’t care!” Kenma shouted, “Just let them go!”

The Sand Lion wilted under Kenma’s glare. He shrank until he barely reached the height of Kenma’s knees.

“Kenma, won’t you dream anymore?” The Sand Lion asked pitifully, “You used to have such wonderful dreams…”

“I’ve changed,” Kenma said quietly, “I’m…I’m too scared to dream.”

“But then…what will happen to me if you stop dreaming?” The Sand Lion asked, his ears drooping.

“Will I be forgotten?”

“You’re too dangerous,” Kenma said, “You have far too much power.”
“But you made me this way, I’m the Hero Maker,” the Sand Lion said sadly, “I’m a place of dreams, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary…”

“You’re a trap,” Kenma said, “Heroes? They don’t exist. No one should have so much power.”

“You don’t believe in heroes anymore, Kenma?”

“Not after what I’ve done,” Kenma said.

“You mean Kuroo? That wasn’t your fault!” The Sand Lion protested.

“It was!” Kenma shouted, tears edging the corners of his eyes. “It was my fault… I destroyed him.”

“He doesn’t blame you for it,” the Sand Lion said.

“That’s because he doesn’t remember it!” Kenma said bitterly, “I tore him apart with my analysis and then couldn’t put him back together! I’m reminded of it every time I look at him… every time I look at myself, my body. I’m made from copies of his biogenetic code!”

Kenma kicked at the sand.

“I deliberately messed with his memories so he couldn’t remember what I did to him, so he couldn’t blame me for it. I’m a murderer and a coward!”

“You’re not a murderer, Kenma,” the Sand Lion said, “He’s still alive, even in that form.”

“You’re too optimistic,” Kenma said, “What I did is something that can never be forgiven.”

“Everyone makes mistakes, Kenma,” the Sand Lion said gently, “you didn’t know what you were doing.”

“Not everyone’s mistakes affects the entire planet,” Kenma replied.

“To exist is to make mistakes and learn from your experiences, weren’t you the one who told me that?” The Sand Lion said, “Even as you are, you must still exist, for nothing would exist without you. You must believe in your decisions.”

“I don’t think I can anymore,” Kenma said.

“Then please let me show you,” the Sand Lion grew until he was the size of a mountain. “I’ve also changed since you’ve been gone, Kenma, I’ve been dreaming and dreaming of the day you’d return! Won’t you look at my dreams and then decide whether or not you will dream again?”

“I don’t have time,” Kenma said, “Lev, you don’t understand, it’s too dangerous to let them stay inside you for much longer. They might learn things they shouldn’t.”

“Like what?” Lev cocked his head to the side like a dog.

“Like about me and about you,” Kenma answered quietly, “And about the Arc.”

“Is it supposed to be kept a secret?” Lev asked worriedly.

“Yes,” Kenma said solemnly, “It’s the most important secret in the world.”

The Sand Lion was quiet… suspiciously quiet. Kenma narrowed his eyes. It had been years since he’d last talked to Lev and it was the first time he’d ever seen him in this form but he knew that
expression and it didn’t mean anything good.

“Lev. Tell me you didn’t already-”

“Yaku probably won’t tell anyone!” Lev blurted out.

“The Arc? What’s that?” Yaku asked.

“It was a ship that my fellow Celestial Knights and I were entrusted with,” Sawamura said, “I was told by my superiors that it held all the world’s secrets.”

“The world’s secrets? If you want to know all that why not ask it?” Yaku said.

“Ask the world about its secrets…” Sawamura repeated skeptically, “Gee, why didn’t I think of that earlier?”

“Don’t sass me, Celestial Knight,” Yaku huffed, “It’s hardly my fault you humans forgot how to speak to Yara.”

“I can hardly ask the uncharted land of the world what its secrets are,” Sawamura said dryly.

“Yara isn’t just ‘uncharted land’ you fool,” Yaku snorted, “No wonder you know nothing about the world! You Celestial Knights are stuck up in the clouds all the time!”

“Then…there is a way to speak to the world?” Sawamura said doubtfully.

“No, there is a way to speak to Yara, the soul of the world,” Yaku corrected. Yaku suddenly averted his eyes and scowled. “At least, there used to be a way to speak to Yara. Now you can only speak to bits and pieces of them.”

Bits and pieces of the world…of Yara? Sawamura’s head swam with the new information. The world had a soul…and its name was Yara…it sounded crazy but the world was already so unbelievable…what if it was true? What if what he had been told all his life was wrong? What if the Arc had something to do with Yara?

“How can I do that?” Sawamura asked urgently.

“You could talk to Lev,” Yaku said with a shrug.

“Where can I find him?” Sawamura asked, straightening up. Forget about the confusing information, for now he would focus on his mission and move forwards.

“We’re inside of him,” Yaku answered.

Sawamura opened his mouth, paused and then closed it with a tight-lipped smile.

“Right, and how can I go about trying to speak to him then?” Sawamura asked.

“Why do you want to know the ‘world’s secrets’ so badly anyway?” Yaku asked with narrowed eyes.
“Because I’m not the only one after them,” Sawamura said darkly, “And if they find them…things will be bad.”

“That was a shitty explanation,” Yaku said, crossing his arms. “And what if you find it? What will you do with them? With Yara?”

Sawamura was silent.

“Will you lock them away? Hide them? Or tell everybody so that there are no more secrets to the world?” Yaku spread out his arms and spun around, “What happens after you solve all of the mysteries?”

Sawamura opened his mouth.

“Nothing.”

Sawamura and Yaku jerked around.

"The Arc must stay lost."

The waterfall of mirror water parted and Kenma stepped through it. A slouching lion that appeared to be made of sand was at his side. Sawamura’s mind raced with questions (How did you get here? What’s with the lion? And why’s it…pouting? Where’s Kuroo?) but the one he eloquently blurted out was:

“What’s with the bondage?”

Chapter End Notes

Inhio - (Latin) stare, desire, gape, gaze, be amazed. As an inhio, Yaku feeds on tangible desire (of which the Cave of Wonders generates and is made from)

Distortionist - a being I made up, their presence confuses most beings' senses and after being in their presence for a few hours you will experience headaches and nausea. Akaashi uses a Fae glamour to hid it.

Lev is a Cave of Wonders! He's kind of like a Djinn or Genie, but he is magical 'space' itself

Yara, the soul of the world, is in our terms, God

Fun Fact: Oculus' speech habits are my own
Here Be Gold

Chapter Summary

Tanaka and Nishinoya are really lucky, Kiyoko? Not so much.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The looming shadow of the Virago passed over the ruins of a city entangled by vines. Nishinoya and Tanaka looked out over the horizon. Two of the three floating islands, Amaranth and Rie were dark blots against the rising sun. The third, Cathal, they had already passed. There was a smattering of floating rubble between each island, a belt of floating rock dubbed the Staircase. They were on course for Amaranth, the oldest of the floating cities and the lowest in altitude.

“How many years has it been since we’ve been in this part of the world?” Tanaka asked. He was leaning with his back against the railing and his head tilted back.

“Three years? Four?” Nishinoya was siting on the second rung of the railing, his legs dangling overboard.

“Seven, for me.” Tanaka and Nishinoya’s heads jerked around to see Kiyoko step out of the captain’s room. Her opulent emerald green dress blew in the wind.

“You look lovely, as always,” Tanaka bowed slightly.

“Green suits you,” Nishinoya winked.

“I thought it would be a good colour for where we’re going,” Kiyoko smiled.

The three of them looked out at their nearing destination, a shining series of glass buildings located on the Staircase just above the ruination of Amaranth’s remains. The Luck Houses of the infamous Prydori Spyre were where fortunes were made and lost in a matter of seconds.

“Surely you two gentlemen aren’t going in there dressed like that?” Ennoshita said, walking up to them. He was wearing a black 3-piece suit with emerald green accents to match Kiyoko’s outfit. He grinned at the jealous expressions on Tanaka and Nishinoya’s faces. He offered his arm to Kiyoko.

“Hurry up and change, boys,” Kiyoko said, lightly taking Ennoshita’s arm, “We can’t leave without our two bodyguards.”

Tanaka and Nishinoya raced into their cabins, pushing and shoving each other to get ahead. They burst into their room at the same time. Laid out on their beds were two sleek black 3-piece suits with gold accents.

“I bet Hana-Chan picked these out,” Nishinoya grinned, lifting up a gold tie that matched his cursed hand. The curse had spread up to their index fingers by now.

“At least she included our holsters,” Tanaka said, looking at the pile of weapon holsters beside their suits.
“Alright, let’s get suited up!” Nishinoya said, pumping a fist in the air.

They dressed quickly and met Kiyoko and Ennoshita back on deck. Ennoshita raised his eyebrows at their rolled up sleeves and sunglasses and laughed quietly.

“Pay attention, boys, here’s the plan,” Kiyoko said, snapping her fan shut, “Our target is Tendou Satori, otherwise known as—”

“The Guess Monster,” Tanaka finished, “And our ticket to finding the qilin again!”


“He’s been eternally banned from this establishment, but that doesn’t stop him,” Ennoshita said, “He’ll be in disguise.”

“What does he normally look like?” Tanaka asked.

“I’ve been told he has bright red hair that’s wild like flames and a crooked smile,” Ennoshita said, “His true form is that of a red ape man but who knows what he will look like in disguise.”

“We’re going to split up to cover more ground, anyone with whose having an unusually lucky streak is suspicious,” Kiyoko instructed, “He’ll be sure to be a master of disguise so don’t discount anyone, old, young, human or otherwise.”

“Got it,” Nishinoya saluted with a wink, “Personally, I’m hoping they’re disguised as a beautiful young woman.”

“Now that’s something I’d like to see,” Tanaka whistled, “But they could hardly be as beautiful as Kiyoko.”

“Enough fooling around,” Kiyoko gestured towards the ship’s bow. “We’re nearly at the door.”

The ship was approaching a small floating rock with an ornate gold door. The door was engraved with the Ace of Diamonds and a diamond knob glittered in the sun. The Spyre had several entrances that led to different rooms of the establishment. Each door was a giant gold card; the Queen of Hearts, The King of Clubs, the Prince of Spades, and the Ace of Diamonds. There was another fabled door, the Joker, that supposedly led to either the cache of gold and treasures the Luck House won from its guests or opened below the Luck House and dropped its guest from the sky.

“Wait, they used a fucking teleporter as a door to travel a few feet?” Tanaka scoffed, “What a blatant show of money.”

“It’s also a blatant display of the Spyre’s main theme,” Kiyoko said, “Luck.”

“This is the West Door,” Ennoshita said with a grim look, “but that doesn’t mean we’ll be entering the West entrance or even entering together.”

“So it’s like a roulette,” Nishinoya rubbed his hands together in anticipation.

“Remember, these games are not about skill or anything like it, they are purely luck based,” Kiyoko said, as they stepped onto the small rocky island before the door.

“Try not to fall in debt while we’re here,” Ennoshita said, tossing Tanaka and Nishinoya each a purse of gold.
“Don’t worry,” Tanaka and Nishinoya grinned as they caught their purses, “We’re as lucky as they come.”

With that, the group stepped off their ship and onto the floating island. The diamond doorknob turned slowly and the golden door opened into a huge room filled with elegantly dressed people and creatures.

“Don’t worry,” Ennoshita whispered to Kiyoko without the other two noticing, “just hold onto my arm and everything should be okay.”

Kiyoko nervously gripped Ennoshita’s arm tighter. They had done this before, granted it was a long time ago but it had worked out then and there was no reason it shouldn’t now…as long as she was lucky. The two of them stepped through the door in tandem, arms linked tightly. Kiyoko held her breath. The door led into a brightly lit room with a huge crystal chandelier and an array of people in glittering clothes gathered at small tables of dice. The amount of desire swirling around the place was nauseating but bearable for now. Kiyoko tightened her grip again and let out a sigh of relief at feeling Ennoshita’s arm still there.

“My goodness, I don’t believe you are the partner I entered with, but I must admit I cannot find dissatisfaction with our switch,” said a genial voice from beside Kiyoko.

Kiyoko’s head jerked around to face her new partner. He had a blonde undercut that was combed back neatly and his eyes were dark brown. He had silver piercings in both his ears and he wore bright yellow formal robes with dark blue accents and a matching scarf. Her heart raced as she realized Ennoshita was nowhere to be seen.

“I need to find my partner,” Kiyoko said, pulling away from the stranger.

“Well, why don’t we find them together?”

The man held fast to her hand. She could see the glint of a tongue piercing as he spoke.

“My name is Yuuji, I also need to find my comrades.” His tone softened persuasively at the hesitant look on Kiyoko’s face. “Surely, two sets of eyes are better than one?”

Kiyoko studied his face. He looked earnest enough and Kiyoko couldn’t feel any suspicious intentions from him. Well, besides the obvious way he was ogling her appearance but with Tanaka and Nishinoya around she was used to that.

“What is your surname?” Kiyoko asked him.

“Does that matter?” Yuuji asked, gently leading her through the Luck House. He sighed at Kiyoko’s stubborn expression.

“A surname is the name shared by one’s family and oneself, right? To be truthful, I don’t want to share anything with my family,” Yuuji said solemnly.

“…You remind me of two people I know…” Kiyoko said.

“Well, they’re siblings,” Kiyoko said, “But they also do not wish to have anything to do with their family. It seems to be a recurring theme among rich and affluent people…”

“Not necessarily,” Yuuji smiled down at her, “You’re looking at the son of a beggar, you know?”
“A beggar?” Kiyoko blinked in surprise.

“The poor are not always loving and selfless people, that’s just a romantic tale,” Yuuji said grimly, “I went hungry most nights, as did my parents and my siblings… I cannot say it made any of us feel very kind. I was an angry little boy with no one to blame except the world itself.”

“So then how did you get here? In-between the Shining Islands?”

Yuuji smiled.

“I was chosen to ascend to greatness,” he said, “as a Celestial Kni…ght….”

Kiyoko stiffened slightly. She tried to keep her breath even as her heart raced. She glanced over at Yuuji but to her surprise his face was contorted in confusion. He held a hand to his temple.

“Sorry…this place is having a strange effect on my mind…” he tried to smile, “What did say my name was?”

“Yuuji…” Kiyoko said cautiously. She wondered if he too struggled with the influence of desire.

“Yes, of course,” Yuuji said smoothly, “as I was saying, I raised myself up from poverty to become one of Amaranth’s leading scientists.”

“Didn’t you just say you were a Celestial Knight?” Kiyoko asked cautiously.

“A what? You must have misheard me, my dear,” Yuuji laughed, “I’ve never heard of such a thing as a Celestial Knight.”

“I think I should go find my companion now,” Kiyoko said, trying to gently pull away from his grasp.

“Before you go, let me tell you about the most fascinating thing I’ve discovered,” Yuuji said earnestly, holding onto her, “I can’t possibly let you go until I’ve told you about it!”

“What is it?” Kiyoko asked uncomfortably. Desire was heavy on Yuuji’s breath and it made Kiyoko’s head hurt. Yuuji’s eyes glowed with excitement as he leaned in close.

“I’ve found a dragon!”

As expected, Kiyoko and Ennoshita were nowhere to be seen when Tanaka and Nishinoya walked through the door together. Luckily though, the two of them had managed to arrive in the same room, even if on opposite sides.

“Ready to have some fun?” Nishinoya asked devilishly.

“You know it, bro,” Tanaka fist-bumped Nishinoya.

“Alright, to rehash, we’re looking for…?” Nishinoya prompted.

“Red hair, monkey features, crooked smile and in perfect disguise,” Tanaka said, ticking off his
“Ryu…” Nishinoya grabbed Tanaka’s sleeve and tugged.

“What is it?” Tanaka looked over at where Nishinoya’s head was turned.

An obviously young man in a fake beard and overcoat was sitting at the Roulette table. Bright red hair poked out from under his top hat and a red furry tail wriggled out of the back of his pants. He grinned crookedly as he placed his bet.

“It couldn’t be…” Tanaka gaped.

“But…it has to…right?” Nishinoya was frozen as he stared.

“There’s no way…”

“But who else could that be? He couldn’t be more obvious if he had a nametag!” Nishinoya hissed.

The man gestured over a waiter carrying a tray of drinks. As he turned, the silver glint at the front of his coat caught their eyes. “So he does have a name tag,” Tanaka said dumbfounded.

“Endou Tori?” Nishinoya made a face. “That’s a terrible fake name.”

“It must be that psychology thing, you know, hiding in plain sight?” Tanaka said weakly.

“Let’s not give him too much credit,” Nishinoya said dryly as Tendou’s tail reached up to scratch his nose.

“What should we do?” Tanaka asked.

“What we always do,” Nishinoya said, popping his collar. “Please be gentle when you carry me to bed later.”

“You always get the fun part,” Tanaka sighed.

They sauntered over to Tendou’s table and sat down next to him in a jovial manner.

“You look like a pretty lucky guy,” Nishinoya said, wrapping an arm around Tendou, “But I bet you’re not as lucky as I am.”

Nishinoya grinned at the monkey man. He nodded his head towards Tanaka.

“Tell ‘em who I was with last night, Toshi.”

“My man, Narumi here was with a red-head last night,” Tanaka winked, “I hear its fantastic luck!”

“I bet he used up all that luck just to get with her,” Tendou replied with a snort.

“Why don’t we have a little bet between us then?” Nishinoya gestured towards the Roulette table.

“You want to give me all your money?” Tendou laughed, “sounds good to me.”

“Oh, we don’t just bet with money,” Nishinoya laughed.

Tanaka reached over to a waiter and grabbed a bottle of shining blue alcohol off his tray. He slammed it down on the table before them.
“We bet with honour! And with Sirens,” Tanaka said with a grin.

“First one to hit the table or spew the blue loses all their gold,” Nishinoya said mischievously. “Red or Black?”

Tendou eyed the bottle of Siren’s Lament, the strongest drink in the entire establishment. He licked his lips.

“I can’t back down when you’re offering me free alcohol and money,” he said, “I’ll take Red.”

Tanaka motioned for the waiter to pour two even glasses of the blue alcohol.

“And I’ll be Black,” Nishinoya nodded at the dealer to release the ball.

The ball rolled free and the game commenced. If Tendou really was a Guess Monster then it made sense that he’d choose Roulette, a luck game that made use of his talents. However, with Nishinoya and Tanaka’s game they had reduced Roulette to effectively 50/50 odds with no guessing involved besides the first spin. It was a fair gamble.

And if Nishinoya somehow ended up stone cold drunk, well then Tanaka could carry both of them back to the ship. After all, no man could resist while under the spell of Siren’s Lament.

Ennoshita sat alone at a poker table.

The table had formerly been fully occupied but all its guests had seemingly lost the will to play once he’d sat down. Under normal circumstances, he would have been quietly ushered out but each attendant and bouncer had changed their minds upon approaching him. It wasn’t that he was intimidating or anything, they were just hit by a wave of disinterest in him every time they got close and the next thing they knew they had forgotten about him.

The amount of desire in the place was intoxicating. Ennoshita struggled to keep a level head. He had to find Kiyoko. He’d promised her that he wouldn’t leave her side and that everything would be okay. Well so much for the first part, but there was a slim chance the second could be salvageable so long as he found her soon. But to be honest, he was feeling a bit drunk off the desire that kept seeping into him from other guests.

Ennoshita tried to sit up and immediately regretted the decision. He giggled as his vision swam and his butt awkwardly re-found his seat with a thud. Okay so he was a lot drunk.

“So this is why no one wants to play poker,” said a suave voice from beside Ennoshita.

Ennoshita looked blearily to his right. A person with long reddish-brown hair had sat down next to him without him even noticing. He gave them a wave and a wide smile.

“You’ve been draining all the greed out of my guests,” the person said with a ‘tut-tut’. “That’s not very nice, Ennui.”

Ennoshita sobered up with the mention of his Olde name.

“Who are you?” He asked cautiously.
“Oh no need to be suspicious of me,” They fluttered their eyelashes, “I’m the current Spyre~”

Ennoshita’s eyes widened. “Prydori Spyre? I uh, didn’t expect you to be~”

“A woman?” She laughed, “I’m not, but I suppose I’m close enough by human standards. And Prydori Spyre isn’t my name, just a title for the owner of the Spyre Luck Houses. My name is Yukie~”

“Forgive me, I am unfamiliar with the history,” Ennoshita said.

“The Luck Houses are named for the Olde King Pryderi who lived before the Shining Islands rose into the sky,” Yukie recited, “he was said to be extremely wealthy and beautiful with golden hair that shone through the dark.”

“Was his head a flashlight?” Ennoshita said dryly.

“During his fight with the magician Gwydion, his castle and his lands were rent across the sky,” Yukie finished. “The first Spyre used the residual magic from their battle to build the Luck Houses.”

Battle magic residue? No wonder Ennoshita’s head was starting to hurt from the amount of desire swirling around this place. He couldn’t even distinguish Kiyoko’s dragon greed from the rest.

“This isn’t the first time you’ve been here you know~” Yukie said, taking a drink from a passing waiter.

“It is as far as I know,” Ennoshita said skeptically.

“Exactly!” Yukie pointed her finger in Ennoshita’s face. “As far as you know!”

“What’s your point?” Ennoshita asked irritably, pushing her finger away.

“You used to stay here all the time when my Grandfather was the Spyre,” Yukie swirled her drink around in the glass.

“I don’t remember doing that,” Ennoshita said.

“Of course you don’t, you demon,” Yukie said softly. The word ‘demon’ fell harmlessly from her lips, without any disgust or detestation. She simply stated it as a fact.

“How much do you know about me?” Ennoshita asked her.

“Probably more than you remember about yourself,” Yukie took a swig and gulped it down. She slammed the empty glass down and wiped her mouth with a satisfied sigh. “Do you want to know about yourself?”

“…No,” Ennoshita answered after a pause. “I don’t have any need for that.”

“Poor Grampa…” Yukie said sadly, a dark look in her eyes. “Thrown away and forgotten so easily.”

“Look, I don’t know your grandfather,” Ennoshita said, wobbly getting to his feet. “But right now I have to find my friend, she’s in danger without me.”

Yukie grabbed his arm and held it against the table.

“History is important, Ennui,” she said seriously, “In forgetting it, we forget ourselves.”
“What do you want from me?” Ennoshita asked her.

“The Luck Houses are restless tonight,” she said with a worried frown, “I don’t know what is going on, but I can feel Grandfather’s presence here…and here you are, do you really think this could possible be a mere coincidence?”

“He’s dead, isn’t he? How could his presence be here?” Ennoshita said irritably.

“How do you know he died?” Yukie asked, surprised.

“You said I was his,” Ennoshita replied, “If I don’t remember being his then the only logical explanation would be that he’s passed away.”

“Is that how you demons work?” Yukie said.

“I’m a lazy demon,” Ennoshita smiled sadly, “I only have the energy to devote myself to one person at a time.”

“Go find your chosen one,” Yukie said, letting go of Ennoshita.

“Are you sure?” Ennoshita asked in surprise.

“I have a disturbance to check out, I don’t have time to waste with you,” Yukie said, waving her hand in a ‘shoo-ing’ motion.

Ennoshita paused, at a loss for what to say in parting. It had been a long time since anyone had recognized him for what he was and the encounter had made him feel strange. He wondered briefly what Yukie’s grandfather had been like. He shook his head. It wasn’t like thinking about it would make him remember.

“Hurry up,” Yukie said, turning back to her empty glass, “weren’t you in a rush?”

Ennoshita held out his hand.

“I’m glad to have met you, Yukie-San,” he said.

Yukie stared at his offered hand in surprise. Then she burst out laughing.

“Likewise, Demon,” she said with a smile. She took his hand and they shook.

Then they heard the screaming.

Nishinoya’s head hit the table with a dull thud. Tendou let out a short shout of victory accompanied by a limp fist pump and then promptly followed suit, his own head nearly falling onto the line-up of empty glasses.

“I guess it’s up to me to clean up this mess,” Tanaka sighed. He hefted Nishinoya over his left shoulder easily. Tendou was a bit trickier with his lengthy body.

“Don’t worry, gentlemen, just taking them back to the hotel,” Tanaka smiled at the waiters cleaning...
up the mess they’d left behind. “The gold on the table there should cover their bill.”

Tanaka weaved through the crowded room in search of an exit. He figured any exit would do in this place. Several screaming guests suddenly pushed past him, nearly knocking him over. The room was in a panic.

“What the hell…?” Tanaka steadied himself against the sudden rush of people fleeing one of the other rooms. He grabbed a random person by the front of their shirt. “What the fuck is going on?”

“Th-there’s a dragon!” The person stammered, struggling against Tanaka’s grasp.

“A dragon?” Tanaka’s eyes widened, “Kiyoko!”

Tanaka released them and they fell backwards and then scrambled to their feet and continued running. Tanaka shoved Nishinoya and Tendou under a table together. It wasn’t ideal, but it would have to do. He slapped Nishinoya awake.

“Don’t let him get away!” Tanaka said, jabbing a finger at Tendou.

Nishinoya nodded blearily and shot him a thumbs-up. It wasn’t very inspiring.

“On second thought…” Tanaka grinned.

Tanaka left Nishinoya draped over Tendou. That way, if Tendou should come to before Nishinoya, he’d at least be slowed down.

Fire shot out of the room people have just exited and Tanaka skidded to a stop before it.

“Holy shit, Kiyoko,” he said as she walked out of the room, surrounded by flames.

Kiyoko’ green dress had been ripped away and underneath it, she’d worn sleek black pants with thigh high combat boots and a white blouse with a corset of seabone. Her eyes glowed amber and she dragged a man in gold robes behind her.

“Ki-Kiyoko…” Tanaka called weakly, “Hey, Kiyoko!”

“Terushima-San! Terushima-Saaan!” Someone else screamed.

A group of three people in black uniforms with silver accents rushed towards her.

“Do you know this man?” Kiyoko asked. Her voice was sharp and her eyes blazed with rage. A man with brown hair pushed his way to the front.

“Release my comrade, monster!” He said, drawing a sword of Celestial steel. “Or I will have your head!”

“Try it, human!” Kiyoko spat. “I will burn you to ash!”

The man swung his sword and Tanaka rushed forwards. The Celestial steel clanged against his golden hand.

“Stop this!” Tanaka shouted at him, “She’s my captain, let me talk to her!”

“And she has one of my captains!” The man replied angrily, “You think I’m going to stand by and do nothing?”
“I said, let me talk to her!” Tanaka growled, “She isn’t usually like this!”

“You get two minutes!” The man said, withdrawing his sword.

Tanaka flexed his golden hand. The sword had left a line in the gold. Tanaka wondered if it counted as a scar. He turned to Kiyoko.

“Hey…Kiyoko…It’s me, Tanaka…Ryuunosuke…” Tanaka said hopefully. He opened his arms.

“Let’s go back to the ship.”

Kiyoko looked past him at the brown-haired man.

“And who are you?” She asked, her eyes narrowed.

Tanaka glanced back at the man. The man stepped up next to Tanaka.

“I am Oikawa Tooru,” he answered, “A Celestial Ship Captain.”

“No,” Kiyoko said forcefully, “You are someone else…just as he is someone else.”

Oikawa’s eyes looked blank for a moment and then his entire demeanor changed. He grinned at her.

“Is it this place? Giving you enough power to see me?” He asked, “I did warn the others that discovery would be a possibility in this kind of place.”

“So there are more like you,” Kiyoko said sharply.

“You don’t need to concern yourself with that,” Oikawa said, “Release my colleague and you will never hear from us again.”

“Your name, first,” Kiyoko demanded.

“If you insist, my lady,” Oikawa said with a frown, “At the moment, I am but a waif, however I used to be known as Eaen Rie, the Erudite.”

Kiyoko’s eyes were expressionless as she pulled the man she’d captured forwards. She inhaled and Tanaka had a bad feeling in his gut. He pushed past Oikawa or Eaen or whatever, and slapped his gold hand over her mouth in desperation. He screamed as the fire burned up his wrist and his arm.

“Kiyoko! Let him go!” Tanaka shouted, trying to keep a hold of his mind through the pain. He wondered if his gold fingers would melt from the heat. The fire stopped as she closed her lips.

“I know what they did to you,” Tanaka panted. He was covered in sweat. “I know it was horrible! And I know I can’t even begin the imagine the pain they put your through! But there are innocent bystanders here!”

“Move your hand, Ryuu,” Kiyoko said, trying to push him away, “I’m going to kill them!”

“No!” Tanaka could feel his strength slipping away. It was all he could do to keep standing, to keep his burned hand over Kiyoko’s mouth.

“Tanaka, it’s alright.”

Tanaka felt a hand on his back. His tension eased and he slumped to the ground. He looked up to see Ennoshita standing over him. The fire in Kiyoko’s eyes died down as Ennoshita approached.
“Stay back,” Kiyoko growled, “Don’t stop me!”

“You don’t want to do this, Kiyoko,” Ennoshita said, “You know you don’t.”

“You don’t know what I want!” Kiyoko shouted.

The two fire glands at the back of her throat glowed as she bared her teeth at him. Kiyoko was a vision of death, her throat glowing orange and red to match her glaring eyes. Ennoshita took a step forwards. Three lines appeared across his chest, ripping his clothes. Blood seeped through the fine cloth and down his stomach.

Ennoshita grimaced at the pain but kept moving forwards. Ennoshita placed both hands on Kiyoko’s shaking shoulders. He pulled her into a fierce hug and she slumped against him. She let go of the man she was holding and he fell to the floor in a heap. He turned his head to the men in black uniforms and glared.

“Never appear before us ever again,” he said threateningly, “because next time I won’t stop her.”

Eaen smiled amiably.

“I’m sure our meeting here was pure chance,” he said, moving forwards to retrieve his fallen companion.

Ennoshita held onto Kiyoko as the strangers left.

“You alright?” Ennoshita said to Tanaka.

Tanaka got to his feet uneasily, clutching his injured hand to his chest.

“Just peachy,” he answered, “But carrying Yuu and the monkey back to the ship is going to be a bitch.”

A woman stepped across Oikawa’s path as he was leaving. She was plain looking and her face was unreadable.

“Eaen Rie, that’s a name I haven’t heard in a long time,” she said.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Oikawa smiled and tried to brush past her, but she stood her ground. Oikawa narrowed his eyes. Behind him, Sugawara and Asahi were watching too closely for his comfort. They were already on the verge of knowing too much. He was going to need more pollen.

“Who is that with you?” She asked, “Another one of the Three? Is he Amaranth or Cathal?”

“I’ll kill you,” Oikawa said quietly.

“Easy there,” the woman backed up and raised her hands. She smiled. “Just innocent curiosity.”

Yukie moved aside as Oikawa and his crew walked past her. She studied their appearance as they left. She felt a sudden pang in her chest as the silver-haired one passed.
"So you were the disturbance," she said to herself, pressing a hand to her chest, “Grandfather…”

Yukie turned back to the fiery scene in the room behind her. Ennoshita had let go of the woman who was his new chosen one and the front of her blouse was stained red with his blood. The bald one had gotten to his feet and was cradling his injured arm to his chest. Staff members were already on the scene with fire extinguishers. Yukie decided to leave it up to them.

“Let’s get Nishinoya and the monkey and get the hell out of here,” Tanaka said loudly.

“Agreed,” Ennoshita said.

“You should take Kiyoko back to the ship,” Tanaka said to Ennoshita.

“No,” Kiyoko said, “We stay together.”

“Alright,” Tanaka said, his voice softening.

They started walking towards where Tanaka had left his partner. Yukie sidled up to Ennoshita as they left.

“I thought she was going to kill you,” Yukie said quietly to him.

“I’m pretty hard to kill,” Ennoshita replied.

“Would you have done the same for my grandfather? If he was the one you devoted yourself to?” Yukie asked.

“I don’t know, I can’t remember,” Ennoshita said bluntly, “But I did it for her, didn’t I? If I was as close to your grandfather as you said I was then you should know the answer to that.”

“You demon,” Yukie smiled.

Nishinoya woke up in a man’s lap. A monkey-man’s lap, to be precise. Goddammit, Ryuu, Nishinoya thought in annoyance. He sat up woozily and immediately regretted that decision. He was way too drunk. Tendou stirred and Nishinoya irritably draped a leg over him, trapping him by straddling him. He realized they were both under a table instead of back at the ship. What the fuck happened to the plan?

“Uuggghh…” Tendou’s hands wandered up to Nishinoya’s ass.

“Hands off!” Nishinoya snapped. He tried to slap Tendou’s hands away but the motion threw him off balance and he fell against Tendou’s chest instead. He was so going to kill Ryuu later for this.

“My head huuuuuurts…” Tendou complained groggily.

“Shut up,” Nishinoya snapped.

“Yuu?” A pair of legs stopped by the table and knelt. Tanaka’s head appeared. “Oh good, you’re awake. And getting cozy, I see.”
“What the hell is going on?” Nishinoya hissed.

“We had a bit of a hiccup.” Tanaka winced, “And frankly I really hope you can walk on your own because carrying just the monkey man is going to be nearly impossible for me.”

“What the fuck happened to your arm?” Nishinoya’s eyes widened as he caught sight of it.

“Dragon fire,” said a stranger’s voice from behind Tanaka. A woman knelt down beside him. “Your captain set fire to my Blackjack room.”

“Kiyoko did?” Nishinoya looked at Tanaka for confirmation. Tanaka nodded grimly.

“And who are you?” Nishinoya asked, turning to the stranger.

“Shirofuku Yukie~” she answered, “the current owner of this establishment.”

“Oh…” Nishinoya swallowed nervously, “So I guess we’re getting billed for the damages?”

“Please, I don’t need your lunch money,” Yukie waved her hand dismissively, “How rich do you think I am from this place? Besides, your pal Ennui and I go way back.”


“Yukie, I thought I told you not to call me that,” Ennoshita said, walking up to them. He was supporting Kiyoko as they walked over.

“Sorry about the plan, everyone,” Kiyoko said, flashing them a weak smile.

“Don’t worry about it. You can fill us in on the ship,” Tanaka said.

“But first we have to get there,” Nishinoya said. He tried standing up and banged his head against the table. He crawled out swearing and rubbing the top of his head.

“Wh-who are you people?” Tendou asked, “What’s going on?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Tanaka said, grabbing him and slinging him over his shoulder.

“Wait! What about my gold?” Tendou wailed, flailing against Tanaka’s back.

“Right, I did promise to give you my gold,” Nishinoya said sweetly before punching him in the face with his cursed hand.

Tendou slumped unconsciously against Tanaka.

“That’s 24 karat, bitch,” Nishinoya said, “Enjoy it.”

There had been something strange about that woman from the Luck House, Suga thought to himself. Well, there was something strange about both notable women they’d encountered there but for some reason the brown-haired one had stuck in his mind. He wondered if it had anything to do with the unusually dense presence of a cluster of golden stardust floating around him.
Suga raised a finger and the dust swirled around it. It was like a sentient being in some senses. It had accumulated slowly, building up after they had landed on Yara. And after going to the Luck House, its size had grown to that of a small cloud. The Luck House was known for, well luck, but also for fated encounters. Which was the reason why Oikawa had come in the first place. Suga wondered whom he’d been hoping to encounter there, if it was Sawamura or the Arc itself. What an easy trip it would’ve been if they had.

_Sawamura._

Suga rolled over onto his stomach and buried his face in his pillow. His memories were a mess. Did Sawamura betray them? Did they betray Sawamura? Every time Suga tried to remember his mind grew murky, like he was muddying up a puddle by prodding about too much. And the red flowers Oikawa kept on the ship didn’t help.

The cloud of gold stardust settled over Suga’s body. He breathed in and to his shock another set of memories entered his mind. His pulse raced. _Three cities rent from the ground and sent into the sky. Glorious buildings, technological advancements, and libraries with endless amounts of books, endless knowledge. A black orb that was both small and enormous. The creation of beings Suga had never seen before, mythical and mysterious springing from the darkness of that strange orb. A strange deer-like creature with pink antlers. A black cat with a serpent for a tail. A boy with long black hair and golden cat-like eyes turned his head and stared at Suga._

Suga’s door banged open and the gust of wind it created blew the gold stardust away. The images vanished and Suga gasped.

“Suga-San?” Kageyama stood in the doorway.

“Kageyama-Kun? What’s wrong?” Suga said, clearing his throat and sitting up. His head hurt and he rubbed his temples.

“Sorry to disturb you,” Kageyama said, “I just wanted to know what happened to Terushima-San.”

“He…got into a fight at the Luck House,” Suga said after a moment, “he must have met his fated rival haha…”

“I overheard Azumane-San talking about a dragon,” Kageyama said.

“She was just a woman,” Suga said, “A very beautiful woman, but definitely not a dragon.”

“Oh,” Kageyama seemed disappointed.

“Kageyama-Kun,” Suga gestured towards the gold stardust floating around near the ceiling. “Do you know what this is?”

“Stardust of course,” Kageyama answered.

“But do you know what stardust is?” Suga asked.

Kageyama fell silent.

“There is so much of it in the sky and in our home that we presumed it must come from stars,” Suga said, “But look at how much accumulated here since we’ve landed.”

“What do you think it is?” Kageyama asked.
“I don’t know…” Suga said, his brow furrowed in thought, “Lately I’ve been questioning a lot of things. Like what stardust is and what we are.”

“We are Alastors,” Kageyama said, standing at attention.

“Before we were Alastors,” Suga said.

“We were formerly Celestial Knights,” Kageyama answered.

“That was our title,” Suga said with a smile, “But what did we do? What were we really? Somehow, I can’t remember. What do you remember before Oikawa was in charge of us?”

“I was a trainee under Sawamura-San, Azumane-San and you,” Kageyama frowned.

“But what was your training?” Suga asked.

“To…to fight…and…” Kageyama trailed off.

“I can’t help but feel like we’ve lost our purpose,” Suga said, “And this stardust means something, something important that we’ve lost.”

“The only thing we’ve lost is the Arc,” Oikawa said from behind Kageyama.

“Oikawa-San!” Kageyama moved aside and saluted him. Suga stood and did the same.

“At ease,” Oikawa smiled, “I need the both of you to our meeting room. We will be discussing the next location shortly.”

“Yessir!” Kageyama and Suga said.

Oikawa placed a hand on Suga’s shoulder as he exited his room.

“Next time you have a concern, please speak to me about it,” Oikawa whispered smoothly into Suga’s ear, “Wouldn’t want to burden our younger, more impressionable members with silly worries and thoughts.”

“Of course,” Suga replied quietly.

“Good,” Oikawa smiled, patting Suga’s shoulder. “Now let’s get going. Don’t want to keep the others waiting.”

Chapter End Notes

I know I left on a weird cliffhanger last time, but I’ll get back to it next chapter

Ennoshita is the demon Ennui, a demon of boredom and laziness and general disinterest

Kiyoko is a dragon, an inherently greedy creature

So with Ennoshita by her side, Kiyoko can control her greed from taking over. Think of it as a mental illness of sorts, with Ennoshita being her medicine. I don’t exactly ship them, but I friendship them lol
Here Be Lions

Chapter Summary

Nothing is what it seems, except for certain times when it is exactly what it seems...like Tsukishima's giant fucking crush.

Chapter Notes

There was a mistake on an earlier chapter (I've fixed it now)

Last chapter a 'black kitten with two tails' was mentioned, it should have been (and is now) a 'black kitten with a serpent for a tail'

"What's with the bondage?"

"Ignore it," Kenma snapped. He stormed over to Yaku. "More importantly, how much did this imp tell you?"

"I'm an Inhio," Yaku snarled, "Not an imp."

"A blabbermouth is what you are," Kenma glared, "Do you know how important the information Lev carelessly told you about is?"

"I only told Daichi what used to be common knowledge," Yaku replied, crossing his arms, "No one told me it was all a secret now."

The two of them glared at each other.

"Kenma," Sawamura said, "Do you know about the Arc?"

"I know that it shouldn't be found!" Kenma said vehemently. He turned to Sawamura and glared. "The Arc isn't some tool for you Celestial Knights!"

"Kenma, please listen to me," Sawamura pleaded, "I'm not after the Arc, it can stay missing for all I care, but Oikawa is, and he won't stop until he finds it."

"Oikawa?" Kenma narrowed his eyes, "Another Celestial Knight?"

"He was a fellow starship captain," Sawamura explained, "He revolted against the Conclave and overturned the Order. He is determined to find the Arc."

Kenma's eyes widened with fear as Sawamura continued his explanation.

"Why didn't you tell me earlier?" Kenma asked.
“I told you there was an internal struggle in the Celestial Order—” Sawamura started.

“YOU DIDN’T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THEM BEING AFTER THE ARC!” Kenma shouted.

Sawamura was startled into silence by Kenma’s outburst. Kenma was shaking and he crouched down, wrapping his arms around his knees.

“Not again…” Kenma whispered faintly.

“Yaku, you said that the Arc contains the soul of the world,” Sawamura said, looking to the inhio for confirmation.

“Yes, that is true,” Yaku nodded.

“What does that mean exactly?” Sawamura asked, “What is so important about it?”

“Sawamura, do you have any idea what the Arc can do?” Kenma asked.

“When I was a Celestial Knight, I was only told that the Arc was a navigational system used by the Conclave,” Sawamura answered, “And just now, Yaku has told me that it actually contains the soul of the world.”

“The Arc can control tangible desire,” Kenma explained, “It can create and destroy at the whim of whoever has it.”

“Then if someone were to gain control of the arc…” Sawamura said grimly.

“They would have control over the world,” Kenma said immediately, “Over the very fabric of the universe.”

“They would be gods,” Yaku said, his eyes glowing.

“Does that sound good to you, imp?” Kenma said sarcastically.

“Hmph,” Yaku crossed his arms, “I’m not exactly happy with the way the world is but I don’t want to become its creator.”

“This situation is even more serious than I thought,” Sawamura said grimly, “I can’t let Oikawa get his hands on the soul of the world.”

“Nor can anyone else,” Kenma said fiercely.

”Nor anyone else,” Sawamura repeated solemnly.

“Godfuckingdammit.”

Tsukishima kicked off his shoes and took off his uniform jacket.

“Hey! Hey, wait a second! Take me with you at least!” Oculus pleaded from the front pocket of the
“What good would that do?” Tsukishima asked irritably.

“I’m a pair of magic glasses, how could that not help the situation?” Oculus said.

“I’m done talking about this,” Tsukishima muttered. He held his breath and then jumped up into the water. He opened his eyes underwater and the blurry image of Hinata floating above him came into view. He swam up towards him.

Hinata’s hand was cold when he grabbed it and pulled. Tsukishima hoped he wasn’t already dead. They broke the surface of the water and dropped down onto the ceiling/floor. Tsukishima started pumping Hinata’s chest. Nothing happened. Tsukishima swore and pressed his head to Hinata’s chest.

To his surprise, it was already beating. He looked at Hinata’s face. His lips were slightly parted and a faint mist puffed out of his mouth as he breathed.

“What the fuuuuck…?” Tsukishima said quietly, waving his hand in front of Hinata’s mouth.

The fog he was exhaling thickened.

“What’s going on?” Oculus shouted from Tsukishima’s pile of clothes. “Eye-ronically enough, I can’t see what’s happening.”

Tsukishima sighed angrily before fetching the annoying pair of magical glasses.

“Uh oh,” Oculus said, as Tsukishima held it over Hinata’s face. “That’s not good.”

“Astute observation,” Tsukishima drawled sarcastically.

“He’s having a nightmare,” Oculus said.

“Well its about to be quite literally,” Oculus said grimly as the mist from Hinata’s mouth grew into a dark pulsating cloud.

“What the fuck is that?” Tsukishima hissed.

“A nightmare,” Oculus answered, “the corporeal kind.”

“Is everything in this fucking place corporeal?” Tsukishima swore, backing away from Hinata’s body and the cloud coming out of it.

“Just what did you think ‘tangible desire’ was?” Oculus asked.

“The phrase certainly never brought THAT to mind!” Tsukishima shouted, pointing to the cloud of doom.

“What can I say? Your friend is a real repressed dude,” Oculus shouted back.

Thunder cracked and the cloud enveloped Tsukishima and Oculus before they could react. They were blown back and Tsukishima hit the ground. He covered his eyes as the dark mist swarmed around him. It felt cold and thick, like heavy air. He coughed and inhaled some of the thick mist.
“What do we do now?” Tsukishima shouted.

“You have to wake him up!” Oculus answered.

“HINATA! WAKE THE FUCK UP!” Tsukishima yelled.

“He can’t hear you in that state! We have to get to the eye of the storm!” Oculus instructed.

“FUCKING HELL!”

“You wanna maybe put me on now?” Oculus yelled.

“You wanna maybe kiss my ass?!” Tsukishima replied. His head was feeling dizzy. He must have hit it when he fell. His lungs felt heavy. He crawled along the ground, feeling around for Hinata’s body.

“We need to find the center,” Oculus said, “Kei, listen to me, we’ll never get out of here if you can’t see the way.”

“I’m fine!” Tsukishima said firmly, “I don’t need some kind of magic to get me through this.”

Oculus was silent. Tsukishima fumbled around the ground. Minutes passed. Maybe he’d dropped the damn glasses, that’d be a blessing. Tsukishima stopped moving and sat. It was quiet but for the whooshing of the cloud around him.

“Oculus?” Tsukishima said quietly.

“What, you suddenly want to talk to me?” Oculus pouted. Tsukishima felt a mix of relief and annoyance at the glasses’ reply.

“Forget I said anything,” Tsukishima said.

“Nope, too late, you already started a conversation,” Oculus chirped happily. “You know what? I think I’ve got you figured out. You act all grumpy and aloof but you’re actually a lonely boy who’s afraid to care too much in case he gets hurt.”

“Okay, you can go back to not talking now,” Tsukishima said sharply.

“I think the only way you know how to talk to people is by arguing with them,” Oculus continued, “it’s kinda cute actually, you’re like a grumpy cat. I think I’m warming up to you.”

“I still hate you,” Tsukishima said.

“Dude, we’re made for each other, you’re visually impaired, I’m a visual enhancer; how are you not seeing this?” Oculus snickered. “Oh wait, maybe it’s because YOU WON’T PUT ME ON.”

“Alright fine!” Tsukishima said irritably. He jammed the glasses onto his face in annoyance.

The fog cleared and Tsukishima saw Hinata lying on his back a few feet away. A dark shadowy figure stood over his head and a smaller figure made of orange light stood at his feet. Hinata’s mouth was open and his eyes closed. His skin was pallid and clammy-looking.

“What are those things?” Tsukishima asked, pointing to the strange figures.

“That’s his nightmare,” Oculus answered.
The dark shadow raised its arm and held a shadowy sword to the orange figure’s neck. The orange figure stepped into the sword and clutched at its neck, writhing in pain. The sword suddenly dissipated and the dark figure moved closer. It put its arms around the orange figure and some of its brightness seeped into the dark figure’s shadow. For a minute, the two colours, orange and black swirled and mixed where the two figures touched.

“It doesn’t look like a nightmare,” Tsukishima remarked, slightly embarrassed by the intimate scene.

“There are as many layers to fear as there are to love,” Oculus said.

The dark figure blew away, leaving the orange figure reaching for it in vain as it slipped through its fingers. The orange figure collapsed on its knees on Hinata’s chest. It’s head was in its hands and it hunched over until it touched Hinata’s face.

Tsukishima walked over and knelt beside Hinata. He glanced up cautiously at the orange figure but it didn’t move. He reached over and shook Hinata’s shoulder.

“Hey, Hinata,” Tsukishima said. Hinata didn’t respond. Tears slipped out from the corners of Hinata’s eyes.

“Hinata, wake up!” Tsukishima said louder, panicking at the sight of his tears.

Hinata jerked upwards, bashing into Tsukishima’s forehead. The orange figure dissipated in a puff of orange dust.

“Oww!” Hinata held his hands to his forehead and grimaced. Tsukishima swore quietly before glaring at Hinata.

“ Took you long enough,” Tsukishima muttered.

“Huh? Where are we? What’s going on?” Hinata asked, rubbing his forehead.

“We’re still in the Cave,” Tsukishima said gruffly, “Come on, we need to find Sawamura and Yachi.”

“My face is wet,” Hinata said in confusion. He wiped at his cheeks and then looked up.

“HOLY CRAP!” Hinata exclaimed as he gaped at the huge body of water floating above them.

“Hurry up, moron,” Tsukishima said, crawling towards the opposite side of the room.

“Tsukishima, are you seeing this? It’s freaking amazing!” Hinata said, lying on his back again. He used his feet to push himself after Tsukishima.

“Uwaaahhh~!”

“You almost drowned in that,” Tsukishima said bluntly.

“I what?” Hinata gulped nervously, “It’s not going to fall on us, is it?”

“No,” Tsukishima and Oculus answered together.

Hinata tilted his head back and looked at Tsukishima upside-down. “Am I hearing things or did someone else answer?”

“You’re hearing things,” Tsukishima replied.
“I suppose technically I am a ‘thing’ but I resent your intentions in saying that,” Oculus muttered.

“Who are you mysterious speaker? And where?” Hinata rolled over and looked around wildly.

“I’d love to greet you face to face but unfortunately right now my wearer won’t turn his big fat head around,” Oculus said, “My name is Oculus!”

“Your wearer?” Hinata repeated in confusion.

“My one and only,” Oculus said, “the ever so sociable and friendly, Tsukishima Kei!”

“Oh boy, you poor thing,” Hinata snorted.

“Can you believe him?” Oculus went on, “the Cave makes him a magical pair of glasses and not only does he insult me, he even refused to put me on for hours!”

“You’re a magical pair of glasses!?” Hinata’s eyes lit up with excitement.

“Only the magical-est,” Oculus bragged.

“And the most annoying,” Tsukishima added sourly.

“Turn around, Tsukishima!” Hinata said, crawling up beside him. “I wanna see your magical glasses!”

“And I wanna get out of this room,” Tsukishima replied, crawling faster.

“Ah! No fair, you have longer legs!” Hinata struggled to keep up. He sped up until he was even with Tsukishima. “You’re too tall! I can’t see them very well!”

Tsukishima glared down at Hinata. Hinata’s eyes shone and he beamed at him.

“Those look so cool!!!” Hinata exclaimed.

“Aw, don’t make me blush,” Oculus said. The glass lenses tinted pink.

“I’m extremely close to throwing you both into the water,” Tsukishima growled.

“Too late! We’re already in the next room!” Hinata said, scooting the last couple feet to the doorway and through the exit.

Tsukishima exhaled grumpily as he followed.

Akaashi breathed in sharply.

A smallish girl sat sleeping at the legs of a giant statue of a woman in long robes. Her head was leaning against the statue, her neck arched gracefully. Her skin was pearly with a rainbow sheen to it. Her hair fell to her shoulders in golden strands. In her stillness, she almost looked like a statue herself but for the slight swell of her chest as she breathed. Akaashi approached her cautiously.

“Hey…” The girl stirred but didn’t wake up.
“Are you Kenma’s friend, Yachi?” Akaashi said a little louder.

“Ugh…” the girl’s eyes scrunched as she awoke. She blinked blearily at Akaashi, the graceless motion overshadowed by the amber depths of her eyes. Her eyes suddenly widened in panic and her mouth opened in a dainty ‘O’ of surprise. Akaashi heard her shout “Behind you!” just as something hard collided with the back of his head.

“That was easy,” a man said as Akaashi fell.

“There’s more of them still, should we try catching a few more?” Another man said from behind the statue Yachi was sitting on.

Yachi struggled against the invisible rope tying her to the statue.

“No use in struggling against spider silk, right Hiroo?” the man grinned.

“Nope,” Hiroo answered as he tied up Akaashi. “Help me with him, Takachiho.”

When he was done, they started dragging Akaashi over to a metal cage with wheels on the bottom. A round black metal ball rolled out of Akaashi’s bag.

“What’s that?” Takachiho asked.

“You don’t think it’s a bomb…do you?” Hiroo said uneasily.

“DON’T MOVE!” Yachi yelled.

Hiroo and Takachiho exchanged glances. Yachi swallowed nervously. The two strangers seemed really wary of Kuroo’s body. The fact that Kuroo was not currently moving was concerning, but at the moment her first priority was not getting kidnapped.

“That’s a kinetic bomb,” Yachi lied, “I saw it activate when it rolled out of the bag. Any movement at all and it’ll blow this entire place to smithereens!”

“That sounds fishy,” Hiroo said, narrowing his eyes.

“I don’t want to die!” Yachi pleaded, making herself cry. It wasn’t that hard considering the circumstances.

“Let’s just take these two,” Takachiho said, “I don’t wanna have to carry too much back. Besides, Daisho already has a bunch of weirdos.”

“Alright then,” Hiroo said, taking a playing card out of his pocket. The card was clear, with a 9 of diamonds design in glowing light.

“And for the lady,” Takachiho took his own playing card out of his pocket and threw it over to Yachi.

Yachi could see it was a seven of hearts as it floated over her head and expanded to the size of a door. It fell downwards over her and her body felt light and bubbly.

“How’d you like our method of transportation?” Takachiho said with a grin.

They were inside what appeared to be a circus tent. Yachi was still bound by spider silk, but the statue that had been behind her was gone.
“Daisho’ll be really happy when he sees you,” Takachiho continued, circling around her now. “We’ve never been able to catch a mwyn firain before.”

“What did you do to my glamour?” Yachi asked.

“We didn’t do anything, did we Hiroo?” Takachiho leaned on Hiroo’s shoulder.

“Your glamour fell away by itself. We just happened to be there watching,” Hiroo said.

Impossible… Yachi wrapped her arms around herself. She would never have let her glamour fall away. Not even her crewmates had ever seen her without her glamour. It must have been the Cave…and that strange dream she’d had…

“Ah! Daisho! Over here! Look at what we found in a Cave of Wonders!” Takachiho said, waving at a man in a long red coat.

The man was standing with another group of people dressed in silver and black. Yachi felt her blood run cold as she recognized the black and silver uniforms. Oikawa. Ikejiri. Terushima.

“A mwyn firain!” Daisho gasped in wonder. “I can’t believe you actually caught one!”

“Whoaaa!” Terushima exclaimed, “She’s so pretty!”

“A real mwyn firain…” a silky-smooth voice said, walking up to Yachi. Oikawa smiled coldly. “What a wonderful surprise!”

Yachi glared at him.

“She doesn’t seem to like you, Oikawa-San!” Daisho said, clapping Oikawa on the back cheerfully.

“How strange,” Oikawa pouted, “I’m usually pretty popular with the ladies.”

“Better luck next time,” Daisho smiled.

“Where did you say you found the mwyn firain?” Oikawa said, turning to Hiroo and Takachiho.

“In a Cave of Wonders,” Hiroo answered, “It was in a desert on the outskirts of Yara.”

“We also got this guy!” Takachiho chimed in, pointing to Akaashi’s unconscious body. “He seems normal at first, but it feels really weird looking at him. We were going to try to catch more but a weird black thing fell out of this guy’s bag so we left in case it was a bomb!”

“A weird black thing?” A strange expression flitted across Oikawa’s face. Yachi wondered what Oikawa was thinking.

“Yeah! It was like a metal ball thing about this big,” Takachiho gestured wildly. “It was a good thing we had the teleporters you gave us!”

“Can you find your way back to where you left the black object?” Oikawa asked.

“We can with these!” Takachiho said, waving his seven of hearts.

“Let me see that,” Oikawa snatched the card out of his hand. He tossed the card over his head and vanished as it expanded and then fell over him.

“What’s so important about that black thing?” Takachiho asked.
“I can’t really say,” Ikejiri said, smiling apologetically. “Anyway, how did you like using the teleporters? Be honest, I’m the one who made them.”

“They’re amazing!” Takachiho beamed. “How did you make them?”

“This guy studied the doors at the Spyre’s Luck Houses!” Terushima chimed in, slinging an arm around Ikejiri’s neck. “He snuck into the hidden chamber where all the secret stuff is!”

“You make me sound like some secret agent or ninja,” Ikejiri said, blushing with embarrassment.

The room started to shine as a giant card with the seven of hearts appeared in the air above them. It descended and Oikawa appeared. As his face was appearing Yachi though she saw his face twisted with rage but he quickly smoothed his expression into a calm one as the rest of his body appeared. A flood of sand suddenly poured down on him as the card returned to normal.

“I couldn’t find your mystery black object,” Oikawa said, bopping the side of his head with a loose fist. Yachi wondered if Kuroo had somehow managed to roll away and hide.

“Ahaha what’s with all the sand?” Terushima laughed.

“I got a little lost,” Oikawa pouted.

“We’ve wasted enough time here anyway,” Terushima said, “We just wanted to see how the teleporters were working for ya.”

“See you next time,” Ikejiri said with a little wave.

“One more thing,” Oikawa said, his gaze falling on Yachi. “Make sure to bring this one to the Fair.”

“Oh course,” Daisho nodded enthusiastically, “there must be a mwyn firain at the World Fair!”

“Bye-bye, Sugu-Chan~” Oikawa said cheerfully.

“See you at the World Fair~!”

Bokuto listened quietly. The pager on his leg had gone off, vibrating three times. That meant Akaashi was in trouble. He thought he’d heard voices but they’d disappeared suddenly, as did their presences. There was the thing that had dropped and rolled across the floor though, that seemed to still be there. Bokuto whistled. There was definitely no one in the room of giant statues but for the ball that Bokuto highly suspected might be Kuroo. But he hoped it wasn’t because Akaashi wasn’t here. And if Akaashi wasn’t here then where was he? And why did he drop Kuroo?

There was a flash of brightness and Bokuto sensed someone appearing.

“The Arc…finally!” A person said, walking towards the ball.

Bokuto had a bad feeling about the stranger. They emitted an eerie energy. Bokuto rolled out from behind a statue and grabbed the ball before they could.

“WHO ARE YOU?” The stranger yelled furiously. “GIVE BACK THE ARC!”
Bokuto ran, zig-zagging between statues as he tried to lose his pursuer. They threw something and Bokuto felt a spike of pain in his left leg. He kept running through the pain. He sensed other people too late. He ran into someone, knocking both of them over. He tightened his hold on the ball and took the brunt of the fall. It was a surprisingly soft landing.

“Whoa, where did this guy come from?” Said a voice.

“Get him off of me!” Another voice hissed from under Bokuto.

“God, what the fuck is he wearing? Is he some kind of pervert? I fucking HATE this Cave! I hate tangible desire!” The person under Bokuto ranted.

“What’s in his arms? Is that…Kuroo?” The first voice said, surprised.

“Of course it is,” a grumpy voice hissed from under Bokuto. “He’s only ever been an immense pain in my ass.”

“Technically your stomach,” the other voice laughed.

“Run…” Bokuto said, struggling to his feet. The pain in his leg made it hard to stand.

“Hey, Tsukishima, he’s injured!”

“We have bigger things to worry about,” Tsukishima said, pointing to the area Bokuto had come from.

Hinata looked. His expression clouded as he saw Bokuto’s pursuer.

"Oikawa."

“Chibi-Chan, Megane-Kun,” Oikawa sneered. “I thought I might run into you here, although I can’t say it’s much of a pleasure.”

“Where’s Kageyama?” Hinata asked, drawing his sword.

“Why are you here?” Tsukishima asked coldly, his sword also drawn.

Oikawa glanced at the object in Bokuto’s hands before smiling at Hinata and Tsukishima.

“Is he a friend of yours?” Oikawa asked, pointing to Bokuto.

“Yes,” Hinata replied immediately. “Stay away from him!”

“How unfortunate,” Oikawa adjusted his grip on his sword.

Hinata didn’t see Oikawa move. He was suddenly hit from the side and sent tumbling across the floor. Oikawa stood where Hinata had been. He grinned and kicked Tsukishima away from Bokuto.

“I told you to stay away from him!” Oikawa caught Hinata’s foot as he came flying at him.

“Neat little shoes,” Oikawa said, throwing Hinata to the floor. “But annoying. It looks like I’m going to have to kill you first.”

Oikawa held his sword to Hinata’s neck. Something suddenly grabbed his wrist. Oikawa swore as he was yanked off of Hinata. An arm made of sand held his wrist. Sand swirled up from the floor into the figure of a person.
“Oho?” Oikawa smirked as he recognized the figure. “This yours, Chibi-Chan?”

“Shut up!” Hinata said angrily.

The figure strengthened its grip and Oikawa grimaced. Hinata and Tsukishima exchanged glances and nodded. They attacked in tandem, Celestial steel singing as it cut through the air.

“Tch!” Oikawa threw something up into the air and a flash of light blinded Hinata and Tsukishima. It disappeared and Oikawa was gone. So was the sand figure.

"Dammit!” Hinata almost threw his sword against the ground but held himself back. Tears of frustration escaped the corners of his eyes.

“Let’s get out of here,” Tsukishima said grimly, “knowing him, he’ll be back with friends.”

Hinata rubbed his eyes.

“And who are you?” Tsukishima turned to Bokuto. “Why do you have Kuroo?”

“So I am holding onto Kuroo, phew!” Bokuto grinned, “I was worried I was holding onto something that was more trouble than it was worth!”

“Trust me, you are,” Tsukishima retorted.

“What’s wrong with Kuroo? Why isn’t he talking or floating?” Hinata asked. “Did Oikawa do something to him?”

“Kenma turned him off before we went into the Cave,” Bokuto explained.

“You know Kenma?” Hinata was surprised.

“I’m Bokuto Koutarou, my partner Akaashi Keiji and I are Black Hawkers,” Bokuto said, “Kenma came to me and Akaashi asking us to help you guys get out of this Cave.”

“Kenma did…” Hinata looked really happy for a moment.

“What did I do?”

Hinata turned around and gasped. A giant sand lion was standing behind them.

“Lev!” Hinata exclaimed.

“Shorty!” The sand lion grinned.

“Whoa, what the heck is here?” Bokuto asked. He could feel some sort of giant presence.

“It’s a giant lion made of sand,” Tsukishima said. And of course, it was friends with Hinata.

“I really wish Hinata would stop befriending giant animals,” Tsukishima muttered to himself.

“You sure hang out with some weird people,” Oculus remarked.

"I wish I didn't," Tsukishima muttered.

A couple heads popped up over Lev’s. Kenma was riding on top of a giant sand lion with Sawamura behind him.
“Kenma!!” Hinata yelled excitedly. He jumped and his shoes flew him up to Kenma. Kenma’s eyes widened as Hinata threw himself onto him, hugging him fiercely.

“Hinata?” Kenma said. Heat rose to his cheeks unbidden. He should push him away but his arms wouldn’t move.

“Call me Shouyou!” Hinata insisted.

“Shou…you,” Kenma repeated. His entire face felt red. Hinata pulled back and grinned at Kenma’s flustered expression.

“Whoa, why are you also dressed like a pervert?” Hinata asked, looking at Kenma’s black leather suit.

“It’s protective gear from tangible desire,” Kenma explained.

“And where were you, Captain?” Tsukishima asked, ignoring the display between Hinata and Kenma.

“I got caught up with an inhio,” Sawamura said sheepishly, “Sorry about all this, Tsukishima. I should have been more responsible.”

“At least you’re back to normal,” Tsukishima grumbled.

“Where’s Yachi?” Sawamura asked, looking around.

“She ran off somewhere,” Tsukishima said, shrugging.

“She’s gone,” the giant sand lion spoke up.

“What do you mean, she’s gone?” Kenma asked, feeling dread rising in his stomach.

“Blood Dealers kidnapped her,” Lev answered.

“They took Akaashi too,” Bokuto said, wincing as he bandaged his leg.

“And you didn’t do anything to stop them?” Tsukishima said.

“I don’t like Blood Dealers,” Lev said uneasily, “They had weird technology with them.”

“Why would blood dealers take Yachi? And Akaashi?” Hinata asked.

“I told you didn’t I, Kenma?” Lev said. Kenma’s eyes widened as he realized.

“One of your friends isn’t human.”

Yachi was dreaming.

Attendants dressed her in long silken robes that shone in red and gold. Her blonde hair fell to her waist in straight strands that were as fine as spider thread. The auburn haired woman sat across from her, smoke trailing from a long wooden pipe. This woman was her mother, and yet, Yachi was
certain she remembered her mother as a stout woman with pale yellow hair that looked as though long days under the sun had faded its brilliance.

“Niwlen.”

“You’re a fairy?”

Yachi opened her eyes. The stranger they had captured with her sat in the cage next to her. He was a strange one. Looking at him was difficult; it felt like Yachi’s eyes were crossing every time she tried.

“I am a mwyn firain,” Yachi answered, tired of lying about it. She didn’t really see the use in lying at this point.

The man had a blank expression.

“Yes, I’m a fairy,” Yachi sighed.

“Can you put a glamour on me?” The man asked, “I think my presence is making the occupants of the cages across from us uneasy.”

“They already know what you look like though,” Yachi said.

“But they’ll feel better if they can’t see my real appearance,” the stranger said, “I’m a Distortionist.”

“I’ve never heard of that before,” Yachi said.

“I’m hard to look at, right?” The stranger said, wincing.

That was true. He was incredibly hard to look at without feeling nauseous. His story sounded weird, but she didn’t see the harm in casting a glamour for him if he was that set on it. The two other people across from them looked visibly more at ease after she cast it.

“Thanks,” the stranger smiled and Yachi was struck by how handsome he was when his image wasn’t distorted.

“My name is Akaashi Keiji.”

“Yachi Hitoka,” Yachi said, extending a hand through the cage bars. Akaashi shook it politely.

“Are you one of Kenma’s friends?” Akaashi asked her.

“Ye…ah, um…I…” Yachi paused, “I think so. I don’t know if he considers me his friend, but I’d like us to be friends.”

“He definitely considers you a friend,” Akaashi smiled, “he asked me and my partner to help him save you and the others.”

Warmth coursed through Yachi’s chest at Akaashi’s words. She burst into a smile.

“Ehehe…he really came to save us?” Yachi beamed.

“Yeah,” Akaashi said, “Sorry I botched up the saving part.”

“You were supposed to save me from the Cave, not blood dealers,” Yachi said, trying to lighten the situation.
They both fell silent for a moment.

“What do you think they’re going to do with us?” Yachi said nervously.

“He said something about a World Fair,” Akaashi said.

“Should we ask them?” Yachi said hesitantly, tilting her head towards the other prisoners. Akaashi shrugged.

“Hey, you over there,” Akaashi called to them, “My name is Akaashi, and this is Yachi.”

“Yeah, we could hear you,” said the smaller one. He shuffled over to the edge of his cage, “I’m Shirabu, and this is Ushijima.”

“Do you know what the World Fair is?” Akaashi asked.

“It’s all Daisho and the others have been talking about for the past few days,” Shirabu said, “I think he’s going to showcase us there, but I don’t know what else will happen. He could sell us or make us fight.”

“But why?” Yachi asked.

“You’re a mwyn firain and a distortionist, you said,” Shirabu laughed joylessly, “We’re demuto. He’s collecting all the Children of Yara.”

“Children of Yara,” Yachi repeated, “I’ve heard that term before…what does it mean?”

“It means us,” Shirabu said, tilting his head in confusion, “Don’t you know about Yara? We are all her children.”

“Who is Yara?” Yachi asked.

“Yara is the world,” Ushijima spoke up.

Yachi felt a chill run through her. A familiar memory, one she couldn’t quite grasp. A woman with auburn hair, blowing smoke through lips like rubies. Red flowers and golden dust. A black kitten with a viper curling up where its tail should be.

“That reminds me of a story my mother used to tell me,” Akaashi said. “A woman named Yara slumbered deep in the forest. Her dreams became reality and were born through her breath. From her lips, sprung life and magic. A nearby village became curious of her powers and wanted to use them. They woke her, but when she woke up they realized her powers were gone.”

“I know that story,” Shirabu said quietly. “But the version I know is much sadder than that.”

“How does it go?” Yachi asked, holding her knees to her chest.

“After the villagers woke Yara they waited for her to fall back asleep and then cut off her head. Her body began to rampage so they cut it apart and scattered the pieces. From those pieces tangible desire spots bloomed uncontrollably, creating beings and monsters alike. They took her head and used it to make their village fly into the sky to escape the monsters created from her body. Yara’s tears rained over the world, possessing the bodies they fell upon to search for her missing parts. From her blood, bloomed red flowers that induced feelings of sorrow, anger, and loss.”

Yachi trembled.
“Who told you that story?” She asked Shirabu.

“I…I don’t know, I feel like I’ve always known it,” Shirabu said.

"Is it real?” Yachi asked, yet she was certain in her gut. Yara's tears...something about that resounded with her.

"I believe it," Shirabu said, "beings who don't make sense in this world, we are all Yara's children."

“I…I think I’m one of Yara’s tears,” Yachi said hesitantly. Yet, as she spoke she knew her words to be true.

“How do you know?” Akaashi asked.

“Celestial Knights can see and collect what we call stardust,” Yachi said breathlessly, “Stardust isn’t actual dust from stars, it’s Yara’s breath!”

“You’re saying that my story…is actually history?” Shirabu said.

“More than that,” Yachi said grimly, “It’s the reason that Oikawa is hosting a World Fair and getting Daisho to collect Children of Yara.”

“Do you think he has the head?” Akaashi asked.

“No,” Yachi said, remembering the look of rage on Oikawa’s face when he returned from the Cave. “The World Fair is just a trap, he wants the head to come to the fair looking for the rest of its body.”

“And how do you know he doesn’t already have the head?” Shirabu asked.

“Because I think I know where the head is,” Yachi said, looking at Akaashi.

“It fell out of your bag when they took us.”

“They took Akaashi too?” Kenma’s face paled. “What about Kuroo?”

“I’ve got Kuroo here,” Bokuto said, holding him up, “he must have fallen out of Akaashi’s bag.”

Kenma breathed a small sigh of relief. His stomach still churned with anxiety over the other two being missing. He climbed down from Lev’s back and took Kuroo back from Bokuto.

“Someone else tried to take him, he called Kuroo the Arc,” Bokuto said as he handed Kuroo to Kenma. Kenma stiffened.

“There’s something I’ve been wondering for a while,” Sawamura said quietly.

He reached into his backpack and pulled out one of Kenma’s maps. It showed the Shining Cities in their prime. The cities stood tall, outlined by the sun.

“I took this from your study before we left,” Sawamura admitted sheepishly.

“It’s beautiful,” Hinata breathed. Even Tsukishima was silent with awe.
“Kuroo said that you drew all the maps from memory,” Sawamura said, “But the Shining Cities have been in ruins for as long as I can remember. How did you draw such a detailed map of them?”

“I’m a cartographer,” Kenma mumbled uneasily.

“Kenma…is Kuroo the Arc?” Sawamura asked quietly.

Everyone looked at Kenma. He cradled Kuroo’s body against his chest.

“You said you wouldn’t ask about the Arc,” Kenma said, his voice trembling.

“That was before I knew we had it all along! That you had it all along,” Sawamura said, trying to keep his emotions under control.

“Kuroo isn’t the Arc!” Kenma said quickly. He looked at Sawamura pleadingly. “He isn’t…”

“Fine…alright,” Sawamura took a deep breath. “Either way, we still need to get Yachi and Akaashi back.”

“We have another problem,” Tsukishima said, “Oikawa showed up here.”

“Oikawa?” Sawamura said in shock.

“He was chasing Bokuto-San,” Hinata said. “We fought him, but he disappeared part-way in a flash of light!”

“Do you think he’s involved with the blood dealers?” Bokuto said. “He showed up where they disappeared.”

“We need to get out of here,” Sawamura said grimly.

“Lev,” Kenma said.

“Right!” Lev said cheerfully.

Sand enveloped the group in a whirlwind. The next thing they knew, they were standing out in the middle of a desert again.

“Whoa!” Someone fell off of Tobio’s back in surprise.

“Isn’t there a better way of letting us out?” Tsukishima complained, spitting sand out of his mouth. He took off Oculus to brush off his lenses.

“He’s made of sand, Tsukishima, what do you expect?” Hinata said, “he did just barf us up.”

Tsukishima put his glasses back on and scowled.

Some sort of…incredibly beautiful ethereal creature was sprawled on its knees in front of him. It had pink antlers, brown hair and it was wearing the same tracksuit that Kenma was before he showed up in black leather bdsm.

“I’ve had enough of seeing weird mirages, Oculus, knock it off!” Tsukishima snapped.

“Bro, what are you talking about?” Oculus said.

“We just got out of that tangible desire-filled hell hole and now you’ve resorted to throwing hot
magical beings at me to make me feel some sort of desire,” Tsukishima said in frustration.

“Um…hello,” the hot magical being said meekly. “My name is Yamaguchi Tadashi…Kenma told me to watch the dinosaur.”

Tsukishima’s scowl stayed frozen on his face as a blush creeping up his neck and spread across his cheeks.

“You…you’re not doing anything, are you Oculus…” Tsukishima mumbled.

“Wait…oh my god…AHHAHAHAHAHA!” Oculus cackled, “HOO BOY I wish I could tell you my lenses were rose-coloured but they’re nothing but truth!”

“Nice to meetcha, Yamaguchi,” Hinata said, shaking his hand enthusiastically, “I’m Hinata Shouyou!”

“Nice to meet you,” Yamaguchi said. He peered around at Tsukishima. “And you are?”

Tsukishima muttered.

“Huh? Tsukki-?” Yamaguchi tilted his head to the side.

“Tsukishima Kei,” Tsukishima muttered again, pushing his glasses up to hide his expression.

“We can continue introductions later,” Kenma said, walking through them on his way to Tobio.

“And who do you think you are?” Lev said, sizing up Tobio. “I’m Kenma’s best friend, right after Kuroo of course, but I’m definitely higher on his list of friends than whoever you are!”

Tobio ignored Lev.

“You think you’re so tough just because you brought Kenma through the desert,” Lev huffed.

“Lev, stop bothering Tobio,” Kenma said with a sigh.

Lev looked shocked as Kenma climbed onto Tobio’s back. He swore the dinosaur smirked at him.

“Lev, take some people on your back, Tobio is weak from being in the desert so long,” Kenma said.

Lev perked up. Hinata jumped onto his back up with Sawamura. Bokuto joined them excitedly. Tsukishima chose the dinosaur, as did Yamaguchi. Lev looked extremely pleased with himself.

“Now,” said Lev, “Where are we headed?”

The group fell silent as they all realized the same thing. None of them knew where Yachi and Akaashi were.

Chapter End Notes

mwyn firain (welsh), rough translation: mineral fair - she's a rock fairy

Niwlen (welsh): bloom, meant in this case as Yachi's name.
Here Be Invaders

Chapter Summary

Some wind, a fire, and a break-in.

Chapter Notes

I know I alternate between descriptions and using their names. Just assume if their name is used then the sentence is from their perspective.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I think we’re getting close,” Kuroo said.

Suddenly his vision went dark and a sharp pain went through his entire being. The pain was gone as suddenly as it appeared, and with it the memory of its acuteness. Kuroo looked around but there was nothing but dark fog.

“Kenma?” He looked down. He saw a naked body with lean muscle and tanned skin stretching down below him. The hand lifted towards his face and touched it. He felt – oh god he actually felt – smooth skin and warmth, simultaneous with the sensation of slightly rough fingertips.

“Oh my god,” Kuroo whispered, “I have a freaking body!”

He ran his hands all over himself, relishing the sensation of being able to move and feel and touch like a person again. How long had it been? Kuroo wondered, running his hands through his thick and unruly black hair. He had forgotten what it felt like to be able to move a limb so effortlessly, without any thought to it. But where was he?

“Holy crap, I’m standing on air!” Kuroo screamed as the mysterious floor beneath him vanished and the gut-wrenching sensation of falling came over him. He closed his eyes, praying for a soft landing. Kuroo’s stomach lurched as the falling sensation stopped all of a sudden. Weird. Man, this place was giving him some severe motion sickness and he had only just gotten a stomach back. It was as if just when you thought the ground beneath you was solid, it disappeared. Or did it?

There was something weird about this place, well there was a lot weird about it, but Kuroo had a feeling that there was some sort of trick to it. Kuroo squeezed his eyes shut.

“I am standing up,” he said aloud, feeling a little silly. He concentrated on that thought and his footing started to feel sturdier. An idea was starting to form in Kuroo’s mind and a slight grin tugged at the corners of his mouth.

Without looking down, Kuroo stretched his legs the way track stars do before a race. He bent down.

“Okay, here goes nothing…” he grinned. He took off in a sprint and then leaped into the air.

A strange wind pushed him forwards and suddenly he was flying through the dark.
“Whoa!” he screamed, startled by the sudden lift.

The wind vanished, as if it had been scared away by his outcry and he dropped like a stone. Kuroo thrust his arms out and closed his eyes, trying to clear his mind. The air rushing past his body slowly ceased.

“Incredible…” Kuroo whispered, opening his eyes.

He was suspended in midair. Kuroo laughed. So this was the trick. It was like something out of fairy tale. A little bit of faith and trust? He lowered himself and stood up straight on the missing ground. Everything about this place was impossible, and for that reason he felt he should be frightened, but he was not. He felt amazed by this strange wind and its possibilities. He took off at another running start and jumped up this time, hurling upwards at an impossible speed.

“I can flyyyyyyy!” He shouted gleefully, kicking off the dark nothingness.

The fog was lighter the further up he bounded and a strong desire to see what was at the top filled him. A thick wall of fog stood before him and by some pure instinct he felt that it was the last barrier between him and the top. He sped up, sprinting now towards the wall, a strange excitement spurring him on. He plunged headfirst into the fog. It was cold and misty inside. His outstretched hands broke through a thin gelatinous membrane and suddenly he was through to the other side, eager to see what was beyond it.

He looked up and saw the world.

“How the shit should I know?” Tendou blinked in confusion at the four mean-looking faces glaring at him.

The last thing he remembered was winning games at the Luck House and now he was on some starship handcuffed to a bed. His head was hurting real bad from the hangover and these people with their questions weren’t helping it.

“Take a guess,” the black-haired woman said. She unsettled him the most, with her strange mixture of beauty and scariness.

“Look, I don’t even know what you’re trying to kill!” Tendou said, raising his hands.

“We’re not killing anyone!” The bald one snapped, “We’re looking for a qilin!”

“I don’t frequent many pottery shops,” Tendou said. The four strangers groaned in frustration.

“Not a kiln, it’s a creature,” the man with a plain face said from the corner. “It’s like a deer but it also has humanoid features.”

“And red horns that are sometimes pink, and brown hair with gold specs,” added the short one with a dyed strip of hair.

Oh my god, I’ve been kidnapped by lunatics, Tendou thought to himself.

“Here’s a drawing of it!” The bald one thrust a scraggly pencil drawing of something that looked like
stick figure centaur with pine trees coming out of its head. He gathered that the random lines around it were supposed to be sparkles. Tendou’s face must have given away his utter confusion because the four strangers sighed in frustration.

“Sorry, my drawing’s not that good,” said the woman, to Tendou’s shock. She was the one who drew that piece of crap???

“It’s not that bad, Kiyoko!” The others said earnestly.

“If I were better at drawing then maybe he’d be able to guess where the qilin is,” Kiyoko said regretfully.

“Don’t say that, Kiyoko!” Dyed-hair said. “Yeah! He’s just worse at guessing than we thought!” Baldy added.

Tendou took offense to that. He had the best winning streak the Luck House had ever seen in all its decades! There were several locations whose names were feeling sweet to his tongue but he’d be dammed if he actually gave them a real guess. Nah, he was getting out of here and back to getting lucky.

“Uh… I hear Black Hawkers have some pretty weird stuff…” Tendou said hesitantly.

“Go on,” Dyed-hair said, crossing his arms. His golden hand glinted in the light and Tendou grimaced, suddenly reminded of the pain in his left cheek.

“There’s a town called Ziyan in the Known territory of the Dosne,” Tendou said. The names felt good to say, a good sign that he would find something there that could help him escape. A good guess always felt this nice to voice aloud.

“That’s not far from here,” Kiyoko said thoughtfully, “But we won’t be able to rendezvous with Saeko for another couple days.”

“Shall I set the course?” Plain-face said.

“Yes,” Kiyoko answered, “Saeko will understand.”

“I could go for a few courses,” Tendou said, rubbing his belly.

“How about a knuckle sandwich?” Dyed-hair offered.

“Don’t bully him, Nishinoya,” Kiyoko said with a small laugh, “Get him some real food.”

“Thanks a bunch lady!” Tendou grinned.

“Don’t get too friendly there, Guess Monster,” Baldy and Dyed-hair said in tandem.

“Come ooonn, let’s all be friends!” Tendou said. “It’s the least you could do for kidnapping me and holding me hostage.”

“He’s got a point there, Ryuu,” Dyed-hair/Nishinoya said seriously.

“Alright fine, we’ll get you actual sandwiches,” Baldy (Ryuu?) said reluctantly.

After they left, Tendou settled back against the pillows with one hand behind his head. None of them had noticed him slip the knife from the baldy’s side sheath and he now stuck it behind his pillow. A crappy hiding spot for now, but it would do until he was left alone for a while. Tendou whistled a
light tune. Might as well wait until they got to Ziyang to escape. Get a few free meals and a nice bed to sleep on in the meantime. Tendou cleared his throat and then began to sing in a lilting voice.

“Are you still awake?

Came a whisper in the dark.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Went the beating of my heart,

As I waited patiently,

For your lips to part.”

“So when are you going to turn him back on?” Bokuto asked Kenma. Kenma mumbled an incoherent reply.

Lev had gotten tired a few miles back and now everyone was riding Tobio once more. Lev had shrunked down to the size of a house cat and was currently getting his belly scratched by Hinata. They were on route to Bokuto and Akaashi’s place to restock on supplies, weapons, and whatever else they figured they’d need to save Yachi and Akaashi.

“Huh?” Bokuto edged closer.

“I said, I can’t turn him back on with Lev here,” Kenma said.

“Why not?” Lev asked worriedly, “Does he not like me?”

“Because you’re a tangible desire spot!” Kenma snapped, “It’ll mess with him!”

“But having Lev with us isn’t messing us up,” Hinata pointed out.

“Kuroo is…more sensitive to that stuff,” Kenma said, trailing off.

“I see,” Sawamura said, looking a Kenma. Kenma found himself unable to meet his gaze and he looked away uncomfortably.

“Hey, but won’t Kuroo be able to find out where Yachi and Akaashi are?” Hinata asked.

“He can’t,” Kenma said quickly, “He’s just a robot, not some god.”

“What good is he then?” Tsukishima said. Kenma glared at him.

“We’d better stop here,” Bokuto said. Kenma looked up and realized there were at the outskirts of the village. “Don’t want to scare anyone with the dinosaur re-appearing.”

“I wanna see Bokuto’s place!” Hinata said, jumping off Tobio. “Tsukishima, you coming?”

“I’ll pass,” Tsukishima said. “Suit yourself!” Hinata stuck out his tongue.
“Hey! Hey! Hey! Let’s get going!” Bokuto said, pumping a fist in the air.

Hinata and Lev bounded off towards the village.

“Hey, wait you guys! Don’t cause a ruckus!” Sawamura shouted, running after them.

Tsukishima felt a tug on his shoulder.

“You’re not going to go?” The qilin Kuroo had picked up was looking up at Tsukishima with its big brown eyes again. Fuck, were those flowers blooming around its head?

“See ya later,” Tsukishima blurted out as he slid down Tobio’s side and walked quickly after the group.

Yamaguchi was confused by Tsukishima's behavior, as well as the snickering voice he’d heard say, “Smooth bro” as he walked away. Yamauchi felt a pang run through him as he realized Tsukishima probably didn’t like him very much.

“You could have gone with them,” Kenma said.

“Huh?” Yamaguchi turned around. Kenma was still wearing the black suit but he’d zipped up a red sweater over it, the same as the sweater Yamaguchi was wearing. Kuroo’s body was in his lap and he drew languid loops across his metal surface.

“They’re not bad people, I’m sure they’d happily be friends with you if you wanted,” Kenma said. “Just be honest with them.”

“I could say the same to you,” Yamaguchi said. He looked at Kuroo in Kenma’s arms. “Postponing it isn’t going to make explaining things any easier.”

Kenma eyed the qilin who looked back at him with an honest gaze.

“How much do you...nevermind,” Kenma looked down at his lap.

The two sat in silence as they waited for the others to return. Above them, the sky was shadowed by a large starship, most likely there to do business with the Black Hawkers. Yamaguchi looked up at it in wonderment. He’d never seen such a huge starship before and the idea of being so high up seemed magical to him.

"You don't have to stay with us if you don't want to," Kenma said all of a sudden. "Kuroo forced you to come along but it's okay to leave."

Something in Kenma's voice made Yamaguchi feel as though those words were meant for himself, not Yamaguchi.

"If I wanted to leave I would have done so," Yamaguchi said softly, "I did feel responsible for causing you to get lost, but that's not the only reason I came with you."

"Why then?" Kenma asked curiously.

“Something just...feels familiar about you, all of you,” Yamaguchi said shyly. “I can’t explain it very well, but mixed in with that familiarity is...fear.”

“Fear?” Kenma looked concerned.

“My memories have been hazy ever since I lost my kind,” Yamaguchi said, “Whenever I think back
to the time I was with them, when I try to reach them, a pervasive whiteness, like a blinding light erases them from view. And ever since meeting you its like the blinding whiteness is at the edge of the horizon, hovering in the distance.”

Yamaguchi stared off in the direction that the others had left in and his hands tightened their grip around his legs. He stiffened suddenly and his antlers tinged red in alarm.

“Kenma,” Yamaguchi’s voice waivered.

Kenma looked over and his heart froze in his chest. Yamaguchi’s voice range inside his head.

“I think that’s fire.”

“This is your house?” Hinata’s jaw dropped to the floor at the sight of the glass floor with water beneath and the little island that served as Bokuto’s gaming center.

“It’s incredible,” Sawamura said, slowly running a hand over one of the hilts of the sword fence.

“I guess this is pretty impressive for a human,” Lev said, wandering around. Every step he took left behind a little patch of sand.

“Where’s the kitchen and the bedroom and every other room?” Tsukishima asked, glaring around at all the open space.

“Watch and be amazed, my skeptical friend,” Bokuto preened as he pressed a button on a remote. Rooms slid out of drawer-like compartments, filling the open space and covering the glass floor.

“Seems excessive,” Tsukishima said, stepping onto the floor of the kitchen as connected to the dining room beneath his feet.

“And hella cool!” Hinata added.

“Feel free to explore while I grab a few things!” Bokuto said while rummaging through a closet.

“Whoa! What’s this?” Hinata asked, poking a globe with blacked out areas.

“Looks like a globe of the Known World,” Sawamura said. “The blacked out parts are what we call Yara, the Unknown.”

Hinata eagerly moved onto the next thing that caught his eye, but Sawamura paused, looked over the globe with an expression of deep concentration.

“Here.” A bundle of clothes were lightly pressed against Sawamura’s chest, startling him. Bokuto grinned from beside him. “Thought you could use a change.”

“Oh you don’t have to-” Sawamura started.

“No problem,” Bokuto interrupted cheerfully, “You were starting to stink anyway.”
“Thank you, Bokuto!” Sawamura said loudly, taking the clothes from him.

“Feel free to use the shower as well,” Bokuto said.

“I will do that,” Sawamura said. There was a definite blush creeping up his neck as he hurriedly sniffed his armpits. Well in his defense he’d been on the run without a change of clothes and then trapped in a weird cave for who knows how long.

“Hey, Tsukishima! Hinata!” Bokuto called, waving a shirt in their general direction, “Come and change into some clean clothes!”

“Alright!” Hinata cheered, “Fresh clothes!!!”

Tsukishima didn’t say anything, but he followed Hinata over to Bokuto’s closet. Bokuto had already changed out of the black leather suit and into a pair of athletic black sweatpants with a dropped crotch and yellow racing stripes down the sides, and a grey hoodie.

“Thanks, Bokuto!” Hinata said. Tsukishima also mumbled a thank you.

“You guys will have to wait your turns for the shower,” Bokuto said, “But for now, try these on.”

Bokuto handed them each a set of clothes. Tsukishima moved behind a dresser and started changing. He’d been given a similar pair of athletic sweatpants but without the dropped crotch and red pockets instead of yellow stripes. They came just above his ankles but they’d do. He looked at the bright teal and black mesh shirt Bokuto had given him with disgust. He put it on reluctantly and then quickly put on his uniform jacket over it. It didn’t match – at all- but like hell he was going to just wear that abomination of a shirt. He came out from behind the dresser and burst out laughing at the sight of Hinata.

“Shut up,” Hinata said, red-faced with embarrassment. Hinata was practically swimming in Bokuto’s clothes.

“How do they fit?” Bokuto asked. Tsukishima snickered as Hinata struggled to hold Bokuto’s pants up to his waist.

“They’re fine,” Hinata lied.

“Like hell they are,” Tsukishima snorted, “What’s the smallest thing you own, Bokuto?”

“I have just the thing!” Bokuto lit up excitedly.

He disappeared back into his closet. Several items were flung out as he rummaged. A pair of underwear nearly hit Tsukishima in the head but he dodged quickly. A pair of shorts smacked Hinata in the face as he laughed.

“Try these!” Bokuto said, reappearing holding a black pair of leggings with orange blocking. Hinata’s face froze at the sight.

“Um, won’t those be a little…tight?” Hinata asked.

“They’re leggings, that’s the point,” Bokuto said, motioning for Hinata to take them.

“I’m seriously starting to wonder why you have so much tight-fitting black clothes,” Tsukishima said, eyeing the leggings.

“They’re really easy to move in,” Bokuto said defensively, “And Akaashi says they make my ass
“I’ll take your word for it!” Tsukishima said quickly.

Hinata shuffled over behind the bed and crouched down to change. He popped back up wearing the leggings. They hugged his legs nicely and Tsukishima narrowed his eyes. If they fit Hinata so snugly, he hardly wanted to imagine what they looked like on Bokuto, who was much bigger.

“You’re not allowed to wear those anymore,” Tsukishima said to Bokuto, pointing at the leggings. “I don’t care what Akaashi says they make your butt look like, there’s no way those actually fit you!”

“They stretch, man,” Bokuto said with a shrug.

“Hey guys, I still need a shirt,” Hinata said, holding out his arms as a display.

“Right! I think I shrunk something in the wash last week!” Bokuto said, “But it’s kinda shoved in the back of the closet. Just go to the back shelf and look around, I’d get it but I didn’t plan on ever having to get it again so I don’t really know where it is.”

“Why is it shoved all the way back here?” Hinata asked, his voice muffled.

“Because I didn’t want Akaashi to find it,” Bokuto admitted sheepishly, “It’s one of his shirts.”

Hinata came back wearing a black shirt with mid-length sleeves and a pair of black running shorts overtop of the leggings.

“Where’d you find the shorts?” Tsukishima asked.

“Beside the shirt,” Hinata said. “This feels much better though!”

“Ah, I forgot I shrunk those a month ago,” Bokuto said, rubbing the back of his head.

“Learn to use the washing machine properly, man,” Oculus tittered from Tsukishima’s face.

“I will when you do, Glass Man,” Bokuto chimed back.

“Enough of this, I’m going to raid your fridge,” Tsukishima said, walking away.

“Do you think Captain’s done with the shower yet?” Hinata said, trailing after him.

“Let him have a long one,” Bokuto said, “He smelled like metal and sweat.”

“ Weird, we don’t smell like metal,” Hinata said, sniffing himself.

“He probably encountered mirror water inside the Ca- I mean, inside Lev,” Bokuto said.

“Just say the Cave,” Tsukishima said flatly.

“Speaking of Lev, where is he?” Hinata asked, looking around.

“Hey, how’s the water?”
Sawamura paused, the water splashing over him as he was in the middle of washing his hair.

“Got enough soap in there?”

“Lev?” Sawamura said, hoping it was just his imagination.

A head suddenly popped into the shower with him and he scrambled to cover his front.

“You called?” Said Lev’s voice.

Sawamura gaped for a moment. Lev had abandoned his cat and lion form for a more human one, although it was still made of sand. He did however, have a full head of silvery hair.

“The hell are you doing? Get out!” Sawamura said, pushing away Lev’s face with one hand and covering himself with the other.

“I just wanted to ask you a few questions!” Lev said, struggling against him. He stepped into the shower with Sawamura despite the latter’s protests. The bottom of the shower was dangerously slippery from Sawamura’s recent soaping and the two of them slid across the floor, grappling with each other to stay steady.

“I swear to god Lev, if you don’t get out of here-!” Sawamura hissed. Their legs were getting tangled now. Sawamura expected Lev’s sand to melt away in the hot water, however it just seemed to darken.

“That’s what I’m here to talk to you about!” Lev said enthusiastically, “God!”

Lev’s foot landed on a bar of soap and the both of them went down in a tangle of limbs.

“Can’t this wait?” Sawamura growled, rubbing a sore arm. They were lucky neither of them had hit their head on the tile.

“Nope! We’re finally alone and Kenma can’t know about this,” Lev said, leaning over Sawamura and holding a finger to his lips. The gesture seemed wildly inappropriate for their current situation.

“First of all, sit back,” Sawamura said, pushing Lev off him. “Second, why are we keeping this a secret from Kenma?”

“Cause he’ll get mad,” Lev said simply.

“What will he get mad about?” Sawamura asked, tiredly.


Sawamura sat up straighter, suddenly a lot more interested in what Lev had to say.

“You’re looking for it, aren’t you?” Lev said in a hushed voice, “I heard you ask Yaku about it.”

“Well…” Sawamura said hesitantly, “I’m not really looking for it…but lately I feel as if…as if finding it will solve everything, about the Celestial Knights and Oikawa and even…myself.”

“I was inside the Arc once,” Lev said, his eyes glowing with the memory. “It was like nothing and everything all at once. A white room where nothing existed until you wished it. A room that contained the entire world. It was beautiful and it was frightening and it was exhilarating!”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Sawamura said.
“It makes all sense, actually,” Lev replied. Sawamura felt a headache coming on. Why was it that discussions about the Arc always seemed to defy all logic?

“Why are you telling me this?” Sawamura asked.

“Because the Arc was a trap,” Lev answered solemnly, “And Yara is still inside.”

“Wait, lemme see if I have this right. Yara, the soul of the world, is trapped inside the Arc…” Sawamura said slowly.

“And without Yara, the planet will die,” Lev said.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, this is the first time I’m hearing that part!” Sawamura said.

“It should be obvious,” Lev said, slightly annoyed. “The gap years, the sudden memory loss and alterations everyone’s been experiencing! Didn’t you ever wonder why you couldn’t remember what a Celestial Knight does? Or even is?"

“Everytime I tried I…my thoughts veered away from it,” Sawamura said.

“That’s because Yara is forgetting who they are,” Lev said, “and if the Arc stays lost with her inside then everyone will forget their own existences.”

“And what happens then?” Sawamura asked.

“If we all forget to exist then we won't exist,” Lev said, “We'll fade into white nothingness.”

“Wow that uh sounds pretty bad,” Sawamura said lamely, at a loss for words. His head was starting to feel dizzy and at this point he wasn’t sure if it was the hot water or Lev’s announcement of sudden doom for the entire planet. Probably both.

“We have to find and open the Arc,” Lev said, “And the only one who knows how to do that is Kenma.”

“Then…Kuroo really is th-” Sawamura was interrupted by a loud creak.

The both of them looked up to see a crack widening in the ceiling above them.

“What the-?” Sawamura said as a reddish-brown blur fell down into the shower with them.

“Alright, now this is getting ri-goddamn-diculous!” Sawamura shouted as a monkey shook itself, seemingly surprised at being wet all of a sudden. Above them, two ropes were flung down the crack and several figures slid down.

“Lev!” Sawamura shouted, “Warn Bokuto and the others!”

“Got it!” Lev said, scrambling out of the bathroom.

The figures were also shouting. Sawamura strained to hear them. They seemed to be shouting something along the lines of, “Catch that monkey!”

The monkey in question had grabbed Sawamura’s old clothes, opened the door and was now scurrying around somewhere in Bokuto’s house. Sawamura grabbed a towel and wrapped it around his waist, all the while swearing profusely. He tied it in the best knot he could before reaching for his sword. Which wasn't there.
“Fuuuuuuckkkk!” Sawamura groaned.

Earlier

“Trust me, I’m not a big fan of this either,” Tanaka grumbled as Tendou looked at the pair of handcuffs connecting them in distain.

“A giant get-along shirt would have been less embarrassing than this,” Nishinoya said from the other side of Tendou. He raised their handcuffed hands and shook them, making the cuffs clink. “And way less kinky.”

“Exactly how are we supposed to walk around the city like this?” Tendou exclaimed, “We look ridiculous!”

“I found the knife under your pillow, Tendou,” Kiyoko said sternly, “I don’t trust you enough in the city unrestrained.”

“Lighten up, would ya?” Tendou grumbled.

“I completely agree with you Kiyoko,” Nishinoya started, “But as much as I hate to admit it, the monkey has a point. Walking around handcuffed together isn’t exactly…subtle.”

“Would you rather hold hands?” Ennoshita smirked.

“Ha ha, very funny,” Nishinoya said sarcastically.

“Let’s go,” Kiyoko said, stepping into the small landing ship.

There was a fair amount of space in the landing ship, but Tanaka, Nishinoya and Tendou were squished together on one seat. Ennoshita pushed them off and the landing ship glided down to the ground, its relay rope unwinding behind it.

The city of Ziyan was more of a village, Kiyoko noted. The buildings were shoddily constructed and old looking, with darkened brick and overgrown vegetation poking out of cracked concrete. However, Kiyoko knew it was a front for one of the most technologically advanced cities in the Known world. The real city of Ziyan was underground. And there were only a few closely-guarded entrances from the surface.

“Hey, Tendou,” Kiyoko said as they were walking through the deserted town square. “Where should we go in?”

“How should I know?” Tendou asked.

“I’m not asking for what you know,” Kiyoko said, “I’m asking you to guess.”

Tendou gave her a tired look.

“Look that’s not how I work, alright? I can’t just say something random I have to have a good
feeling about it,” Tendou said in exasperation. “I need to feel the stone and concrete and pavement with my hands and feet and really consider it.”

“We’re not taking the handcuffs off,” Kiyoko said flatly.

“Fine then, lay me down,” Tendou said.

“Right here?” Tanaka asked, looking at the dirty ground in disgust.

“No, on a feather bed,” Tendou snapped sarcastically.

The three of them lied down on their stomachs. Tendou smoothed his hands against the rough pavement, feeling each grain of dirt and pebble. Tanaka and Nishinoya shifted uncomfortably.

“Can you hurry this up?” Nishinoya asked.

“Here’s not a good spot,” Tendou said. “Move me down a few streets.”

“I should have worn crappier clothes,” Tanaka grumbled, as the three of them awkwardly got to their feet. Tendou declared that spot unsuitable as well. And the next. And the next. Their clothes grew dirtier with every spot that Tendou suggested.

“This one no good either?” Kiyoko said, leaning over them with a frown.

“Wait!” Tendou said earnestly. “Can you feel it? Close your eyes!”

“It feels like rock,” Tanaka grumbled, his eyes closed.

“My body is all stiff,” Nishinoya complained.

“This is it!” Tendou declared, “I have a good feeling about this spot!”

“You’d better be right about this,” Tanaka said grumpily.

“Trust me,” Tendou said with a grin. His tail waved behind him, its tip curled around the key he’d snagged from inside Kiyoko’s jacket from when she’d leaned over them. “We just need to break in.”

“Make way,” Ennoshita said, holding what looked like a flat pike and a hammer. He wedged the pike in-between cobblestones and hammered it into place. In the ground, the pike extended horizontally, creating a crack in the ground. Metal creaked as it pushed the crack open wider. A reddish-brown blur disappeared into the hole before any of them could move.

Tanaka and Nishinoya looked between them. Their handcuffs were cuffed together, Tendou nowhere in sight.

“I’m gonna kill that monkey!” Nishinoya said, shaking a golden fist.

“First we have to catch him,” Kiyoko said stonily as Ennoshita prepared the ropes.

Kiyoko and Ennoshita slid down the ropes with elegant ease. Tanaka and Nishinoya however, descended in a mess of tangled limbs and rope-burn.

“What is this? It looks like a dollhouse,” Ennoshita said, looking below them. Each room was like a separate compartment and in the middle was a long hallway ending in a small living room or gaming room of some sort.
“Hey! Catch that monkey!” Tanaka shouted at what looked like a person in a towel. A very muscular person in a towel. They glared up at them and moved into a defensive stance. Tanaka grinned.

“Oh so that’s how it’s going to be! Ready Yuu?” He shouted gleefully.

“Always!” Nishinoya shouted back. “Ennoshita, catch us!”

Ennoshita landed neatly before them and ran to tighten the rope between them. He held onto it tight, planting his feet.

“Kiyoko, could use a hand,” Ennoshita winked, “These two are heavy!”

Kiyoko also grabbed into the rope with a smile.

“Hurry up, boys!” She shouted up.

Tanaka and Nishinoya exchanged grins before hooking their handcuffs over the rope and holding onto each other with their other arms. They zip-lined down the rope, wind rushing past them.

“Let’s get this guy!” Nishinoya said, bracing himself.

“Hell yeah!” Tanaka exclaimed.

Nishinoya pushed off Tanaka’s side and flipped over the rope. The two of them dropped into the bathroom, opposite to the muscular man in the towel.

“What are you doing here?” The man asked with narrowed eyes.

“Nothing personal,” Nishinoya said to him, “Just business.”

“Home invasion is pretty personal to me,” the guy replied.

Tanaka and Nishinoya moved together to attack him. He dodged skillfully and struck their legs, sending them tumbling. Nishinoya recovered first and helped steady Tanaka. He pulled Tanaka to his feet just as the towel man’s fist bushed past his cheek. Tanaka swung back at the guy but he ducked behind Nishinoya.

"He keeps trying to make us get in each other's way!” Nishinoya hissed through his teeth.

"Grab my hand!” Tanaka said. They linked hands and Tanaka lifted Nishinoya and swung him like a club. Nishinoya ran up the side of the wall and jumped. Their linked arms caught Sawamura in the chest, knocking him down.

“Ready to throw in the towel?” Nishinoya grinned.

“I think not,” Sawamura said flatly.

“Who are you?” Lev asked two of the invaders.
They dropped the rope they were holding and got into fighting stances. Lev’s hackles raised and he grew to the size of a lion.

“Ennoshita, I have a bad feeling about him,” Kiyoko said, wincing.

The lion made of sand felt like pure tangible desire. Her heartbeat grew irregular and her vision swam. Adrenaline and desire filled her, their sweet calling igniting her very soul.

“Stay back!” Lev warned, growing even larger.

Kiyoko shrieked, fire blasting out of her mouth and engulfing Lev. Lev roared, reeling back from the flames. Chunks of glass fell and scattered across the floor from where he’d been burned. The room caught fire and flames shot up the side of the wall. Smoke trailed up and out of the crack they’d made in the ceiling.

“Kiyoko!” Ennoshita shouted.

“I’m-I’m alright!” Kiyoko said, trying to keep herself under control. The glow in her eyes glimmered before fading slightly.

“Lev!” A worried cry pierced the air.

A short boy with orange hair cradled the sand lion’s head before turning to glare at them.

“You hurt him,” he said coldly.

He was at them almost faster than they could react. His sword clanged against Kiyoko’s hands, the tip slicing a small cut into just above her eye. The expression on the shorty was intense and without any shred of mercy. Kiyoko felt a chill run through her at the sight. A bullet whizzed past Hinata’s ear and he turned to see the other stranger pointing a gun at him.

Tsukishima’s sword sliced through the barrel of the gun in the next moment. Hinata focused back on his own fight. He twisted his blade and moved into another strike, this time aiming for her legs. She leapt away and drew her own sword.

"Hinata!” Tsukishima yelled. They exchanged glances before turning and running away, the sand lion following after them.

Kiyoko and Ennoshita were startled as their opponents started running away from them, sprinting as fast as they could. The floor rumbled quietly and suddenly the entire room started moving towards the giant walls of the building.

“Right on time,” Bokuto grinned as Tsukishima, Hinata and Lev sprinted down the hallway towards him. He held a gaming controller in his hands and he was furiously pressing buttons.

The rooms receded into the walls and the sound of delicate machinery echoed through the room. The glass panels that covered the floor slid from one side of the main hallway to the other and then neatly tucked underneath the hallway. A panel slid open at the top of the wall that was on fire and water poured down to extinguish the flames. Person-sized birdcages containing the intruders and Sawamura emerged from compartments in the wall and were sent floating across the floor.

Tsukishima and Hinata looked at the intruders. There were two others besides the man and woman they encountered earlier. The two were handcuffed together in one cage and their left hands glinted mysteriously in the light. One had a shaven head and a face like a delinquent while the other was quite obviously short and had a strip of dyed blonde hair in the center of his head.
“Hey! Hey! Hey! Welcome everybody!” Bokuto said, flinging his arms out in greeting. “Now how about you all introduce yourselves and tell me why exactly you decided pay me a visit?”

“Uh, Bokuto, could you get me out of this first please?” Sawamura asked grimly.

“Ah! Sure, sure!” Bokuto said, reaching for his cage.

“Whoa! Captain what happened to your clothes?” Hinata asked as he hurried over to help pull Sawamura’s cage onto the gaming island.

“I think a monkey took them,” Sawamura said. Bokuto unlocked the cage and Sawamura stepped out with a tight grip on his towel.

“A monkey?” Hinata repeated with a confused expression.

“Did you capture him too?” The woman asked.

“Wow, Captain what happened to your clothes?” Hinata asked as he hurried over to help pull Sawamura’s cage onto the gaming island.

“I think a monkey took them,” Sawamura said. Bokuto unlocked the cage and Sawamura stepped out with a tight grip on his towel.

“A monkey?” Hinata repeated with a confused expression.

“Did you capture him too?” The woman asked.

“No,” Bokuto said, “I only caught you four. What’s so important about the monkey?”

“We need him to help us fix this!” The baldy said, raising his arm. To their shock his entire hand and up to his elbow was solid gold.

“How would a monkey help you with that?” Tsukishima asked, shooting them a weirded-out glare.

“We’ve been cursed,” the one with the dyed hair explained, “And the monkey knew- well could guess how to find the person we need to undo it.”

“My name is Kiyoko Shimizu,” said the woman. “I am the Captain of the Virago Pirates.”

“And I’m her First Mate, Ennoshita Chikara,” said the other man. He gave them an amiable smile.

“Tanaka Ryuunosuke,” said the baldy.

“Nishinoya Yuu,” said the one with the dyed hair.

“I’ve heard of the Virago Pirates,” Bokuto said, “They say you steal from Blood Dealers.”

“We free those who’ve been enslaved,” Kiyoko said tensely.

“Good on ya!” Bokuto said loudly with a grin, “I like anyone who gives Blood Dealers a hard time!”

“And who are you?” Tanaka asked suspiciously.

“Bokuto Koutarou,” Bokuto said grandly, “Treasure Hunter and Black Hawker.”

“I’m Hinata Shouyou!” Hinata said, jumping up and down. He then gestured to the sand lion beside him. “And this is Lev!”

“Tsukishima Kei,” Tsukishima muttered.

“And I am Sawamura Daichi, Celestial Kni-”

There was a huge crash and part of the wall collapse, creating a giant hole near the top where the doorway used to be. Then a giant reptilian head popped through it and into the room.

“Ryu,” Nishinoya said quietly, “Are you also seeing the dinosaur?”
“I wish I wasn’t,” Tanaka whispered back.

“What in the world?” Kiyoko said in shock.

A small arm slid around the dinosaur and slapped its side. The dinosaur moved over slightly and the rest of the thin body wriggling out.

“Are you guys okay?” Kenma shouted down. “We saw fire!”

“Kenmaaaa!” Hinata bounced and his shoes carried him halfway up to him, “We’re all fine!!!”

“Phew! What a relief!” Yamaguchi said, sliding out from behind Kenma.

“AHHHHHHH!” Tanaka and Nishinoya shouted in tandem.

They pointed up at Yamaguchi, who jumped in surprise.

“IT’S THE QILIN!”

Chapter End Notes

yup, Daichi got his clothes stolen by a monkey while in the shower. what a cliche
“God this sand is just everywhere!” Oikawa shouted in annoyance.

The sand from the Cave of Wonders seemed to have gotten into every article of clothing and body orifice he possessed. He’d left a trail of sand all the way from the Blood Dealers’ tent back to his starship. It was endless. Unlike his patience.

He stormed past the dorm rooms of the ship on his way to the showers, flinging his clothes onto the floor as he walked. For some reason, by the time he’d reached the bathroom, the sand was gone. He scratched his head in confusion and glanced back down the hall from where he’d came. He could only see his discarded clothes.

“ Weird magic sand,” he muttered, shaking his head. He was still going to take that hot shower though. Lord, he needed it.

Down the hallway, inside one of the dorm rooms, Kageyama slept fitfully. Sand crept under his door and slithered over to his bed. It swirled up into a figure that matched his and looked down at him. Inside its chest, a golden circle started to glow, darkening in colour until it was a vibrant orange. Slowly, the light of the circle unfurled and traveled down the length of its arm and it reached towards Kageyama’s chest. A hand smacked through its arm, sending a puff of sand scattering across the floor.

“Who are you?” Kageyama’s eyes were open. He glared at the sand figure as he sat up in a defensive position. “Why do you look like me?”

The scattered sand swirled up and reformed its arm. It held the orange glowing orb in its outstretched palm. Kageyama’s heart pounded as he looked at it. He could see a small figure within the orange orb.

“Hinata…” he whispered. Sweat beaded on his forehead. Hinata was laughing as he leapt through the sky, as if gravity didn’t apply to him. No, gravity never applied to him. He was…sunlight…unfiltered and unbearably bright. And Kageyama was…like cold water below him, wishing he could reach him but afraid to drown him with his touch.

He could see a close up of Hinata’s face, lips parted in surprise and cheeks flushed. He could see his arms on either side of his face, cradling it gently. He could almost feel the heat of that moment again, that day when everything had changed.
“This thing again?” Oikawa snarled. A sword sliced through the sand figure and it crumbled to the floor. Oikawa stood in a towel, a look of disgust on his face.

“What was that thing?” Kageyama asked.

“It must have followed me from a Cave of Wonders,” Oikawa said. “I can’t seem to get rid of the blasted thing.”

“It seems to be dissipating,” Kageyama observed.

“For now,” Oikawa said. “Try to destroy it if you see it again.”

He turned to leave, but paused by the doorway.

“Did it…say or do anything to you?” Oikawa asked. Hinata’s face flashed through Kageyama’s mind.

“No,” he lied.

“If it does…” Oikwa said slowly, “Would it change your mind?”

Kageyama couldn’t read the expression in Oikawa’s eyes. Once more Hinata’s face flashed into his mind. Sawamura, Sugawara, Asahi, Yachi, even Tsukishima. Kageyama’s clenched his hands into fists.

“No,” Kageyama said fiercely, “I am loyal to our cause and I will not waver, not for anything.”

“But you care about them,” Oikawa said, “And you don’t like what we’ve done, what we’re doing.”

“But I remember,” Kageyama said softly. He closed his eyes.

In his mind, cities with towers of glass and steel rose floated on islands in the sky. He opened his eyes and like a dream, the memory ended, fading away as his eyes took in the real world. Oikawa smiled slightly.

“We will get our home back,” Oikawa said, “We will get back everything we have lost.”

And in exchange, lose everything we have gained. Kageyama pushed away that thought. They had lost paradise. Nothing could compare to that. Nothing. Not even…

“Oh, Kageyama,” Oikawa said, standing up. “Let me come with you next time.”

“Can you fight?” Oikawa asked, his eyes cold. They both knew what he meant by that. Hinata’s face flashed through Kageyama’s mind again.

“I fought before,” Kageyama answered.

“And what about now?” Oikawa asked, his eyes cold.

“You still doubt me?” Kageyama said with a glare.

“Never, my dear Kouhai~” Oikawa said, easing his posture. “If you think you’re ready to face your old teammates again without the red flower’s influence, then by all means, come with me on my next trip~”

“Yes, Captain,” Kageyama said with a small salute. Oikawa left with a little wave.
Kageyama fell back onto his bed with a sigh. He rubbed his temples. Oikawa was always too damn perceptive. Guilt still weighed heavily in his chest, no matter how much he thought about his old home on Amaranth.

He’d been five when Oikawa found him. Like a wild animal, he’d attacked him with nothing but a rock and a pointed stick. Almost killed him too, but for Oikawa’s quick reflexes. Oikawa had taken him in, forcibly but kindly. He taught him the history of his city, his people, and how things didn’t used to be so bad, how the city was once prosperous and at the height of advancement. Everyone contributed to the greatness of Amaranth. They didn’t scurry around like rodents, fighting each other over rocks and garbage. Oikawa had taught him everything.

And he must never forget that.

“AAHHHHHH!” Yamaguchi quickly ducked behind Kenma. “IT’S THE QILIN!”

“The what?” Tsukishima asked.

“The asshole that cursed us!” Tanaka said angrily.

“Everybody calm down!” Sawamura roared. Everyone instinctively quieted. “There will be no more shouting or fighting in this house. Have I made myself clear?”

His glare was met by unanimous nods. Bokuto spoke hesitantly.

“Okaaayy, so clearly some explaining is in order…how about we let everyone who needs to shower get clean,” Bokuto glanced at Sawamura, “And dressed. And maybe move the dinosaur back outside and then after all that we can all sit down together and sort this all out.”

“Nobody moves until we get this taken care of!” Tanaka said, lifting his left hand. He glared pointedly at Yamaguchi, who was currently hiding behind Kenma.

“Um,” Bokuto looked at a loss for words at the sight of Tanaka’s golden hand. “I don’t think I have anything that can help with that…I might have some polish somewhere…”

“That’s a nice offer but I would really appreciate having our hands returned to flesh and bone,” Nishinoya said.


“What’s going on? Do you know these people?” Kenma whispered to Yamaguchi.

“Th-they kidnapped me and were planning on selling me to Blood dealers…” Yamaguchi gulped. “I was so scared I lost control of myself and fainted. When I came to, I was miles away in the middle of nowhere.”

“Are you guys Blood dealers?” Kenma asked the strangers, his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“We are not Blood dealers!” The woman nearly spat. Her eyes burned with passion.

“But you are pirates,” Bokuto said, tilting his head, “I recognize the voice of your captain. You may
not remember me, but I never forget a voice I’ve done business with.”

"I remember now," Ennoshita said, his eyes narrowed, "We bought weapons from you..."

“We may be classified as pirates by some governements…” Kiyoko admitted through gritted teeth, “But the nature of what we do is not piracy. We do not steal cargo!”

“But you kidnap,” Kenma said harshly. “That’s considered stealing to me, stealing their rights as a person.”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about!” Tanaka shouted, shaking the bars of his cage as if he meant to rip them apart by brute strength.

“Kiyoko is not a thief or a kidnapper!” Nishinoya said, just as impassioned.

“Then what does she do?” Tsukishima said, stepping protectively in front of Kenma and Yamaguchi.

“We free people,” Ennoshita said, placing a hand on Kiyoko’s shoulder through the bars of their cages. “Mostly demuto, but other beings as well.”

“Yamaguchi Tadashi,” Kiyoko said, turning around in her cage to face him, “Please don’t be afraid of us. My name is Kiyoko Shimizu, I was the one who asked Tanaka and Nishinoya to save you from Dominus Semi.”

Kenma looked at her suspiciously.

“So you’re some kind of hero? Why should we believe you?” He asked.

“That monkey you were chasing, he seemed pretty keen on getting away from you,” Sawamura spoke up.

“Okay, we might have kidnapped him…” Tanaka muttered quietly, looking sheepish.

"So then you are kidnappers,” Kenma said.

"That was different!” Nishinoya exclaimed.

"Oh really? So because he was a monkey he..." Tsukishima’s snide remark died in his throat as the woman, Kiyoko, closed her eyes and started to glow.

It seemed to come from inside her chest, shining warmly. Her skin appeared to be covered in gleaming black scales that reflected the rainbow and all at once she seemed enormous. Great wings of black and cobalt sprung from her back and horns curled back from her head. She opened her eyes and they were pools of deep blue like the ocean.

Kenma and the others trembled in her presence. Her crewmates all looked away, as if shown something too grand for their eyes to handle. The Celestial Knights, Bokuto and Kenma could barely stand to look at her. It was like looking at raw emotion. From her, they could see more than just the image of a dragon, they could see everything. Past, memory, emotion, and thought. It was too much to bear. Lev bowed, casting his eyes downwards.

“You need not bow,” Kiyoko said to him.

“But this is the image of your soul,” Lev said in a small voice, “For you to show it...”

“This is all I can do to prove my true intentions,” Kiyoko said. She turned to Yamaguchi.
“Yamaguchi, please look at me.”

Yamaguchi raised his head. The mass of her soul was enormous and it felt raw and ancient.

“That’s enough,” Yamaguchi said softly. Tears gathered at the corners of his eyes. “I understand.”

Kiyoko opened her eyes and her soul shrunk back inside her human body. Sweat beaded her forehead and her eyes looked glassy.

“You are the same as I am,” Yamaguchi said, tears falling freely. He stepped out from behind Kenma. “I thought there was no one left like us…”

“There are still a few of us out there,” Kiyoko smiled.

“Um, if you don’t mind me asking,” Sawamura said hesitantly, “But what exactly are the two of you?”

“We are Children of Yara,” Yamaguchi said, wiping at his eyes.

“And what does that mean?” Tsukishima asked, “Are you like, siblings or something?”

“Not exactly, not in the human sense,” Kiyoko said, “We are beings made by Yara.”

Yara, Yara, Yara, Sawamura was starting to get sick of hearing that name all the time. He could almost feel the oncoming headache.

“As opposed to beings made by?” Tsukishima prompted.

“Earth,” Kiyoko answered.

“Well excuse us for being the dirt beneath your feet,” Tsukishima muttered.

“I meant no offense,” Kiyoko said in concern. “Yara made beings like us, dragons and qilins and more in response to the desires and dreams of this world’s inhabitants.”

“Oh so you people are made of fairy dust and magic while the rest of us are dirt and clay?” Tsukishima said.

“Stop it, Tsukishima,” Sawamura said sharply.

“Sorry about him,” Hinata said, “Regrettably, he’s just like that. Personality issues.”

Tsukishima glared at him but remained quiet.

“I can’t help but feel we’ve gotten off topic,” Nishinoya said, waving his gold hand.

“Yeah, we’d really appreciate it if you could undo the curse you placed on us,” Tanaka drawled.

“I did what?” Yamaguchi yelped.

“Cursed. Us.” Tanaka said, pointing at his hand.

“Um, uh,” Yamaguchi paled. “I’m so sorry!”

“No worries, bro, just return us to normal and we’ll call it even,” Nishinoya said.

“That’s the problem…” Yamaguchi whimpered. “I cannot personally undo my curse. I can stop it
from progressing, but as for undoing it…”

Just then, the gold on their hands advanced up to their elbows. Tanaka swore as he glanced at his watch.

“Well can you pause it now?” He asked in frustration.

“Yes!” Yamaguchi hurried towards them.

Bokuto let the two of them out of the cage and they crawled out. Bokuto then moved onto Kiyoko and Ennoshita’s cages. Sawamura wondered idly if he’d ever be able to get dressed.

“A-alright, here goes,” Yamaguchi said nervously. He seemed to quickly glance in Tsukishima’s direction. Tsukishima felt his heartbeat quicken for a second but he didn’t let it show on his face. He wondered why he looked at him, if it wasn’t just his imagination.

“Pl-please don’t look,” Yamaguchi said quietly.

“Why not?” Sawamura asked for all of them.

“I…change when I have to use my abilities,” Yamaguchi said, his ears burning with shame. How could he be so bold to ask this of them when Kiyoko had bared her soul to all of them just moments ago? How shameless of him.

“No problem,” Bokuto said. He turned and slapped Sawamura on the shoulder. “Hey, Sawamura, how about we finally get you dressed?”

“Finally,” Sawamura said.

“I’ve got a living room somewhere in these walls,” Bokuto herded everybody else away as a room slid out of the far right wall.

“I’ll go move Tobio,” Hinata said, rushing off.

“Me too!” Lev said, bounding after him.

“Not going to peek?” Oculus asked Tsukishima quietly.

“He didn’t want me to see,” Tsukishima said bluntly.

That was what that glance had been. Clearly, his changed or transformed form was a private party and Tsukishima wasn’t on the guest list. This totally wasn’t bugging him. Not at all. Not even a bit. Tsukishima hid the lower half of his face in his palm as he sat in a chair next to Kenma.

Yamaguchi breathed a quiet sigh of relief as the others turned away and left him along with his apparent victims. He wasn’t sure how they’d react to his transformation and to put it bluntly, he was afraid of what they might think.

“You look different from the last time, more human,” Nishinoya remarked.

“This is what I usually look like,” Yamaguchi said, tugging on a strand of hair.

“Then what was with the deer appearance?” Tanaka asked.

“My other usual appearance,” Yamaguchi said.
“Of course,” Tanaka rolled his eyes.

“Please give me your cursed hands,” Yamaguchi said.

Tanaka and Nishinoya held out their hands as requested. They watched in awe this time as Yamaguchi’s hair turned gold and elongated. His antlers flushed scarlet and grew like red-branched trees. Pointed teeth gleamed in Yamaguchi’s mouth as he started chanting. Red lines appeared all over their bodies except for their golden hands. They faded to a light pink and then disappeared.

“That should stop the curse,” Yamaguchi said, breathing heavily.

Tanaka and Nishinoya inspected their hands. They were still solid gold up to their elbows but they had more feeling in them. Not as stiff.

“Hey, it’s kinda like we’ve got permanent armor on these now,” Nishinoya said, eyes glowing with excitement.

“Yeah! This is way cooler now that we’re not going to become statues!” Tanaka said with a grin.

“Hey, why didn’t you want the others to see you like this?” Nishinoya asked, lowering his gold hand. “It’s not that weird.”

“But it isn’t human,” Yamaguchi said softly.

“Um, sorry to break it to you but having pink antlers isn’t very human either,” Tanaka said.

“That’s true,” Yamaguchi smiled. His teeth were flat again and his hair subtly shifted back to brown. His antlers faded to pink and then white and then shrunk into tiny nubs that were mostly covered by his hair.

“I didn’t mean you had to do that!” Tanaka said.

“Do you want to be human or something?” Nishinoya asked, puzzled.

“I want to belong somewhere,” Yamaguchi said, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. “I’ve realized something after meeting Kiyoko-San. It is very unlikely that I will meet another Qilin, it is just our nature to be hard to find. But humans are everywhere and they are very kind.”

Yamaguchi smiled and this time it was a shy but warm smile. “There may have been misunderstandings when we first met, but the more I’m learning about humans the more I feel like I want to stay with them. Just like Kiyoko-San.”

Tanaka and Nishinoya exchanged troubled glances. Nishinoya opened his mouth to speak but he was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Um, sorry to interrupt, but are you all done uh de-cursing?” Bokuto asked. Everyone else was behind him.

“Yes, we’re finished!” Yamaguchi answered. He noticed Tsukishima looking over at him with that cold and sullen expression he always wore. But this time, it almost looked like there was more behind his gaze. Something piercing and intrusive. Yamaguchi averted his eyes.

Nishinoya raised his eyebrows and nudged Tanaka subtly. Tanaka made a face at him as if to say: ‘Really? That one?’ Nishinoya shrugged.

“Where are you heading next?” Sawamura asked Kiyoko.
“We’re supposed to meet up with a friend of ours,” Kiyoko answered. “She’s in the middle of rescuing two demuto from blood dealers.”

Sawamura’s expression hardened.

“As it happens, two of our friends have also been taken by blood dealers. Mind if we tag along?” Sawamura asked, bowing his head.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Kiyoko said, “You are all welcome aboard our ship.”

“Thank you so much,” Sawamura said, with emotion in his voice. “I can’t express my gratitude enough.”

“Whoohoo! We’re going to get Yachi and Akaashi back!” Hinata said, jumping in the air.

“Yeah!!” Bokuto chimed in, “Come on, Hinata, let’s get packing!”

The two of them rushed off to pack some bags, Lev trotting after them.

“Tsukishima, Yamaguchi, you should probably pack some stuff too,” Sawamura said. They exchanged awkward glances before obediently following the others.

Sawamura looked around but didn’t see Kenma anywhere. Sawamura had a bad feeling in his gut. He took a deep breath. He imagined Suga’s voice in his head saying, “Calm down, Daichi, you’re worrying too much.” Ahh, he remembered how the edges of Suga’s eyes crinkled just a little when he teased him. Still, he couldn’t shake the bad feeling completely.

Kenma folded the black leather body suit and placed it on Akaashi’s bedside table. He felt bad about taking some of the man’s clothes, but his wardrobe consisted of much darker clothes than Bokuto’s and Kenma needed to go unnoticed. Akaashi’s clothes were loose on him, but he just tucked the pants inside the boots with socks stuffed into the ends.

He also took a bag that was bigger than his knapsack so that he could fit Kuroo inside it as well. Kuroo. Kenma lifted him to his face and leaned his forehead against him. What would he tell him? Kenma felt tears prick at the corners of his eyes. It didn’t matter what he told him, he would be mad as soon as he realized they weren’t with everyone anymore. But this was for the best. Staying together with others never went well. Kenma opened his eyes and stared at their reflection in Kuroo’s smooth surface. He pulled Kuroo away and gently placed him inside the knapsack. He slung it over his shoulders and turned around to leave.

Hinata was standing in the doorway.

“You finished packing?” Hinata asked, a happy look on his face.

“…Yeah...” Kenma answered, looking down.

“We’re all going to hitch a ride on Kiyoko-San’s starship!” Hinata chattered excitedly, “I hope Tobio fits on it! I won’t leave without him! If he doesn’t fit then I’ll ride him and follow after the ship.”

Kenma snorted at the image.
“Yeah, you’d do that,” Kenma said, trying to hide his smile. Hinata grinned at him.

“Hey, after we save Yachi and Akaashi...” Hinata suddenly turned shy, “Well, Daichi was saying we’ll have to get our own starship eventually so how about you join us as our navigator? You and Kuroo could have your own room and we could have pancakes for breakfast everyday!”

“That sounds...really nice.” Kenma said, pain stabbing into his heart.

“And of course, we’d have to have a really big starship to fit Tobio on it!” Hinata said happily.

“Hey, Hinata,” Kenma said softly, “I have to go to the bathroom before we leave, you go on ahead. I’ll meet you later.”

“Oh sure...” Hinata said, pausing slightly. “Um, see you later, Kenma!”

“See you...” Kenma said with a small smile.

He waved as Hinata disappeared down the hall.

“Sorry...Shouyou...”

The bathroom still had a hole in the ceiling from where the pirates had entered. Kenma pulled out a grappling hook he’d taken from Akaashi’s room.

“Is everyone ready?” Sawamura shouted over the noise. They were all standing outside of Kiyoko ship.

“Kenma’s not here yet!” Hinata shouted.

“What’s he doing?” Tsukishima asked.

“Taking a dump, I think,” Hinata answered.

“I don’t see him,” Yamaguchi said, from near the hole in the ground.

“What?” Hinata ran over and looked down. The bathroom was empty.

“He must be on his way,” Hinata said, “I’ll go meet him!”

Hinata took off in a sprint. Sawamura felt that same bad feeling from before. His feeling was confirmed at the look on Hinata’s face when he returned alone.

“He’s not there...” Hinata said quietly. He looked like he was on the brink of tears. Sawamura’s gut was heavy with dread.

“What if he got kidnapped or...” Hinata fell silent as he remembered the knapsack on Kenma’s back. “He lied to me...and he didn’t even leave a note...” Hinata’s eyes filled with tears. They spilled down his cheeks and he wiped at them furiously.

Sawamura placed a hand on Hinata’s shoulder.

“We’ll meet him again,” Sawamura said, but his words felt empty.

“Let’s go get Tobio,” Hinata said, walking onto the starship. Sawamura felt his heart ache at the sight of Hinata’s hunched shoulders.
To make things worse, the spot where Hinata had left Tobio was empty.

“He wouldn’t have fit on the starship anyway,” Tsukishima said.

“Maybe Kenma took him,” Sawamura said.

“I didn’t tell Kenma where we put him,” Hinata said.

“Besides, someone who wanted to travel stealthily wouldn’t ride a giant dinosaur around,” Ennoshita said, “I’m sorry, but from the looks of the foliage around here it looks like he just wandered off.”

“We should have tied him or something,” Lev said regretfully, “There was nothing to keep him here.”

Hinata stood still.

“What, did you think he would just stay here because we ‘befriended’ him?” Tsukishima said coldly, “He was just a dumb dinosaur.”

“That’s enough, Tsukishima,” Sawamura said angrily. “Hinata, we’ll find him, he can’t be far…” Sawamura fell silent as he looked at Hinata. Hinata’s eyes were empty. He looked the same as he did after Kageyama and the others had betrayed them.

“Tsukishima’s right,” Hinata said quietly, “Tobio didn’t care about us…we weren’t friends…”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Bokuto said softly, “Don’t say that, you cared about him, right? Maybe he’s gone on a different path, but as long as you’re both on this planet the chances of meeting again aren’t zero!”

“He’s a giant dinosaur, he can’t be that hard to spot!” Nishinoya joined in, wrapping an arm around Hinata’s shoulders.

“Yuu and I will personally keep both our eyes out for him!” Tanaka grinned.

“Thanks but…Tobio is a wild being,” Hinata said, “I can’t keep him tied to me against his will.”

“That’s true…” Nishinoya said with a frown.

“Let’s go,” Hinata said, “We have to save our friends.”

They watched him as he climbed back aboard the starship.

“Is he gonna be okay?” Tanaka asked Sawamura.

“I…don’t know,” Sawamura said.

Kuroo looked up at the world.

He could see everything from each arc of the horizon, from the outline of the setting sun in the west to the faint glow announcing its arrival in the east. He waved his hand and the planet turned.
lifted both hands and spread them. The world zoomed in on a tiny island.

“Holy shit…” Kuroo whispered under his breath. “Where am I?”

The place suddenly turned dark. At his feet was a trail of shining golden hair adorned with red flowers.

“Am I supposed to follow this?” Kuroo asked aloud. There wasn’t an answer. Not that he was really expecting one.

He walked beside the trail, not feeling bold enough to walk on it. He didn’t know why, but he felt compelled to see the end. A crack appeared in the air above him and his body went numb. He felt disconnected from his limbs and he stared at his hands in horror. They flickered before disappearing completely. The golden hair vanished and a hazy light blinded him.

Kenma’s face came into view above him.

“Awake?” Kenma asked.

“What happened to me?” Kuroo asked. He felt like crying, although he couldn’t anymore. Already the sensation of having a body was leaving him. He almost wished he’d never felt it again.

“I’m sorry, Kuroo, I’m so sorry,” Kenma said, hugging him close. Kuroo couldn’t feel his warmth and he yearned to know what it felt like.

“It was the Cave of Wonders,” Kenma said. Ahh, that explained it, that wonderful feeling.

“I hate tangible desire,” Kuroo said. He hated how it made him want things he couldn’t have, how it gave them all to him only to take it away.

“Did we save the others?” Kuroo asked. Kenma stiffened slightly.

“We did,” he answered, “They’ve already left while you were out.”

“They left?” Kuroo shot up in the air and looked around. They appeared to be in a small room of an Inn. “Why did they leave before I woke up? What about Tobio?”

“They had stuff to do,” Kenma said, clutching his arm, “Celestial Knight stuff. They took Tobio with them.”

Kuroo spun aimlessly in a circle.

“Oh…I just…I can’t believe they’re gone…” he said dejectedly.

“It’s time we went back home,” Kenma said. Kuroo felt a twinge of pain that almost seemed like heartache.

“But…I don’t want to go back home…” Kuroo found himself saying. Kenma looked surprised and was that a hint fear in his eyes?

“We have to go back home,” Kenma said, “It’s too dangerous out here.”

“What do you mean dangerous?” Kuroo asked. A thought crossed his mind and a note of suspicion entered his voice. “You didn’t…just leave them…did you?”

Kenma opened his mouth to protest but the look on his face gave him away.
“I can’t believe you…” Kuroo said, backing away from him. “Are they still trapped in that Cave? Did you even go back to save them? What about Bokuto and Akaashi?” Kuroo was shouting at this point.

“Kuroo, just listen to me, I can explain,” Kenma pleaded.

“I don’t want to listen to you…” Kuroo said. Kenma looked stricken. “I…I can’t even trust that you’ll tell me the truth…”

“Kuroo I-” Kenma started.

“What am I?” Kuroo interrupted. “You told me that I was in an accident that ripped my consciousness away from my body and that you saved me by putting me in this contraption! But this isn’t just some robot brain wheelchair like you said it was. There’s more to it. I saw it.”

Kenma’s face grew paler the more Kuroo spoke.

“What did you see?” He asked finally.

“I saw the world,” Kuroo said, a note of awe crept into his voice at the memory.

“I put you into a deep sleep, you shouldn’t have seen anything,” Kenma said.

“You put me into that sleep?” Kuroo sounded shocked and hurt, “You just lied to me then...about it being the Cave of Wonders that affected me...You didn't want me to see anything so you turned me off but instead I saw everything. Tell me the truth, Kenma. Am I the Arc?”

“No!” Kenma said immediately. Hurt washed over Kuroo at his denial.

“I’m not going home,” Kuroo said, floating towards the open window. “I have to find out who I was, what I am.”

“Kuroo, wait no!” Kenma scrambled towards him, “You can’t!”

“Goodbye Kenma,” Kuroo said.

And then he was snatched out of the air by a pair of red furry arms.

“What the hell?” Kuroo shouted. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Name’s Tendouuu!” A monkey-like man looked down and grinned at him.

“Well, get me out of your armpit!” Kuroo shouted at him.

“Sorry man, but I got a good feeling about you being real useful to me,” Tendou winked.

The man was running along the rooftops. He whistled sharply and something swooped out of the sky ahead of them. From what Kuroo could see, it had giant black wings made of skin stretched between long limbs and a roundish furry body.
“Um, what the hell is that?” Kuroo asked.

“Tsu-Chaannn~!” Tendou shouted gleefully as the thing landed, knocking off several shingles.

“Goddammit Tendou, can’t you have picked a more shaded place to meet up?” The thing complained as it scrambled to get a good foothold. "It's fucking bright out!"

“A little sun won’t hurt ya,” Tendou said, jumping onto his back. “Now let’s go!”

“I just landed,” the thing grumbled as it awkwardly launched back into the air.

“Ahhh, this is the life~!” Tendou said, lying down on the thing’s back. “I missed you, Tsu-Chan~”

“What’s that thing you brought with you?” Tsu-Chan asked.

“Hm? Dunno, just picked it up on my way,” Tendou said, holding Kuroo above his head and spinning him around.


“You’re a monkey-man and a giant bat and yet somehow I’m the weird one?” Kuroo snapped.

“Hey, I’m a Satori and Tsu-Chan here is a Vampire bat!” Tendou said.

“Stop calling me ‘Tsu-Chan’,” Tsu-Chan grumbled. “My name is Goshiki Tsutomu.”

“I don’t care,” Kuroo said, “Just let me go, I have to get back to…” Kuroo trailed off.

“Go back where?” Tendou asked.

Well that was the golden question wasn’t it? Kuroo stayed quiet.

“Doesn’t seem like where you were going to go is all that important, so why not hang out with us for a while~?” Tendou said persuasively.

“I have other friends,” Kuroo said sharply. “Wait a minute, where did you get those clothes and that sword?”

Tendou looked down at the Celestial Knight uniform he was wearing.

“They’re mine,” Tendou lied.

“Oh really? You’re a Celestial Knight?” Kuroo said. “Why’d you tell me your name’s Tendou then, Mr.” Kuroo leaned in to look at the embroidered name on the breast pocket. “…Sawamura?”

“Sawamura’s my surname,” Tendou said, “Yeah, I’m Sawamura Tendou.”

“SAWAMURA’S NOT A MONKEY!” Kuroo shouted, reaching the limit to his patience.

“Ah so you know him…” Tendou said meekly.

“What happened to him? Where did you meet him? Was it in the desert?” Kuroo asked in rapid fire, inching closer to Tendou’s face with every question.

“The de-? No! It was in a bathroom!” Tendou sputtered.

“I kinda…borrow his clothes while he was taking a shower,” Tendou said sheepishly.

“When was this?” Kuroo asked.

“Like last night-ish?” Tendou shrugged. So at least Sawamura was out of the Cave of Wonders. Maybe Kenma had been telling the truth…about that anyway.

“Where are you two headed? And why did you take the Celestial Knight uniform?” Kuroo asked.

“There’s a party I want to attend,” Tendou said, “I caught wind of something called a ‘World Fair’ going on soon. Its supposed to be top secret so there’s bound to be stuff I want there. Thing is, it’s being run by Celestial Knights, or so I hear. Apparently they’re calling themselves something different for this event.”

“The Alastor,” Tsutomu added, “That’s their new name.”

“ Weird name,” Kuroo said.

“As far as I’m concerned, their new name is ‘Golden Opportunity’!” Tendou grinned.

“And how exactly do you plan on getting there if its top secret?” Kuroo asked.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got an idea,” Tendou said.

“It better not be far,” Tsutomu grumbled, “I’ve been flying almost non-stop for the last few days because your stupid ass got kidnapped.”

“And you managed to follow the sound of my singing,” Tendou said fondly, “You’re the best, Tsu-Chan!”

The bat seemed happier at that comment.

“So how’d you two meet?” Kuroo asked, genuinely curious.

“Tendou got me fired,” Tsutomu said bluntly, “He’s been a pain in my ass ever since.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, Tsu-Chan you suck at story telling,” Tendou said dramatically, “Let me explain, it all started when I was a younger, more devilish little tot…”


“Spying, Captain?” Sawamura jumped. He pried his eyes away from the crack in the door and turned to see Bokuto standing there. Sawamura moved and past him was a sliver of a figure with bright orange hair standing by the railing of the ship.

“I’m worried about Hinata,” Sawamura said. He sounded haggard. “He won’t stop smiling that creepy listless smile.”

“You said he’s been like this before, after a falling out with some friends of yours,” Bokuto said gently.
“That time he was just…expressionless…this time I think it’s even worse because of the previous experience. His faith in friendship has been shattered all over again,” Sawamura said.

“And what about you?” Bokuto asked.

“What?” Sawamura looked confused.

“Haha…do you have any idea how you sound right now?” Bokuto asked, “You talk like Hinata’s the only one hurting right now but it’s plain to everyone that you are too. Even I can tell and I’m blind.”

“I’m fine,” Sawamura said, looking down at the floor. “I’m the adult here, I nee to support them.”

“Just because you’re older, doesn’t mean you don’t need to be supported too,” Bokuto said, “We’re the same age, aren’t we? You don’t need to act all ‘captain-y’ around me, you can be just a normal dude going through a hard time.”

“Aren’t you worried for Akaashi?” Sawamura asked, “You have enough on your plate and I’ve already imposed too much. I’m wearing your damn clothes for god’s sake.”

“Of course I’m worried,” Bokuto said, “But we’re on our way to save him, aren’t we?”

“I admire your composure,” Sawamura admitted. “Apparently I can barely keep myself together, let alone comfort my crew.”

“Go get some sleep, Captain,” Bokuto said, placing a hand on his shoulder, “Let me talk to him. No one can let loose with someone they’re close to; they don’t want to drag them down. But strangers, like me, well we’re the best shoulders to cry on.”

“You sure?” Sawamura said, surprised.

“Hey, I care about the Shorty too,” Bokuto said.

“Thanks Bokuto,” Sawamura said.

“Just pay for my food sometime,” Bokuto said amiably before walking through the door. Sawamura considered watching them, but his exhaustion was getting to him. He glanced at them one last time before heading to his room.

“How’s it going?” Bokuto asked, sitting down next to Hinata. Hinata turned and smiled at him but it was listless and didn’t reach his eyes.

“Lovesick?” Bokuto blurted out.

“Huh?! Wha-?” Hinata squawked. A reaction, nice. Bokuto could work with that.

“Kageyama, was it?” Bokuto asked slyly. Hinata jumped. “At least, that’s what you were saying in your sleep last night.”

“I what?” Hinata squeaked, flushing bright red.

“That got a reaction out of you,” Bokuto laughed. “Is she pretty?”

“Kageyama’s a guy! And he’s scary and always glaring,” Hinata said loudly.

“Oh is that what the angst is about?” Bokuto laughed. “Afraid of loving a man? That’s so known
“L-love? I don’t! What are you talking about?” Hinata sputtered.

“Right, right,” Bokuto said with a knowing smile. “But you know, in Yara, love is love. It doesn’t concern itself with what gender, sex, race, or even entity you are so why worry about it?”

“You make it sound so easy,” Hinata complained, “You and Akaashi are lucky. You two can be together without any worries.”

“Not quite,” Bokuto said, looking out at the horizon.

“What do you mean?” Hinata asked.

“Akaashi is a demon of sorts,” Bokuto said, “He thinks I don’t know, but I can sense it sometimes. But because of it, he refuses to be my lover.”

Hinata was at a loss for words.

“Honestly, I want to just blurt it out sometimes. Hey, Akaashi! I love you and everything about you, including the demon part!” Bokuto said, shouted into the wind, “But it won’t mean anything unless he tells me first. I want him to trust me.”

Bokuto leaned over and punched Hinata on the arm.

“So next time you see this ‘Kageyama’ person, blurt out all the things you’ve been worried about telling them,” Bokuto said, “Don’t leave them in the dark.”

“Don’t you ever worry that he’ll leave you?” Hinata asked quietly. “Everyone leaves.”

“Is that what you’re worried about?” Bokuto asked. “I’ve never really thought about it, but I think if I were afraid of them leaving me I’d want to make it so that they’d never want to leave me.”

“How?” Hinata asked.

“By being awesome,” Bokuto said as if the answer were obvious. Hinata stared at him and then burst into a smile.

“Thanks Bokuto,” Hinata laughed. “I’ll try that.”

“That’s more like you,” Bokuto grinned. He got up and stretched. “Well that’s my advice anyway, gosh what a good friend I am~” Bokuto turned towards the door to the lower deck. “Now let’s go grab dinner!”

Bokuto paused as he realized Hinata’s footsteps were headed in the wrong direction. Suddenly, Hinata ran fast towards the edge of the ship. Bokuto heard the last step as Hinata jumped off the hull and ran across the sky.

“Sawamuraaaaa!” Bokuto shouted, sprinting down the stairs. Hinata was already an orange speck on the horizon; his flying shoes carrying him back the way they’d come.
Here Be Maps

Chapter Summary

A talk about the past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ah yes, it all began that terrible, awful, horrible day a hundred years ago…

“Tendou will be joining our team today,” Dominus Eichiro Semi had announced. He looked at Goshiki. “I’m entrusting his training to you, Goshiki.”

“Yes Sir,” Goshiki replied obediently.

“My name is Tendou Satori!” The red-haired man grinned cheerfully at him.

“Goshiki Tsutomu,” Goshiki had replied coolly. There was something about this man that irritated him. It could have been his weird mannerisms, or unruly hair or the fact that he was taller than Goshiki by a whole 6 centimeters. Most likely, it was all of those things together. At least, it was at first. But soon, Goshiki gained more important reasons to hate this Tendou Satori.

“Dominus Semi, I don’t understand,” Goshiki struggled to keep his voice calm, “Why was my proposal to invest on Rie rejected? From my reports, Rie is nearly as profitable as Amaranth but with less direct competition!”

“Have you read Tendou’s proposal?” Dominus Semi asked.

“Yes!” Goshiki snapped, “But there’s no basis to it! Why risk so much to start a business on the seas when the most profitable cities are in the sky?!”

“Tendou says the cities will fall,” Dominus Semi said calmly, “Within the next couple years, if that.”

“Like I said,” Goshiki’s voice was strained, “He has no basis-!”

“The cities will fall,” Tendou’s voice came from the doorway behind Goshiki. Goshiki whirled around in anger but was stopped by the serious look in Tendou’s eyes. “I’m certain of it. More certain than I’ve ever been of anything before.”

Goshiki felt goosebumps rising along his skin from the tone of Tendou’s voice.

“Dominus,” Tendou slammed his hands down on the Dominus’ mahogany desk. “You must warn the cities. Everyone needs to be evacuated!”

“We’ve already been through this, Tendou,” the Dominus’ voice was clipped and cold. “I will notify the cities at the right time. This news will cause a panic. Isn’t it better to tell them once we have contingencies in place?”

“Unbelievable…” Tendou shook his head slowly, “You don’t care about the people who will lose
“Watch your mouth, you damned Satori,” Dominus Semi said in a low voice.

“What’s going on?” Goshiki blurted out before he could stop himself.

“This prick is going to let millions of people die,” Tendou snarled.

“But HOW?!” Goshiki shouted, “What do you mean, the cities will fall?”

“Just what I said,” Tendou answered, “In a year, maybe two but definitely not more than that…the Shining Cities will fall to ruin.”

“But before that, our company will be there for the people,” Dominus Semi said smoothly.

“Yes, your company will be there with fancy ships and outrageous ticket prices to board them,” Tendou spat.

“This is business, Tendou,” Dominus Semi said.

“You’ll never build enough ships to evacuate everyone,” Tendou said, “And even if you did, you’ll do nothing to help them rebuild their lives after everything is lost. You’ll take all their money and then leave them to rot.”

“I told you to watch your mouth!” Dominus Semi stood angrily.

The two stood in opposition, separated only by the desk and a few inches of space between their fury-filled faces.

“I quit,” Tendou said.

“Actually, you’ve been promoted,” Dominus Semi said, his lips curling into a sly smile. “Shall I show you to your new office? I’m afraid your new position is rather demanding. You won’t have any time for socializing and running your mouth, I’m afraid.”

The doors burst open and two men grabbed Tendou’s arms. Goshiki was shoved against the wall. He watched the scene unfold in shock and horror. Tendou was slammed against the desk, his arms folded against his back.

“What are you doing?” Goshiki asked, his voice trembling.

“Oh, Goshiki, I’d forgotten you were there,” Dominus Semi’s eyes moved to Goshiki. “Well you’ve always been a hard worker. You deserve a promotion as well.”

One of the men left Tendou and charged at Goshiki. Goshiki dodged the man by pure reflex, screaming as he did so.

“Ha ha! I knew I could count on you!” Tendou shouted happily.

A tail snuck out from his pants and wrapped around the throat of the man holding him down. The man choked and let go as Tendou tightened his grip. “Help me!” Goshiki shouted, frantically running around the room.

“Alley-oop!” Tendou tossed him something shiny and sharp-looking. Goshiki yelped as he tried to catch the non-bladed end.
“Stay back!” He shouted, pointing it at the man.

The man started to smile. Goshiki looked down at what he was holding. The Dominus’ silver letter opener was in his hand.

“Goddammit, Tendou!” Goshiki shouted in anger as he fended off the man’s attacks with the letter opener.

He backed up until he was against the window. The man hit it out of his hand and it flew straight up into the ceiling. It thumped against the plaster panel and then fell back down with a poof of white powder. Then the entire panel followed after it. It fell directly onto the man’s head, knocking him to the ground.

Goshiki was stunned.

“Whoo hoo!” Tendou shouted, "Nice job, Tsu-Chan!"

Tendou let go of the man he was holding onto and the man slumped to the ground, unconscious from lack of air.

“You won’t get away with this!” Dominus Semi shouted.

“That’s our line, Dominus,” Tendou said, grinning wildly. He picked up a large metal paperweight from the desk and whipped it at the window behind Goshiki. Goshiki ducked as the window exploded in a shower of glass.

“Let’s go,” Tendou grabbed the back of Goshiki’s suit jacket and jumped out the window. Goshiki shrieked as they fell.

Dominus Semi rushed over to the window and looked down. Tattered shreds of a black suit blew in the wind, slowly falling to the street below. He looked up and against the horizon he saw something that didn’t make any sense to him at all.

A giant bat flying away with a monkey riding on its back.

“If you ever jump out a window with me while I’m wearing an expensive suit again I’ll let you fall,” Goshiki threatened.

“I’ll pay you back,” Tendou winked, “I have a good feeling I’ll be coming into some wealth in a couple decades.”

“I can’t believe you made me fly back across an entire ocean,” Tsutomu said, wheezing as he climbed into a cave on the side of a cliff.

The ruins of the Shining Cities floated in the distance. Tendou blew a kiss to the Spyre Luck Houses before sliding neatly off Goshiki’s back and landing with a bow.

“And you’ve done very well, I applaud you!” Tendou said, clapping his hands.

“Yeah, good job not dropping us into the water,” Kuroo said, floating into the cave. “Um…nice digs
you got here…”

“We don’t live here,” Tsutomu said flatly.

“Oh! I uh, didn’t mean to jump to conclusions…” Kuroo said, eyeing the giant bat.

Tsutomu rolled his eyes. He then hugged himself tightly. If Kuroo had a jaw, it would have dropped to the floor as Tsutomu’s body shrunk in size and girth. His wings unfolded from around himself and a moody looking young man with a sharp black bob and narrowed eyes emerged from inside them. Two pointy fangs hung over his bottom lip.

“What?” Tsutomu snapped.

“Just…trying not to jump to conclusions…” Kuroo repeated.

“Aww, I like Tsu-Chan when you’re all cuddly better,” Tendou pouted.

“I know that’s why I changed,” Tsutomu grumbled, “Otherwise you cling to me too much.”

“So…if you guys don’t live here then why are we here?” Kuroo asked them.

“Just picking this up,” Tendou said with a grin.

He was holding up a map. It wasn’t a world map like the ones Kenma drew. It was of a smaller area and it was fairly detailed. It was also very old. It had been drawn on canvas instead of paper to make it last through the years.

“I took it off one of them Alastor dudes,” Tendou said gleefully, “It’s probably where the world fair thing is going to be held.”

“Why do you want to go to this thing again?” Kuroo asked, “It seems like more hassle than it’s worth.”

“There’s a real reason why we want to go to the world fair,” Tsutomu said solemnly, “Tendou thinks we might find someone there.”

“Who?” Kuroo asked.

“He was a friend of ours, from Cathal,” Tsutomu said, “Cathal used to be the city of Architecture and there were millions of hidden passageways and secret rooms. Kaerulus, he knew them all. He couldn’t draw you a map or anything, but he could lead you through them effortlessly.”

“Until he got lost?” Kuroo said sarcastically.

“Until the cities fell,” Tendou said coldly.

“Right…sorry,” Kuroo said awkwardly. “You didn’t warn him about that?”

“Of course we did!” Tsutomu snapped, “We warned everybody! No one listened to us!”

“Except for him,” Tendou said, “Dominus Semi had us arrested by the Praesidium. We were sent to the Umbra, a prison in Cathal.”

Tendou shivered at the memory. The Umbra was a maze completely in darkness. Prisoners stumbled around; not knowing if ahead of them was a wall, a clear passage, or even a pit with spikes at the bottom. Most went insane, muttering to themselves while huddled in their own waste.
“How did you find your way out?” Kuroo asked. “Was it your guessing ability?”

“My guessing skill was able to keep us alive in there but I wasn’t the one who got us out,” Tendou said. “In the prison, there was a rumor about a monster who came and went from the prison as he pleased.”

“So you found him,” Kuroo said.

“No,” Tendou said, “He found us.”

Tendou piled some sticks together in a circle of stones. He hit flint and steel together and a scattering of sparks set the sticks ablaze.

“He came out of the darkness with glowing eyes,” Tsutomu said, the fire reflected in his eyes, “He had the body of a black cat with a serpent for a tail.”

“Spooky,” Kuroo said. Although with that sort of appearance, Kuroo supposed he fit right in with these two.

“If he’s anywhere, I have a feeling he’ll be there,” Tendou said with conviction. He leaned back against a log with his arms behind his head.

“Why do you want to find him so bad?” Kuroo asked, making a face on his monitor.

“We have a promise to keep,” Tsutomu answered. He yawned and then snuggled against the log behind him.

“And it’s been like what, a hundred-ish years since we’ve last seen him?” Tendou pouted, “You’d think the dude would learn how to send a letter or something! Especially to his friends!”

“Maybe you’re not as important to him as you think,” Kuroo said bitterly.

Tendou tilted his head as he eyed Kuroo.

“What’s up with you? Friend issues?” He asked.

“It’s nothing,” Kuroo muttered, floating over to the edge of the cave. He looked out at the horizon, to the floating ruins of the Shining Cities. The sun was setting, casting rainbows through the glass buildings of the Luck House.

“You should probably make up with that friend of yours,” Tendou said, “You never know when you’ll see them again.”

“He’s…not my friend…” The words hurt coming out. Waves crashed rhythmically against the cliff, like the pounding of a heart he didn’t have. “He lied to me…”

“Lied about being your friend?” Tendou asked.

“No…something worse,” Kuroo answered, “He lied about me…and about the world. He’s told me lies for the entire time I’ve known him.”

“Ahhh…” Tendou nodded his head in understanding. “Did you ever ask him why he lied?”

“Does it matter?” Kuroo spat.

“In my experience, there’s two reasons people lie,” Tendou said, holding up two fingers, “First, to
protect themselves...second, to protect others.”

“Are you telling me to just forgive him?” Kuroo said angrily.

“No, that’s another matter entirely,” Tendou said, “All I can see is that right now you’re in confusion. And the only way to clear up that confusion is to talk to him.”

“Kinda hard to do that when you’ve kidnapped me,” Kuroo said sarcastically.

“Oh right, sorry about that,” Tendou playfully knocked on his head with his fist, “But I really think we’ll need you. I promise, we’ll find that friend of yours once we’re done.”

“Are you two done yet? I wanna get some sleep!” Tsutomu complained.

“Go ahead,” Kuroo said, “I’m gonna look at the scenery for a bit.”

“Don’t...” Tendou closed his mouth and shook his head; “See you in the morning, Kuroo.”

“Yeah,” Kuroo said, watching as the sun sank beneath the horizon and the stars appeared across the sky.

The stars reminded him of Kenma’s maps. That small study room filled wall to wall with drawings of places he’d never been before. Kenma always drew them when he had bad dreams. Kuroo sensed him getting out of bed and wandering down the hall, followed him quietly and saw the study light turn on. Heard the scratching of his pencil as he drew frantically, as if desperate to get the drawing out of his head. There are two reasons that people lie; to protect themselves and to protect others. Then who was Kenma protecting with his lies? Himself? Or was he actually protecting Kuroo? And from what? If Kuroo really was the Arc, what would happen to him? It’s too dangerous out here.

Kuroo suddenly felt very small.

Sawamura passed by the lounge on his way to his room. He could hear voices coming from inside and against his better judgment he paused by the door.

“...then they’re all in danger,” Kiyoko’s voice was grim. “This bloodstain smells like Misaki’s.”

“How is that possible?” Nishinoya said. His voice was tinged with frustration and worry.

“This ‘world fair’ they’re talking about,” Tanaka said slowly, “It seems like some serious shit is going to go down there.”

“If only we could predict where it would be,” Kiyoko said glumly.

They each sat in silence as they regretted losing the Satori.

“It won’t be in the Known World,” Ennoshita said.

“Yeah, that would be too easy,” Nishinoya muttered.

“Not only that, but if they really are planning on showcasing some of the things they’ve mentioned
it’d be impossible to keep those creatures where there is no tangible desire,” Ennoshita explained, “They would weaken and die.”

“But Yara is impossible to navigate,” Kiyoko said.

“I have something that might help,” Sawamura said, sheepishly stepping into the room. “Sorry for eavesdropping.”

“I’ll forgive you if you have something useful to tell us,” Kiyoko said.

Sawamura pulled out the map he’d taken from Kenma’s house and spread it on the coffee table before the pirate group.

“Whoa! That’s some map!” Nishinoya said, leaning forwards.

“I’ve never seen one so complete before,” Ennoshita added, his fingers tracing some of the areas. “These are of Yara, aren’t they?”

“Who drew this?” Kiyoko asked. Daichi hesitated before answering.

“I don’t know,” he lied. “I found it.”

Kiyoko’s eyes narrowed in concentration as she studied it.

“This map is unnatural…there’s too much detail here, stuff that no one should know,” she said.

“It’s also out of date,” Tanaka said. The others looked up at him in surprise.

“What do you mean ‘out of date’?” Daichi asked.

“Well, look here, the Shining Cities are still floating and while the details are small, those are definitely cities not ruins,” Tanaka explained.

“…You’re right,” Ennoshita said. “But the cities were only like this a hundred years ago.”

“But this map isn’t a hundred years old,” Kiyoko said, “The paper isn’t yellowed or frayed.”

“You’re a man of mysteries, Mr. Sawamura,” Nishinoya said, lightly punching him on the arm. His tone was friendly but there was a slight suspicion in his eyes.

“You’re not wrong to suspect my intentions,” Sawamura said, “I’m showing you this map for a reason.”

The room grew silent.

“I have something to ask all of you,” Sawamura said seriously.

“Well go on then,” Tanaka said with narrowed eyes, “Shoot.”

“Have you heard of the Arc?”

Kiyoko’s heart beat fast as a flash of panic shot through her. She clutched at her chest as her breathing grew short and ragged. The Arc, that word bought memories of darkness and pain to her, of constriction and manipulation. She glanced over at Ennoshita but for once instead of his usual calm countenance, panic too, gripped his features.
“What have you done to them?!” Nishinoya shouted as he and Tanaka leapt to their feet, their weapons drawn.

“I didn’t do anything!” Sawamura protested, raising his hands.

“Kiyoko! Ennoshita! What’s wrong?” Tanaka asked over his shoulder, his eyes fixated on Sawamura.

“We’re okay…” Kiyoko wheezed. Sweat beaded her forehead and her body felt clammy.

“I swear to you, I meant no harm!” Sawamura said profusely, “Are you alright?”

“That’s right, you’re a celestial knight,” Ennoshita said, wincing, “Of course you’d ask about that.”

“You’re a real insensitive jerk!” Nishinoya spat.

Sawamura was baffled.

“I…I’m sorry…I don’t understand…” Sawamura stammered.

“What do you mean, you don’t know?” Kiyoko’s voice had an edge in it that Sawamura hadn’t heard before. He swallowed nervously.

“Wait, do you really not know what the Arc is to us?” Ennoshita asked.

“Since landing here, I’ve been told that the Arc contains the soul of the world,” Sawamura said, “But up until that point I’d always thought the Arc was a navigational system. My superiors never told me anything otherwise.”

“A navigational system…HA!” Ennoshita shook his head in disbelief.

“You saw my soul, back at Bokuto’s house,” Kiyoko said.

“Yes, it was…indescribable…” Sawamura said.

“That was just my soul, can you imagine what the soul of Yara looks like?” Kiyoko asked.

Sawamura remembered the power of Kiyoko’s soul and shuddered at the thought of something so grand. "Can you imagine the power of something that contain something like that? The Arc is something so powerful it can hold Yara prisoner, it can control her."

“Creatures like Yamaguchi the Qilin were born outside, when Yara was free,” Ennoshita took over, “But we were both born from Yara while she was inside the Arc. It was dark and suffocating and we could feel our souls being tampered with and manipulated by the Arc as we were created.”

“I cannot tell you how horrible a feeling it is to be born wrong,” Kiyoko said, her eyes glowing softly.

“It was your people, the Celestial Knights that created the Arc,” Ennoshita said, anger in his voice.

“And then we lost it,” Sawamura added quietly, his voice heavy with guilt.

“Wait…” Kiyoko’s eyes flared, “You lost it?”

“All I know is that five years ago, the Arc was no longer in our possession,” Sawamura said.

“So you’re here to find it,” Kiyoko said, her voice hard. Nishinoya and Tanaka resumed their
offensive positions.

“No,” Sawamura said, “I’m here to stop the other Celestial Knights from finding it,” – Sawamura took a deep breath – “And to free Yara from the Arc.”

Nishinoya and Tanaka lowered their weapons in surprise.

“And how do you plan on doing that?” Tanaka asked.

“I think Kenma is the key,” Sawamura said.

“The one who left you guys?” Nishinoya asked.

“I think he knows where the Arc is,” Sawamura said, thinking of Kuroo. “And possibly how to free Yara from it.”

“Sawamuraaaaa!” Bokuto’s head popped into the doorway.

“Um, we have a bit of a problem,” Bokuto said meekly, “Hinata’s running away.”

“Running away…how?! We’re currently 25 thousand feet in the air!” Nishinoya exclaimed.

“That idiot!” Sawamura leapt to his feet and ran out the door. The others followed him quickly.

Sure enough, there was an orange dot on the horizon.

“That’s kid’s got some insane legs!” Tanaka remarked.

“I’ll get him,” Kiyoko said. Her image shimmered before large black leathery wings appeared on her back. She took off in a whoosh that nearly blew down everyone on deck.

“Now, I think we can all agree that that was a stupid idea,” Sawamura said, glaring at Hinata’s hunched figure.

It had taken Kiyoko roughly 15 min to catch up to him and bring him back. In the meantime, Tsukishima and Yamaguchi had joined them, wondering what the commotion was all about.

“I was just going to go bring Kenma back,” Hinata said stubbornly. Sawamura sighed and then turned to Bokuto.

“I leave you with him for ten minutes, ten minutes, and the next thing I know he’s gallivanting across the damn sky!” Sawamura hissed, “What did you say to him?”

“This isn’t my fault!” Bokuto protested, “I told him to just be awesome! Not to run off!”

“I can’t show Kenma how awesome I am if he’s not around to see it,” Hinata said, pouting slightly.

“Oh, I guess you do have a poi…” Bokuto caught the look on Sawamura’s face and trailed off. He cleared his throat and continued in a forced serious tone. “That was a very irresponsible move, Hinata.”
“Alright, I know what we need to do here,” Nishinoya said, standing up. “Ryu and I will go with the shrimp to find the gloomy one!”

“You what?” Sawamura gaped.

“You will?” Hinata said excitedly.

“You bet,” Nishinoya winked.

“You’re crazy,” Tsukishima said flatly.

“Alright, I’ll give you three days to find him and get back to the starship,” Kiyoko said with a sigh. She knew there wasn’t any stopping them at this point. She turned to Sawamura. “Shouldn’t you go too?”

Sawamura slumped a little before straightening his back with determination.

“Please, take care of Tsukishima and find my missing crew member Yachi,” Sawamura asked with a bow, “I know we’ve only just met and I’m already asking too much of you but-”

Kiyoko raised her hand, stopping him.

“Try to catch up to us quickly,” Kiyoko said with a small smile.

“Take an Omnia,” Ennoshita instructed, “That way we can keep in touch with you.”

“What is this?” Sawamura asked as Ennoshita passed him a thin black book roughly the size of his palm. Inside the black cover was a single page of paper.

“Write something in it,” Ennoshita instructed.

Sawamura wrote ‘hello’. Ennoshita then took another Omnia out of his own pocket and opened it. On his page, was the word ‘hello’ in Sawamura’s handwriting.

“It’s a bit tedious, but it’s a good way to send instant communication,” Ennoshita said. “Try to check it once a day.”

“Thank you,” Sawamura tucked it into the inside pocket of his jacket.

“I’m coming too!” Lev said, jumping onto the couch and sitting on Hinata’s lap. “If Kenma is near, I’ll be able to sense it.”

“Then why couldn’t you have found him earlier?” Tsukishima asked.

“He was already too far away,” Lev answered glumly.

“Thanks for coming, Lev,” Hinata said with a smile.

“Alright, let’s get going, Shorty,” Tanaka said, whacking Hinata on the back. Lev jumped down and Hinata stood up. “I assume your stuff is still packed?”

“Yup!” Hinata said with a grin.

“Kiyoko, we’re taking the nightrider,” Nishinoya said, “The BIG one.”

“Do you have to?” Ennoshita asked futilely.
“We’ll bring it back in one piece,” Tanaka winked, “Promise.”

“You’re not going with them?”
Tsukishima turned around to see the qilin behind him. He adjusted his glasses, scowling to keep from blushing.

“They don’t need me tagging along too,” Tsukishima said gruffly, “Besides, at least one person from our crew needs to be there to save Yachi.”

“I see,” Yamaguchi gave him a small smile, “I’ll continue to be in your care then, I guess.”

“Why do you look so happy about that?” Tsukishima asked, sounding harsher than he’d meant to.

“Ah! I’m sorry!” Yamaguchi paled, “I shouldn’t be happy when your friend is captured and your other friends might be going off into danger! I’m so-!”

“That’s not what I meant,” Tsukishima cut him off, slamming his hand on the wall behind him.

Yamaguchi’s eyes widened.

“We just met,” Tsukishima said in a low voice, “Yet you’re acting awfully friendly with me, aren’t you? What is a qilin anyway? I’ve never heard of your species before. Why do you cling to me so much?”

“I-I’m sorry…” Yamaguchi looked down, his face red.

Tsukishima felt disgusted with himself and the way he was acting. He dropped his hand from the wall and turned away.

“I’m not as friendly as the others,” he said gruffly, rubbing the back of his neck.

He walked away, leaving Yamaguchi standing there in shock.

“Are you an idiot?” Oculus asked him quietly.

Tsukishima didn’t reply.

Yamaguchi watched regretfully as Tsukishima left.

“Making friends with humans is hard,” He muttered.

“Well, you did choose the orneriest human on this ship to befriend,” said a voice from behind him.

Nishinoya poked his head out from around the corner. “Sorry, we overheard by accident,” he said. Tanaka was with him as usual.

“But man, that Tsukishima sure is a real piece of work!” Tanaka said, crossing his arms, “Why are you so set on being friends with that one?”

“He doesn’t remember, but we’ve met before,” Yamaguchi said shyly.
“Whoa, really?” Nishinoya’s jaw dropped.

“How?” Tanaka asked.

“It was before he was a Celestial Knight,” Yamaguchi said, “In a small village…”

“One day, I was in my deer form. I was walking through a field. Pain suddenly struck my leg and I fell. Some kids were throwing rocks at me. They surrounded me while my leg was injured. He was just passing by when he saw us. He saved me.”

“You sure this is the same Tsukishima?” Tanaka asked doubtfully.

Yamaguchi laughed.

“He went up to them as sneered, “picking on a poor deer? How lame~!” He said to them,” Yamaguchi said.

“Okay, that sounds more like him,” Nishinoya said.

“He took care of me after that,” Yamaguchi continued, “The kids ran off and he brought me a wet cloth and bandages for my leg. He talked with me a lot, probably because he didn’t know what I was.”

“Hm never pegged him for an animal lover,” Nishinoya said.

“His words were rough,” Yamaguchi said.

“They still are,” Tanaka added.

“But his actions are almost always kind,” Yamaguchi said, “He never hesitates to help his friends.”

“And that’s why you want to be around him so badly?” Nishinoya grinned. He waggled his eyebrows at Tanaka. “Sounds to me like you’ve got a crush on him!”

“I would never want to crush him!” Yamaguchi protested, his face paling at the thought.

“Uh, no, that’s…not what I meant,” Nishinoya tried to explain.

“It just sounds like you really like him,” Tanaka said.

“I do like him,” Yamaguchi said innocently.

“No, we mean…you like like him,” Nishinoya said.

“Yes?” Yamaguchi tilted his head in confusion.


“You just keep trying your best,” Tanaka said, patting Yamaguchi on the shoulder.

“I will,” Yamaguchi said with clenched fists, “I’ll try to be more human so that we can understand each other and be friends! Just like you guys and Kiyoko-San!”

Nishinoya and Tanaka exchanged troubled glances.

“You’re wrong about that, you know,” Nishinoya said.
“We’re not friends with Kiyoko because she looks like a human or anything like that,” Tanaka said from the other side. “Kiyoko is and always will be a dragon.”

“And we love her for who she is,” Nishinoya turned to Yamaguchi and looked into his eyes with a strong gaze, “And for what she is.”

Yamaguchi shifted uncomfortably.

“You’ll never be able to understand each other if you keep trying to hide what you are,” Tanaka said.

“He doesn’t need to understand everything about me,” Yamaguchi said, “It’s fine if I just understand him.”

“That’s selfish,” Nishinoya said.

“I’m going to my room,” Yamaguchi said, “I’ll see you later.”

He bowed before turning away and walking down the hall.

“My, my, my, what troublesome kouhais we’ve gained,” Tanaka said, placing a hand on his hip and the other against his cheek like a worried mother.

“Wonder if they’ll make any progress while we’re away,” Nishinoya mused.

“A silver says they won’t,” Tanaka said, flicking a silver coin in the air and catching it.

“Double it and I’ll bet they’ll at least be calling each other by name,” Nishinoya grinned.

“What, you don’t want to bet that Yamaguchi will grab Tsukishima by the ears and plant one on him?” Tanaka said devilishly.

“I’ll bet a gold that Yamaguchi will be the one to initiate,” Nishinoya said, producing a gold coin between his fingers.

“You two are incorrigible,” Ennoshita said from behind them.

“What can we say?” Nishinoya said, walking the gold coin across his fingers, “We love a gamble!”

Kenma stared in shock at the empty window. Panic clutched at his heart. He rushed to the window and looked out. Whoever it was had moved so quickly that they were just a blurry dot in the distance. Kenma bolted out the door and rushed down the stairs and through the lobby. He pushed past a waiter who nearly spilled his tray. He stumbled out onto the street and looked desperately for that dot but it was gone. He fell to his knees, partly from shock and partly from despair.

“He’s gone…” Kenma felt an emptiness that he had never known before.

“Um…Mr. Customer, are you alright?” A voice asked.

Kenma turned and looked at them numbly. It was the waiter he’d knocked into.
“My name is Inuoka,” He said, pointing to his nametag, “Can I help you with anything?”

“I’m fine, I don’t need anything.” Kenma mumbled.

“That’s exactly what people who aren’t fine say,” Inuoka said with a knowing look that irritated Kenma.

“If you don’t have a ship or something then you can’t help me anyway,” Kenma snapped. He stood up and flipped his hood up. “See you around.”

“I can ask my boss if I can use the van!” Inuoka offered cheerfully.

Kenma stopped.

“Can that van fly?” He asked.

“Um…it’s just a van,” Inuoka said sheepishly, “With wheels and stuff.”

“I can work with that,” Kenma said, turning back abruptly.

“Alright! Follow me,” Inuoka said, a wide smile on his face.

Kenma followed him with low expectations, but he couldn’t stop the smidgen of hope blooming in his chest.

“That suspicious looking guy?” Nobuyuki said with an expressionless face.

“How much did you quote him for it?” Nobukyuki asked. Inuoka averted his eyes. Nobuyuki rephrased his question, “Sou…you couldn’t possibly have told him we’d let him use it for free, right?”

Inuoka’s gaze dropped to the floor. He looked like a dejected puppy. Nobuyuki sighed.

“Stuff his pockets with our business cards and tell him he has to pay for gas,” Nobuyuki said reluctantly. Inuoka’s eyes shone.

“Yes! Of course, Boss! Thank you, Boss!” Inuoka’s head bobbed frantically. He turned to the guy in the red tracksuit and flashed him two thumbs up. “Kozume-San! We can use it!”

Nobuyuki was surprised by the polite bow the kid gave him before following Inuoka to the garage. Inuoka sure liked to make strange friends but at least he wasn’t asking to keep him this time.

The van looked like it had been well taken care of. It was an older model but in good shape and the interior was nearly spotless. Kenma popped the hood and stared down at the engine.

“Um, what are you doing?” Inuoka asked, peering over his shoulder.

“Inuoka-San,” Kenma said quietly, “Have you ever left the Known world before?”

“The what?” Inuoka tilted his head in confusion.

“Don’t worry about it,” Kenma said, closing the hood and climbing into the passenger seat.

Inuoka buckled himself into the driver’s seat and turned the key in the ignition. They drove out onto
the street and turned down the road where Kenma had seen Kuroo disappear.

“So, how far are we going?” Inuoka asked cheerfully.

“To the ends of the earth if we have to,” Kenma answered. He reached out and placed his hand against the dash.

“Inuoka-San,” Kenma said quietly, “Please don’t freak out.”

The van suddenly lifted into the air.

“Eh?” Inuoka blinked. He turned the steering wheel left and right but the van kept driving forwards.

“EHHH?”

He let go of the steering wheel and plastered himself to the window. He looked down and his jaw dropped at the sight of the ground being much further away than it should have been.

“Um, Kenma-San…are we flying?” Inuoka asked.

“Technically the van is flying, we’re just riding in it,” Kenma answered without looking at him.

“Why is it flying?” Inuoka asked.

“Because I’m making it fly,” Kenma answered flatly.

Inuoka swallowed nervously. He looked back out the window as the fleeting landscape below. Roofs turned to fields and then fields to forests.

“Kozume-San, what are you?” Inuoka asked in wonder.

“Who knows?” Kenma said.

Oikawa stepped through the doors to the Captain’s room. Ikejiri and Terushima were already there and they looked annoyed by his late entry. Oikawa adjusted his jacket and grinned at them.

His new uniform was black with silver lines in a blocky pattern down his arms and legs. A black cape fluttered behind him and the center of his chest had the Alastor insignia, the three Shining Cities in a circle. Ikejiri’s had bronze and Terushima’s had gold.

“You both look on edge,” Oikawa remarked.

“How do we know it will show up,” Ikejiri said, looking grim.

“Yara will come,” Oikawa’s voice boomed. But it wasn’t Oikawa speaking. Oikawa’s posture changed as the spirit of Eaen Rie came to the forefront.

“You still have so much faith in your crazy girlfriend,” Ikejiri spat, Aerimus Cathal’s spirit showing through him. “She was the one who caused our cities to fall!”

“And she was also the one who helped us build them in the first place,” Eaen said.
“Personally, I don’t care if she shows up for not,” Terushima said, looking at his nails. He stood daintily, with a feminine grace. “I want my original body back.”

“There’s more at stake here than your damn science experiments, Nairali,” Aerimus snapped.

“Enough! Both of you!” Eaen said angrily, “If we have Yara and the Arc then we can have everything.”

“We will be as we once were,” Nairali said, gazing longing at Terushima’s manly hand. She lowered it and crossed her arms over her flat stomach.

Eaen and Aerimus fell silent. They both placed a hand on her shoulders. For a moment, it felt as if they were mere teenagers again, dreaming of better lives.

There was a knock at the door and the three of them jolted. Eaen faded away first and Oikawa turned to answer the door. Aerimus closed his eyes and when he opened them, he was Ikejiri. Nairali was about to do the same when she caught a glimpse of silver hair in the doorway.

He was of average height with a slender build. His hair was silver, his eyes hazel brown. A birthmark was under his left eye. He glanced past Oikawa and smiled at her politely. Water clouded her vision. He looked concerned at the sight of her tears but Oikawa ushered him back out the door.

“It’s not fair,” Nairali said, trembling with emotion, “He looks just like him.”

“I’ve looked into it and he’s not his,” Eaen said. “He’s the descendent of Prydori’s sister.”

“What is his name?” Nairali asked.

“Sugawara Koushi,” Eaen answered.

"He's an Argent," Nairali said.

"Yes," Eaen said, "But his blood inheritance is so little that I don't think he knows."

"It will bring him pain in the future," Nairali said bitterly.

"Prydori always loved you, until his last day," Eaen said, “Rumours say he kept the company of a demon to alleviate the pain of losing you.”

"Yet he had a child in that arranged marriage of his," Nairali said, drying her eyes, “This plan of yours had better work, Eaen.”

“It will,” Eaen replied, “It must.”

Suga slumped against the wall. His heart was racing and sweat beaded his forehead. Who was that? It was Terushima but it wasn’t. For a moment, he thought he saw a beautiful woman with golden hair and tanned skin. For a moment, he remembered a meadow of blooming moonflowers, the two of them meeting in the middle of the night.

“Argent” she called him, many, many times. The Silver Speaker. Golden flecks floated around
Suga’s head. The stardust again.

He took a deep breath. *Three Shining Cities floating against a scarlet sky. Three City-makers, Amaranth, Rie, and Cathal. Three friends lying on the floor, their hands reaching for each other. A woman’s head, gold dripping from the stump of her neck. Red flower petals fell from the sky like rain. The Shining Cities tore themselves apart, like the seeds of a dandelion let loose in the wind. A dark orb hovered in the sky like a black eye.*

Suga fell to the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Some relatives of note: Dominus Eichiro Semi is Eita Semi's great grandfather. He inherited the sea business. The Prydori that Nairali Amaranth was in love with was Yukie's great grandfather and Suga's great grand uncle. Yukie and Suga are distant cousins, but Yukie did not inherit Argent blood.

Argents, the Silver Speakers are known for their charisma and ability to persuade anyone of anything.
“Suga?” It was Asahi.

Suga’s eyes fluttered as he woke up. He grimaced. His head was pounding.

“Are you alright?” Asahi asked, worriedly. He helped Suga to his feet and steadied him as he got his bearings.

“Just… a headache,” Suga tried to smile, “Thanks Asahi.”

“Have you been eating properly?” Asahi asked.

“Of course! You eat with me every day, no need to fuss,” Suga said, waving him off.

“I just found you collapsed in the hallway and you’re telling me not to fuss?” Asahi said, his voice rising higher as he spoke.

“Would you keep quiet?” Suga hissed, slapping a hand over Asahi’s mouth. He lowered his voice, jerking his head towards the door a little ways down the hall behind him, “They’re having a meeting in there.”

Asahi’s expression darkened. “I wonder why we’re never invited to these meetings,” Asahi said quietly.

“They don’t trust us,” Suga said, “Which means their plans are something they don’t think we’d support.”

“Oh my~ what crazy conclusions are you two jumping to?”

Suga and Asahi watched Oikawa approach cautiously. They hadn’t heard the door open and yet he was standing behind them, a wry grin on his face. Suga plastered a fake smile on his face to match.

“We were just feeling left out~” Suga said, pouting.

“I thought we were supposed to be finding the Arc, not hosting some festival,” Asahi added, his suspicions showing through.
“We are finding the Arc,” Oikawa said, shaking his head as if exasperated by Asahi’s ignorance. “The World Fair will bring it to us.”

“How?” Suga asked, grudgingly taking the bait.

“It’s simple, the World Fair is meant to bring all kinds of people from around the world together,” Oikawa explained patronizingly, “If someone has the Arc, then they will attend, lured by our attractions.”

“And if no one has the Arc?” Suga asked.

“It will be likely that at least one person has seen it,” Oikawa said, “It’ll be your jobs to weed that information out of them.”

“We’ll be searching for a needle in a haystack that might not exist,” Asahi said.

“Are you saying this is too hard for you?” Oikawa pouted, “I would have thought that for people like you, this would be almost too easy.”

“What do you mean, ‘people like us’?” Asahi asked, his eyes narrowing.

“When we took over, we read your files,” Oikawa said, “They sure were interesting. I feel like I’ve gotten to know you too a lot better.”

Suga had a bad feeling in his gut.

“Seems unfair,” Asahi said, an edge in his voice.

“You two are so full of potential and you don’t even know it,” Oikawa said smoothly, “But we’ll work on that.” Oikawa sauntered away, leaving the two feeling unsettled.

“It’s a trap,” Asahi said.

“I know,” Suga replied, “But it’s a damn tempting one and that bastard knows it.”

“There might not even be any files,” Asahi said.

“No, there will be,” Suga said, “He wants us to find them after all, but as for what they’ll say…”

“Maybe they’ll be full of compliments,” Asahi said sarcastically.

“UWWOOOAAHHH!” Hinata’s eyes lit up as he saw the nightrider.

“Wow!” Lev was in his kitten form but he grew to the size of a lion to admire the ship more.

The airship had an angular shape that was streamlined for speed. The glass top lifted, revealing a cockpit with seating for six.

“Isn’t she a beauty?” Nishinoya grinned.

“I tear up a bit every time I see her,” Tanaka said, wiping at the corner of his eye dramatically.
Even Sawamura had to admit the airship was impressive. It was like a sleek piece of the night without any stars.

“I want to live in it,” Hinata said, hugging the side of it. The side of his face was reflected in the shiny surface.

“Careful!” Tanaka said, pushing him off, “You’ll smudge her!” Tanaka breathed on Hinata’s face smudge and rubbed it clean with his sweater.

“I call shotgun!” Hinata said, jumping inside. Lev followed gleefully.

“Oh no you don’t!” Nishinoya said, jerking his thumb towards the other seats, “Sorry, Shorty, but shotgun is copilot and while you might be able to fly with them shoes, I doubt you can fly this baby.”

“Aww…” Hinata slunk over to the middle seats. Lev shrunk down and sat on Hinata’s lap. Sawamura sat beside him.

“The view from here is still pretty good, no?” Sawamura said, pointing at their feet.

Hinata’s jaw dropped as he realized the floor was clear and he could see through the bottom of the ship. Lev hopped down and crouched on the floor, looking down in fascination, his tail twitching from side to side.

“Camera view’s underneath the ship are displayed on the floor,” Tanaka explained with a grin, “Pretty cool, huh?”

“Really cool!” Hinata said, practically bouncing in his seat.

“Here we go!” Nishinoya said, flicking some switches.

Tanaka and Nishinoya placed headsets around their necks and Tanaka started the engine. It quietly hummed to life and the airship rose vertically. The wheels folded in under it and the floor beneath the ship slid open.

“The Nightrider is a stealth ship,” Nishinoya explained as they flew off. “She’s silent as the night and moves much faster than any other airship.”

“The camera panels above and below the ship work in a circle pattern,” Tanaka added, “Cameras hidden on the top of the ship take the images from above them and display them on the camera panels below the ship, while the bottom cameras take images from below the ship and display them on the top camera panels, as well as the floor inside here. That way, from above and below we’re invisible.”

“What about from head on?” Sawamura asked.

“The ship is designed to be flatter around the edges so that from head on it looks like a mirage, a trick of the light played on your eyes,” Nishinoya answered.

“Who designed this ship?” Hinata asked, “It’s amazing.”

“This is a genuine Lockiere make,” Nishinoya bragged.

“Aren’t those incredibly expensive?” Sawamura said, skeptically.

“Yeah well…five finger rule,” Tanaka said, wiggling his golden fingers.
“I don’t think that kind of rule applies so something this big,” Sawamura said dryly.

“What does that mean?” Hinata asked, cluelessly.

“It means they stole it,” Sawamura said disapprovingly.

“What? How?” Hinata’s eyes were wide as saucers. He ran his hand along the leather armrest of the seat. “How did you get away with that?”

“It’s a stealth ship, getting away with it was the easy part,” Nishinoya said devilishly.

“You two are such a bad influence,” Sawamura said.

“As opposed to you?” Tanaka raised an eyebrow, “Celestial Knight sounds like such a fancy title compared to pirates, but we only steal things. You guys steal people and don’t even realize it.”

“Huh?” Hinata’s face fell.

Sawamura tightened his hands into fists and looked down at the trees below them. Lev looked at them in concern and rubbed against Hianta’s thigh.

“If you’re talking about your captain…” Sawamura started.

“We’re not,” Nishinoya said, a hardened look in his eyes.

“He probably doesn’t know anything about Asahi either,” Tanaka said bitterly. “Apparently we’ve encountered the most clueless Celestial Knights in the whole Order.”


A jolt went through Nishinoya and he practically whipped around in his seat.

“I know an Azumane Asahi,” Sawamura said, “He was a part of my squad.”

“What did he look like?” Nishinoya asked. His eyes looked wild and there was some raw emotion in his face that Sawamura could only identify as desperation.

“He’s tall, muscular, and has longish brown hair that he ties up,” Sawamura said, “He has a slight beard too and looks intimidating but in reality he’s got a glass heart.”

“So they made him one of them,” Tanaka said bitterly, “You probably brainwashed him too.”

“You’re wrong,” Hinata said, surprising Nishinoya and Tanaka. “Celestial Knights aren’t kidnappers.”

“You show up, you take someone and then they become a Celestial Knight, how is that not kidnapping?” Nishinoya snapped.

“It’s because he found the tear,” Sawamura said, “I can’t explain it well, but I became a Celestial Knight when I found a tear. It happens to all Celestial Knights that way.”

“What do you mean a tear? Whose tear?” Tanaka asked.

The image of a woman’s head flashed through Sawamura and Hinata’s minds. Gold dust fell like a waterfall from her severed neck and flowers bloomed from her hair.
“…Yara’s…” Sawamura said, surprising himself.

How had he never realized it before? That name that sounded like air, “h-yar-ah”, like the release of a breath you’ve been holding.

It had been when he was ten years old. Through the noise of the cicadas screaming in the summer heat, Sawamura had heard a voice crying. In the middle of the dirt lane, was a clear puddle and inside he’d seen the image of a Yara’s head. Compelled by her sadness, he’d reached for her and the water rose up, surrounding him in a shining bubble. As it popped around him, golden dust shimmered in the air. The Celestial Knights arrived that night. He went, compelled by the strange emotions stirring inside him from the image of the woman’s head.

“And what mission were you given?” Nishinoya asked.

“It…I…” Sawamura’s brow furrowed in confusion and he felt an immense sense of loss at the missing memory.

“She needed our help…” Hinata looked stricken. He held his head in both hands. “Something happened to her…I don’t know what…I can’t remember…”

“You need to find the Arc,” Lev said, looking at Sawamura, “That’s the only way you’ll have any answers.”

“This Arc of yours sure is a whole lot of trouble,” Nishinoya remarked. Sawamura had to agree.

“That direction,” Lev suddenly jumped onto Nishinoya’s lap. He pointed his head to the west. “We’re close.”

“Speaking of trouble…” Tanaka remarked, shifting gears. The nightrider’s engine whirled quietly as they changed directions.

“What did you do to me?” Kuroo asked in a low voice.

Tendou giggled, an incriminating white marker pen in his hand. Kuroo turned to Goshiki.

“Goshiki, tell me straight, do I have a dick on my face?” Kuroo asked, “Answer carefully because this will determine whether I murder both of you or just Tendou.”

“Not a dick, but you do have a cute kitty face,” Goshiki replied indifferently.

“Alright, Tendou prepare to die,” Kuroo said, approaching as menacingly as he could, being a floating black ball with a kitty face drawn on him.

“But you look cute!” Tendou said, holding up a mirror. Kuroo scrutinized Tendou’s handiwork.

“You live for now,” Kuroo said.

He hated to admit it, but he kinda liked it. He wiggled his triangular side panels that Tendou had drawn ear outlines on. He kinda felt more like a living being.
“And how do I look?” Tendou asked, striking a pose in Sawamura’s Celestial Knight uniform.

“Like an idiot,” Kuroo and Goshiki said in unison.

“So harsh!” Tendou pretended to be hurt, holding the back of his hand to his forehead.

“We have to do something about that bright red hair of yours,” Kuroo said, “It stands out way too much.”

“I agree,” Goshiki said, standing up and appraising it, “Let’s dye it.”

“What? No!” Tendou ran behind a rock, his hands pressed against his head protectively. “I like my hair the way it is!”

Goshiki and Kuroo exchanged glances. Tendou felt a chill run down his back at their calculating expressions.

“Stay back!” Tendou shouted.

Goshiki rushed him from the right while Kuroo floated around the left. Tendou jumped over the rock between them.

“Gotta!” Kuroo shouted, propelling himself upwards and knocking Tendou in the stomach with his body. Tendou let out an ‘oof!’ and fell on his back. Goshiki shifted into his giant bat form and promptly sat on him.

“My turn,” Kuroo said gleefully. A nozzle stuck out of one of his body’s compartments. “Try to stay still.”

Tendou did not stay still but Kuroo’s dexterity with a laser pointer seemed to transfer over to spray painting.

“We should probably style it a bit,” Goshiki said.

“It’s already styled, “ Tendou pouted, unhappy with his new black locks.

“Maybe we could gel it back?” Kuroo said. Goshiki shrank back down and applied a generous amount of hair gel to Tendou’s head.

“We got a little on his ears,” Goshiki remarked.

“It’ll wash off eventually,” Kuroo said, “I think.”

“What is this stuff?” Tendou asked, feeling his head, “My hair feels like a helmet now.”

“Well I don’t have hair dye, just the paint for my body,” Kuroo said, “So good news is, your hair is weather proof, scratch resistant and environment friendly.”

“I hate you,” Tendou said flatly.

“What happened to that ‘good feeling’ you had about me?” Kuroo smirked.

“I got to know you,” Tendou said, “And shockingly, it left.”

“So I can go now, then?” Kuroo said.
“Not yet,” Tendou grabbed him with both hands. He grinned mischievously. “We still need a disguise for you.”

Kenma stood in a large empty space, a tall dark silhouette facing away from him. Water splashed at his knees. Soft grey specs fell slowly from above them, covering the surface of the water with a light blanket of ash.

“Don’t go,” Kenma begged, “Please…don’t leave me…”

The ash turned to golden dust and stopped falling and paused before floating back upwards. Kenma reached out and grabbed at it in vain. It neatly slipped through his grasp, whirling away from his motion.

“Stop it…Stop it!” Kenma shouted at the silhouette.

The water cleared and Kenma looked down in fear. His eyes were pitch black, like empty sockets and his skin was grey like clay.

“Please…!”

Kenma looked back at the silhouette as they turned to golden dust up to their neck. Their dust blew away starting at the legs, floating upwards into the void above until only their head was left.

“Kenma?” Kenma jolted awake, drenched in sweat. Inuoka hovered over him, looking concerned.

“What is it?” Kenma asked, clearing his throat.

“You looked like you were having a nightmare,” Inuoka said.

Kenma looked around. They had landed in a junkyard near the city of Caelum. The ruins of the Shining Cities and the Spyre Luck Houses floated above them.

“I’m still having a nightmare,” Kenma grumbled under his breath.

“Hm?” Inuoka tilted his head to the side.

“Nothing,” Kenma said.

“Oh, um, well then what are we going to do for breakfast?” Inuoka asked.

“Find something out of my bag,” Kenma said, “I’m going to look around a bit.”

Kenma climbed out of the van and stretched his legs. It had been cramped sleeping in a van, especially with someone as lanky as Inuoka. Kenma closed his eyes and concentrated on the faint connection he had to Kuroo’s body. He was still far but the connected felt stronger than before.

Suddenly, he felt another presence. His eyes shot open and he ducked into a pile of scrap metal. He looked up and noticed a shimmer in the air, like heat. So it was Lev, huh? Kenma’s expression darkened.
“Kenma?” Inuoka wandered past Kenma’s hiding place.

Kenma darted out and yanked him into the hiding place too. Kenma turned and looked directly into Inuoka’s eyes. *That’s strange*, Inuoka thought to himself, *Kozume-San’s eyes were gold.*

Kenma caught the tall waiter awkwardly as he slumped over. He lowered him to the ground the best he could, considering their difference in height. It had been a long time since he’d done anything like this and he’d never tried it before in this body. But now he was out of options.

“Sorry, Inuoka,” Kenma said, “But I can’t let you see this.”

The shimmer lowered and dust stirred in a circular patterned beneath it. Black enveloped the outline of a sleek airship and wheels unfolded from underneath as it landed. Hinata jumped out of the airship and Kenma’s chest panged at the sight of his orange head and happy expression. Sawamura and Lev followed and Kenma hardened his resolve. Two others were next, the bounty hunters from the pirate group.

Lev looked in Kenma’s direction and Kenma knew there was no use in hiding. He stepped out from the scrap pile, forcing a cold expression onto his face.

“You shouldn’t have followed me,” Kenma said.

“Kenma!” Hinata said, bounding up to him, “Why did you leave? I was so worried! And hurt, you dummy!” Hinata pouted and Kenma wanted to apologize, almost did, the words were right at the tip of his tongue, but he held back and furrowed his brow.

“Please leave,” Kenma said, “We’re not friends or anything…I already led you out of the woods so just leave me alone.”

Hinata’s face fell, his expression a mixture of hurt confusion.

“Where’s Kuroo?” Sawamura said, stepping up beside Hinata.

“Why do you want to know?” Kenma asked, on guard.

“You know why, Kenma,” Sawamura said softly, “We need Kuroo, don’t we?”

“No, you don’t,” Kenma said coldly.

“What’s going on?” Hinata asked, reaching for Kenma. Kenma jerked back.

“Kuroo is the Arc,” Sawamura said, “And Yara is trapped inside him.”

“You don’t know anything,” Kenma said, his eyes shadowed.

“Kuroo is the Arc?” Hinata looked confused. He realized he was scared of the tension of the situation.

“You said you wouldn’t look for the Arc,” Kenma said, feeling betrayed.

“That was before I knew we needed the Arc to save Yara,” Sawamura said.

“So you’re after him too, Sawamura,” Kenma said in a low voice.

“Kenma, if we don’t find Kuroo, then Yara will be lost forever!” Sawamura shouted, “The world will forget itself!”
“I know,” Kenma said, his eyes glowing gold. “I want it to forget.”

“What?” Sawamura said in confusion. A bad feeling crept up his spine. “Kenma, what are you saying?”

“I’m saying you’re wrong about me, about Kuroo,” Kenma said.

Strands of Kenma’s hair rose although there was no wind. Objects in the junkyard behind him creaked and then rose into the air. He looked at Lev.

“You shouldn’t have come Lev,” Kenma said, “You know what I am.”

Kenma held out his left hand. Lev surged forwards, his claws digging into the ground as he tried to stay where he was.

“Sorry Sawamura,” Lev said, struggling as pieces of his sand blew towards Kenma. He lost his form as his sand swarmed around Kenma’s arm and was absorbed into his body.

“Kuroo isn’t the Arc,” Kenma said coldly.

Kenma’s eyes turned from gold to black and the world around them cracked and then shattered apart. “I am.”

Sawamura was looking at the ground. It floated in chunks above him. His head felt numb. He reached up and touched it gingerly. His fingers came away with blood. Where was everyone? He sat up and immediately felt like vomiting but he held it together. He looked around desperately. The area looked like a meteor belt with chunks of ground and trash from the scrap yard floating everywhere.

“Sawamuraaaa!” It was Tanaka’s voice.

“I’m over here!” Sawamura shouted the best he could.

A roped arrow shot into the ground beside him and Tanaka came flying at him, pulled by the rope as it winded back into a contraption on his belt. He crashed into the ground beside Sawamura.

“What happened to the others?” Sawamura asked.

“Nishinoya and Hinata went towards the kid,” Tanaka said. He cursed as he saw Sawamura’s head injury. “Let me treat that first.”

“What do you mean they went after him?” Sawamura grabbed Tanaka by the shoulders. “They’re in danger!”

“We’re all in fucking danger!” Tanaka shouted back, shoving Sawamura down and forcibly treating his wound. “What the hell is that friend of yours?”

“…The Arc apparently,” Sawamura said bitterly, recalling the cold look in Kenma’s eyes.

“I’m sorry, but that doesn’t make any fucking sense!” Tanaka said, wrapping a bandage around
Sawamura’s head.

“Why don’t you tell him that?” Sawamura said, pushing Tanaka aside and standing up.

He could see the flash of Hinata’s hair and his golden shoes darting from rock to rock around where Kenma was floating in midair. Nishinoya was shouting at him from the top of a broken down car. He seemed to have a person in his arms.

“We need to get over there,” Sawamura said grimly.

“Hold on to me,” Tanaka said, yanking the arrow out of the ground. Sawamura held onto Tanaka as he loaded the arrow into a crossbow and shot it over to where Nishinoya was huddled.

“Who’s that?” Tanaka asked as they landed.

“Don’t know, found him floating amidst the debris,” Nishinoya said, “I don’t think he’s dead.”

“Stay with him,” Sawamura instructed, “We’ll deal with Kenma.”

“You got any plans on how to do that exactly?” Tanaka asked wryly.

“The original plan was to talk things over,” Sawamura said, “But I don’t think that’s an option anymore.”

“Yeah, he doesn’t seem to be in a listening mood right now,” Nishinoya remarked.

“KENMAAAA!” Hinata shouted.

“Stay away!” Kenma shouted back.

Several large rocks flew at Hinata but he dodged through them. One whipped around the side and grazed his temple. Another hit him in the leg and he stumbled, falling into a floating heap of trash. He banged his head against the roof of an old car and his vision blurred.

“Hinataaaa!” Sawamura shouted.

Hinata could hear the sounds of fighting through the ringing in his ears. He stared blankly ahead of him. The rock that had struck his temple lay beside him, gold residue clinging to the side of it. Lev. The gold dust left the rock and floated towards him, as if drawn to him. It stopped in front of him and then floated in a line away from him. Don’t leave me…

Hinata raised his head. The thin line of gold dust has paused. Hinata pulled himself to his feet. His shoes carried him to where the gold dust was. His vision felt narrowed, sound muted. There was only the gold line. And then…in front of him… Kenma’s back was small and narrow.

“Kenma…” Hinata said.

Kenma whirled around, golden sand formed a sword in his left hand and he swung. Hinata held his blade steady and it parted the sand like water. Sand fell to the ground below them, falling slowly like snow. A pang ran through Kenma’s left arm and his fingers stiffened.

“What?” Kenma’s eyes widened.

“Come back with us,” Hinata said, “We’re friends, aren’t we? We’ll find Kuroo together and-”

“You don’t understand anything,” Kenma’s face hardened. Sand swirled up to maintain the sword
but Hinata’s blade kept pushing it away.

“You’re right,” Hinata said quietly, “I don’t understand anything about Yara or the Arc or you and Kuroo… I just know that without you and Kuroo around I feel sad.”

“You feel sad?” A brief look of surprise crossed Kenma’s face. Then his expression hardened again. “Why?” He practically snarled, pushing against Hinata’s sword.

“Because I like you, you moron!” Hinata shouted, shoving back. He pushed through Kenma’s sword and it fell apart, sand pouring down Kenma’s legs.

Kenma cursed and stepped back, holding onto his left arm. He felt his fingers grow cold and his entire arm felt numb. Pieces of trash started falling to the ground as Kenma lost his grip on them. Tanaka’s grappling arrow sunk into the ground behind Hinata, quickly followed by Nishinoya’s.

“Ever since I met you two, everyday has been a lot of fun,” Hinata said, putting down his sword. The only platforms still floating were the chunk of ground they were standing on.

“Fun? I don’t get it,” Kenma said, his face uneasy. “How could you have fun with me around?”

“Eh?” Hinata looked confused. He rubbed the back of his head with a laugh, “Having fun isn’t really something you think about…it just happens when you’re with people you like.”

“You like me… even after all this?” Kenma asked.

“Yeah,” Hinata smiled, “We all do.”

Kenma looked past him to where Sawamura was standing with Tanaka and Nishinoya. Inuoka was propped sloppily around Nishinoya’s shoulders.

“I don’t want to drag you all down with me,” Kenma said quietly. He looked down at his hands. His left arm had turned to clay. Using his powers had been too much for this form.

Hinata held out his hand, the palm facing up.

“Don’t worry about that,” Hinata said with a grin. “Even if you’re in the pits of despair, I’ll pull you up!”

Kenma stared at the outstretched hand before him. Fear seized Kenma’s heart. What would happen if he took that hand? He felt something welling up inside him, something indescribably painful. Was it… yearning? Hinata was too bright, like the sun. His light was overwhelming. It almost reminded him of Yara’s.

*Don’t fall.*

Tears ran down Kenma’s cheeks as he reached for Hinata’s hand. Hinata beamed at him.

Then the ground fell out from under them.

“Eh?” Tanaka and the rest suddenly found themselves hurdling towards the ground.

“RYUU! THE KEY!” Nishinoya shouted, holding onto Inuoka’s limp body.

Tanaka pulled out the key to the nightrider from the cord around his neck. He pressed a button on it.

“Everybody brace for impact!” He yelled as the nightrider zoomed towards them.
Sawamura hit the windshield and rolled over the top. He held on as Tanaka crashed into him. Nishinoya landed near the back, his hands scrambling for a hold while still holding onto Inuoka. Sawamura slung his foot over to hook Nishinoya’s arm before he rolled off.

“Are you guys alright?” Hinata asked. Kenma was slumped over his shoulders. His magic shoes had kept them in the air.

“Peachy,” Sawamura groaned.

“Oh man, Ennoshita’s gonna be pissed about this…” Tanaka said with a grimace.

The nightrider had not fared well in the skirmish with Kenma and was now sporting several large dents from their “landing” as well as a sizeable crack across the windshield.

“Well it’s still in one piece right?” Nishinoya said weakly, “We didn’t break our promise there…”

“One big battered piece,” Sawamura said flatly.

“Oowwww…” said an unfamiliar voice.

Hinata’s face grew pale. Sawamura sat up and looked back. The stranger Nishinoya had been holding onto didn’t look great. His right arm was swollen and red.

“I think we broke him,” Nishinoya said.

“Let’s get him inside the nightrider, nearest hospital is the town we passed on the way here,” Tanaka said. He pressed another button on the key and the top of the nightrider slid open. Nishinoya and Sawamura lowered the guy gently while Tanaka crawled into the driver’s seat.

“Go ahead without us,” Hinata said.


“We have to pick up Lev,” Hinata said, pointing down at the scattered piles of sand.

“…How?” Sawamura asked.

“I think we have a small broom and dustpan in here…” Nishinoya suggested.

“Alright, Sawamura and I will take this guy to a hospital, you three sweep up Lev,” Tanaka said, turning on the engine.

Some of the cameras had been damaged and the interior screens showed some significant pixilation, as well as some dead spots.

“Righto,” Nishinoya hopped out and roped his way down. Hinata skipped down behind him.

Tanaka revved the engine and the nightrider took off above them.

“You guys are weird,” Kenma said, his face buried in Hinata’s shoulder. The tips of his ears were red.

“You have a lot of problems, Kenma,” Hinata said bluntly. Kenma felt his words hit like a brick. “But whenever you want to talk about them, I’ll be here. And then we can work through them together.”
The heaviness in Kenma’s chest lightened all of a sudden. He could breathe again. He smiled against Hinata’s shoulder.

“Thanks,” Kenma said quietly.

*Eventually, Kenma thought to himself; Some day I'll be able to tell you about everything, Shouyou.*

“You can’t keep doing this,” Saeko said grimly.

Misaki wrapped the bandage around her waist tightly, trying not to wince as the wound burned.

“Let one of us swap in.”

“Won’t the Dominata be suspicious if their supposed peers join in the fight?” Misaki said derisively.

“We can disguise ourselves,” Saeko said, “Many Dominata have more than one bid-winner.”

“Would you be able to win?” Misaki asked, her expression hard.

“I’m not that weak,” Saeko said defensively.

“In a fight to the death, against someone who doesn’t even want to fight,” Misaki added, “Someone who’s been forced into it by some highborn prick?”

Saeko fell silent. Misaki went back to attending her wounds.

“All the more reason for you to switch out,” She said finally. “I didn’t help save you from this all those years ago just for you to end up back here.”

“This isn’t the same as back then,” Misaki said, taking a drink of water. “I have you, Narita and Kinoshita with me now, don’t I?” *Back then…it had been no one.*

“We can’t help you in the arena,” Saeko said, her hands balled into fists.

“You don’t have to,” Misaki said, standing and poking Saeko’s forehead. “You’re much more useful while pretending to be a Domina.”

“That doesn’t make me happy,” Saeko said.

A conflicted expression came over Saeko’s face. Misaki didn’t know what to make of it. In her opinion, being smart enough to pose as one of the Dominata was way more useful than being good at fighting. Not that she could even be considered good at fighting. There was no elegance or grace to her fighting, not the way there was to Kiyoko’s. Misaki was plainly a survivor, not a warrior.

There was a knock at their door and Narita poked his head in.

“We’ve found his number,” he said, opening the door to reveal Kinoshita behind him. Kinoshita and Narita were outfitted in the white uniforms of Dominata attendants. At their hips were regulation weapons, a foot-long engraved dagger, a set of tonfas, and a stun gun.
“He’s in cellblock 7,” Kinoshita said.

“Alright, let’s get going,” Saeko adjusted her outfit. She was wearing an elaborate overcoat that was fashioned to look like a dress. Underneath, she wore her normal clothes, a tank top and pants with combat boots.

Misaki watched them leave. When the door closed, she finally gave in to the pain from her wounds and laid down on the cot.

*I’m fine,* she said to herself. *I can handle this much.* Kiyoko probably wouldn’t let a thing like this affect her this much, Misaki thought to herself. A wave of self-hate settled over her the way it did every time she compared herself to their captain. She had been doing it more lately too. Misaki sighed. She knew what the reason probably was. A certain blonde person ran through her mind. Her face flushed and she pressed the thin pillow over her face.

Saeko had entered her life like an explosion. Quite literally. Misaki still remembered the day they’d met. The arena ceiling had exploded and rubble rained down. A figure dropped through the hole and extended their hand. Misaki had been struck breathless by the wild look in Saeko’s eyes and her rakish grin.

But Saeko was in love with Kiyoko, that much was obvious. And what chance did Misaki have against a dragon?

The sunlight poured down on the grassy hills as the wind blew, spreading the scent of summer. Ushijima stood beneath an apple tree, munching on the ripened fruit that fell from it. He saw the man approach out of the corner of his eye. He wore red, they always did, and it immediately triggered a sense of distrust in him.

They had come for the others of his kind, the ones he rarely saw because the aggression bred into them was too fierce to be around each other without fighting to the death. But he’d seen the red men come for them from a distance. They entered their pens and shackled them, herding them into cages on wheels and taking them away. They never returned. Only the red men did.

And here was his red man, standing just outside his pen, a smile on his face.


They passed Shirabu’s cage on their way to wherever they were going. Shirabu grasped the bars and glared at Daisho.

“Where are you taking him?!?” Shirabu demanded.

“Don’t worry,” Daisho said, waving a hand, “If he’s strong enough, he’ll come back.”

“Hey! Stop it! Bring him back!” Shirabu’s voice grew desperate as the men led Ushijima away.

Ushijima eyed the back of Daisho’s neck. It would be so easy to just crush it.

“My, my, you’re passionate stares are making me blush~” Daisho said slyly, “But save that bloodlust
for the Auction. You’ll need it.”

A metal collar was locked around his neck and a red number 7 appeared over his head. Men herded Ushijima into a cellblock marked with the same number on it.

“Don’t forget this,” Daisho held up a strange bracelet-looking item. It had a weird mechanism with syringes build into it. “Put it around his ankle.”

The metal was cold against Ushijima’s skin.

“Now, my strong man,” Daisho smiled, “Try not to die. I’ve got all my bets on you.”

The cellblock lifted off the ground and floated into what looked like an arena. The arena pit was fitted with cellblocks, looking like a giant bank vault. The seating area above was too dark to see anything. Ushijima’s cellblock slid into place.

“What is this place?” Ushijima wondered aloud. He felt uneasy. He could sense two overwhelming emotions in this place, fear and greed. Everything smelled of blood.

“Did you hear that? This new guy here has no idea what’s in store,” A voice laughed from the cellblock to Ushijima’s right. From the numbering system, they must be in cell 8.

“The first round will begin in a few minutes, let the bastard watch and find out,” Said a voice from above.

“Unless he’s unlucky enough to be first,” Said someone from the upper right, “Poor sap might die without even realizing what’s going on.”

“I won’t die,” Ushijima said bluntly. He had a promise to keep to Shirabu.

“We all die eventually,” Said the first voice slyly.

Spotlights turned on and swirled around the arena pit. Wild cheers could be heard from above. A booming voice shouted out over the crowd.

“WELCOME DOMINATA, TO THE AUCTION!” A glittering figure in bright red stood in midair above the pit. Another thundering cheer went up as they announced the first item, something called an ‘alacritas’. “ALL BIDS HAVE BEEN ENTERED AND CALIBRATED. CONGRATULATIONS TO MR. 16 AND MS. 4, ON THE RIGHT TO WIN THE BID.”

In the stands above them, two golden numbers shone in the dark. The cellblock a few down to Ushijima’s right opened and a young man walked out. He had a dyed mohawk and his cat-like eyes were a dark brown. Faint black stripes decorated his skin. He was demuto; Ushijima could feel it.

To his left, the 16th cellblock had also opened and his opponent had stepped out, or rather, slithered out. A cerulean naga reared its hooded head. The naga had a humanoid upper torso but its face was too angular and its eyes too beady to resemble a real human.

The fight began almost too quickly for Ushijima’s eyes. Within fractions of a second the two were upon each other in a flurry of claws and fangs. The naga tried to capture the demuto but each time it’s body tightened around him the demuto’s claws ripped into it, causing it to flinch away. The naga reared its head and hissed. Venom dripped from its fangs. Ushijima’s eyes widened. The naga hit the demuto with its tail and he tumbled across the arena. He landed near Ushijima’s cellblock. For an intense instant their eyes met.
The naga spat venom at the demuto but he rolled away quickly. The demuto furrowed his brow and grinned viciously. Claws extended from his hands and feet and black stripes appeared on his skin. He was a tiger demuto. He let out a roar that echoed throughout the auction house. He ran at the naga and pounced onto its face. Two deep gouges from his claws ruined the naga’s eyes and it shrieked, waving its head wildly. The tiger demuto held on tightly, continuing to tear into it.

Finally, the naga released its last shudder of life and collapsed onto the floor. The tiger demuto stood panting over it, his body still tense with adrenaline. The collar on the tiger demuto’s neck flashed and he cried out as he fell to his knees. Attendants dressed in black hurried across the arena and carried him back to his cellblock.

“CONGRATULATIONS MS. 9, ON WINNING THE BID!” The Announcer declared with a flourish. A huge cheer rang through the arena.

“You scared yet?” The sly voice from cellblock 8 said. “I bet you never imagined you be in a place like this.”

It was the opposite actually. Ushijima was more surprised at how familiar this setting was. He supposed that no matter where, there were always those who toyed with the lives of others like it was a game. He’d escaped one fighting ring only to end up in another.

“CONGRATULATIONS MR. 7 AND MR. 13, ON WINNING THE RIGHT TO BID!”

The door to Ushijima’s cellblock opened. He looked up at the audience. The creature before him wasn’t his real enemy, it was the person who’d brought him here. He glared up at the gold number 7.

His real enemy was the man in red, the Matador.

Chapter End Notes

Not a very funny chapter, but I hope it's still entertaining for you
I'm loath to say that unfortunately, this is not a chapter update, but rather an update on my situation.

About a week ago my laptop started having problems, making the turning on sound without actually turning on. I naively hoped it was the fault of my frayed charger not working. I took it to the Apple Store (it's a MacBook Pro) and was informed that the motherboard is - colloquially speaking - toast.

I've had that laptop for the past five years and regrettably, have lost everything that was on it. "Oh but notgregarious, all your fanfics are uploaded here! You can still continue!" You might say, and you're correct. I can and will continue this fic...just not right now. I might not have lost the fic, but I've lost all my planning and progress for it, as well as everything else.

It might be just words, but they were all my words and I'm mourning the loss.

So please bear with me and patiently wait for when I can resume my writing. As I am.

Thank you all for your continued or new support.

Sincerely,

Notgregarious
Chapter Summary

Two ships pass in the night
Two ships engage in a fight
One ship is out of sight

Chapter Notes

My triumphant return! Good news, my hard drive has been recovered and my boyfriend sent me my fan fictions so I could continue them. And they say romance is dead.

Sweeping up Lev was proving to be difficult. Nishinoya carefully inspected the dustpan.

“I think I got mostly him but there’s a lot of dirt mixed in as well,” Nishinoya said, showing Hinata.

“Is this bad for him, Kenma?” Hinata asked, passing the dustpan over.

“I have no idea, this has never happened before,” Kenma answered bluntly.

“I think I see more of him over there,” Nishinoya said, darting over to another pile of sand.

Hinata started picking out some of the bits of dirt. The two of them sat in awkward silence. Kenma was sitting with his arms wrapped tightly around his knees.

“I…” Kenma furrowed his brow and his face grew red. His mouth moved but no sound escaped. He buried his face in his knees and said a muffled ‘sorry’.

“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to,” Hinata said. He leaned back on his hands and looked up at the sky. “I’ll wait until you’re ready to talk about it.”

“I want to tell you…I just don’t know how,” Kenma said.

“Start with what comes to mind,” Hinata said, thinking of something that Suga had told him long ago. “Even if it doesn’t make sense. I’ll listen.”

Kenma loosened his grip around his knees. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

“I was made by Aerimus Cathal as a container to hold and control Yara’s powers,” Kenma explained. “I wasn’t alive at first, but Yara’s presence inside the Arc created me. She gave me - the Arc - a soul.”

“So Yara is like your mother,” Hinata said excitedly.

“I guess…” Kenma said, making a face, “I don’t know if that’s really how it works.”
“What was she like?” Hinata asked, leaning towards him eagerly.

“She was...amazing...she didn’t really talk the way we do, but in her way she told me all about the world before she’d been severed. She made it sound so beautiful and wonderful…” Kenma said wistfully. “I wanted to see it so much.”

Then Kenma’s expression darkened.

“But we were trapped in a room and we couldn’t leave. Years passed, so many we both lost count. Yara grew distant from me and less responsive…” Kenma looked sad and Hinata reached over to squeeze his hand.

“I did something horrible to Kuroo,” Kenma said finally, “His body...I took it from him. And he still doesn’t know.”

As Kenma spoke, small grains of sand gathered together. They took the form of a tall and lean boy with unruly hair and a rakish grin. Next, they formed a ball that the boy picked up.

“Kuroo was a thief who had broken into Astraea.” The sand formed the walls of the room that the arc had been held in.

“He meant to steal the Arc but he didn’t know anything of what I could do.” The ball became a cloud that enveloped the boy, raising him up to Hinata and Kenma’s faces.

“When he touched me, I tore him apart. Ripped apart his very cells, studied them, and then reformed them to make my own body.” The boy’s body fell apart and became sucked into the ball while something else escaped from within the ball’s depths.

Kenma held a hand in front of his face.

“I stole his body from him and I’ve lied about it every since.”

“You didn’t know any better, Kenma,” said Lev’s voice suddenly.

Kenma and Hinata looked down in surprise. Lev was smaller than before, but his sand was gradually coming back to him. Nishinoya watched in amazement as Lev’s sand came flying from the places it had been scattered.

“You’re back…” Kenma said in disbelief.

“You wanted me to come back,” Lev said happily. “So here I am!”

Kenma gathered Lev up in his arms and hugged him fiercely. Nishinoya made eye contact with Hinata above Kenma’s head and they both exchanged happy grins.

“I’m sorry Lev,” Kenma said, tears welling up in the corners of his eyes.

Lev just smiled and purred, rubbing against Kenma’s left arm. Lev licked the clay and Kenma felt feeling return as the clay turned back into flesh. “How?” Kenma said in amazement.

“I am tangible desire,” Lev said, “If you wish for it Kenma, there is nothing I can’t do for you.”

Kenma picked up Lev in his arms and stood up.

“I’m sick of being pathetic,” Kenma said, “And I’m done with running away.”
“We might not be as useful as Lev,” Nishinoya said with a grin. “But we have your back as well.”

Just then, a gust of wind blew overhead. They all looked up to see the nightrider above them.

“Look’s like our ride’s here,” Nishinoya said, turning to Kenma. “Where do you want to go?”

“Huh?” Kenma said in surprise.

“You want to find Kuroo right,” Hinata said, “Let’s go get him!”

Ushijima laid on his side, his eyes closed. His entire body was tense and he could still feel the adrenaline in his veins raging. He’d washed himself immediately after the fight, but the smell of blood lingered, rust and copper, from where it was dried under his fingernails and in his hair.

The centaur he’d fought hadn’t stood a chance, not once Ushijima caught up to her. She had been fast and had there been a bow in her hands the outcome might have been different. But she’d had nothing, just her fists and her legs as Ushijima had. And hers were made for deft movements and his for crushing.

There were footsteps. Ushijima listened carefully. They didn’t sound like the guard; there were four sets of them. He got up quietly and hunched near the door, peeking out slightly. The guard was with a Domina and her attendants. They stood with their backs to him right outside his door. The Domina seemed to be gushing over the appearances of other captives. The attendants were standing with their hands behind their backs.

Ushijima saw one of them slightly move their arm and a piece of paper slid out. Ushijima’s eyes widened as he read it.

*Do you want to escape from here?*

The Domina squealed and pulled on the guard’s arm, dragging him a little further down. The attendants stayed where they were. One of them, the taller one with a dark buzz-cut turned slightly towards Ushijima.

“Tomorrow,” he whispered, “When the lights go out.”

“Not just me,” Ushijima said quietly, “My friend too.”

“Where are they?” He asked.

“Daisho has him,” Ushijima said. “He’s in the red tent.”

“We won’t leave without him,” the stranger said.

“How do I know if I can trust you?” Ushijima asked.

“You don’t,” the stranger said with a sad smile, “But you don’t have many other choices, do you?”

Ushijima watched them silently as they left; the Domina’s laugh echoing down the hall. What was it Shirabu had told him? *Never trust the Dominata.* They have so much money that they have no need
of it between each other. They pay in knowledge, what they call ‘golden truths’ and glory and other things that Ushijima didn't understand. That was what the Auction was, a way for them to trade with one another and have fun while doing it. Maybe saving him was a way for her to have ‘fun’.

Either way, he was going to get Shirabu out of here.

Suga looked out at the night sky. Somewhere out there was Sawamura and the others. He wondered what they were doing. The ground shook slightly as something moved in the distance. Trees rustled as they parted. Suga was shocked to see a dark silhouette of something huge.

"Is that a dinosaur?"

Suga turned to see Kageyama standing behind him. A small sandy figure stood on his shoulder.

"The Unknown sure is something," Kageyama said.

"You can say that again," Suga said lightly. He gestured to Kageyama’s little friend, "That your new pet?"

"Please don’t tell Oikawa," Kageyama said, joining him near the railing.

"My lips are sealed," Suga said, mimicking zipping them and throwing away a key. "It’s cute, did you name it?"

"…I did," Kageyama said. Awkward silence fell between them.

"What did you name it?" Suga asked finally.

"…I’d rather not say," Kageyama said, the tips of his ears turning red.

"Um…alright, well then, what is it?" Suga asked instead.

"I don’t know," Kageyama answered, "It came back with Oikawa. It was bigger before, but yesterday a lot of it blew away suddenly."

"Seems to like you," Suga smiled and waved at it. It waved back exuberantly. "It kinda reminds me of Hina…" Suga glanced up at Kageyama’s face.

"Ahhh…" Suga said knowingly.

"Don’t look at me like that," Kageyama muttered.

"What are you going to do when you see him again?" Suga asked softly.

They both looked out at the dark forest before them. The dinosaur had disappeared into the distance, trees swaying where it had pushed through.

"Fight," Kageyama said. Suga laughed.

"Of course," Suga said, wiping at the corner of his eye. "That sounds exactly like what you two
would do.”

“We always fight,” Kageyama said, a little less humorously.

“But you know, fighting can sometimes be a sign of how well you actually get along,” Suga said, noticing Kageyama’s expression.

“That doesn’t make sense,” Kageyama said.

“If you can argue about something it means you can be honest with that person,” Suga said.

“That’s not true at all,” Kageyama said. I’ve never once been honest with any of you, Kageyama thought to himself.

“I guess ‘honest’ isn’t exactly the right way to put it,” Suga thought for a moment, “It’s more like… you can be yourself around them…you can voice your own opinions even if they’re different. In a way, an argument is like when two different worlds clash together. And if it’s a good argument, then you each take away something from it, you get stirred up and think about things you wouldn’t have otherwise.” Suga glanced at Kageyama’s stoic face.

“I’m just rambling on now, sorry,” Suga said, awkwardly.

“…Clashing worlds, huh,” Kageyama said with a dark expression. “There might be something to that.”

He pulled out a file from his bag.

“Oikawa told me to give this to you. I didn’t read it but I can’t imagine it’s anything good coming from him,” Kageyama said, “It might be about our plans or something.”

“No…” Suga said quietly, “I know what that is.”

He took the file hesitantly.

“Suga-San…” Kageyama said, “What will you do when you see Daichi-San again?”

“It’s getting late, Kageyama,” Suga said with a soft smile, “Don’t worry about it.”

Kageyama paused before leaving, his eyes searching Suga’s. Finally, he ducked his head and left Suga alone. Suga looked down at the file in his hand.

“…I don’t know,” Suga said to the empty balcony.

There was a huge pile of steaming shit on the back patio.

“Aone, are you seeing this?” Futakuchi asked. The big man next to him merely grunted. “What in the FUCK could have left THIS?”

A nearby tree shook and then toppled. Futakuchi’s face paled.
“That was a rhetorical question…” he said weakly as the head of a huge dinosaur poked between the trees.

“An ankylosaurus,” Aone said, pointing at the thing. Futakuchi looked up at him with an incredulous expression.

“For the love of god don’t fight it…” Futakuchi said, slapping his forehead.

For once, he wished Aone would actually listen to him, but the man had already drawn his pair of chui and his gaze was focused entirely on his new target. The chui was essentially a stick with a large metal ball on the end, a perfect weapon for Aone’s brute strength.

“MONIWAAAA!” Futakuchi shouted as he started marching back into the house.

The sound of clanking metal soon drowned out the sounds of Aone’s fight with the dinosaur as Futakuchi descended the stairs to the underground workshop. He found Moniwa near the forge with Kamasaki.

“What’s up, Futa-Chi?” Kamasaki asked as he approached.

“Aone’s fighting a dinosaur,” Futakuchi answered flatly, jerking his thumb in the direction behind him.

Moniwa’s face paled and the blueprints in his hands dropped to the floor as he took off.

“A dinosaur?” Kamasaki shook his head as he and Futakuchi followed Moniwa back upstairs.

When they arrived it seemed that the fighting had ceased. Aone stood locked eye to eye with the dinosaur. Aone gave it a short nod before turning to the others.

“Um, Aone…You can’t keep him…” Moniwa said gently.

Aone stared at Moniwa with intensity in his eyes.

“What, Aone!” Futakuchi whispered.

“I understand but he’s just…too big…and he’s a wild animal,” Moniwa struggled.

Aone loomed over him, staring even more intensely.

“…Just…for a little while then…” Moniwa relented.

Aone’s expression didn’t change but he seemed happy.

“Moniwa…what the heck was that?” Futakuchi asked, placing a hand on his shoulder.

“I know but I just can’t help it when he looks at me like that and begs,” Moniwa said dolefully.

“Where are we going to keep it…?” Kamasaki asked, staring at it.

“OI, Aone!” Futakuchi shouted, “You gotta look after this thing by yourself! It’s up to you to feed and house it!”

Aone gave him a short nod in response.

“I hope that thing eats grass,” Kamasaki grumbled.
“Well it didn’t eat Aone,” Futakuchi pointed out.

“If I were a giant dinosaur my first meal choice wouldn’t be Aone either,” Kamasaki said, “I’d go for someone soft, like Moniwa.”

The two of them stepped slightly in front of Moniwa, blocking the dinosaur from him.

“Um, thanks guys but it’s fine!” Moniwa said, pushing them aside, “That dinosaur looks like a herbivore!”

“Still looks pretty dangerous though,” Kamasaki said, eyeing the dinosaur’s hard skin and slightly spiked plates on its back.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine,” Moniwa said with a smile, “Aone won’t let it hurt anyone.”

The three of them looked over at Aone who was pushing his new pet towards the barn. The dinosaur seemed slightly disgruntled at the manhandling but it hadn’t bit his head off or sent him flying with its tail.

“…It’ll be fine,” Moniwa repeated, more for his own sake.

“See you gentlemen later,” Oikawa said, wiggling his fingers at Ikejiri and Terushima as he left the meeting room.

“Creepy bastard,” Terushima muttered, leaning against the desk. “How can he change so easily?”

“I have no idea,” Ikejiri said, slumping back in his seat, “It’s so draining for me. Cathal is too angry all the time.”

“At least he’s a man! Amaranth used to be fun but ever since the Luck Houses she’s been depressed,” Ikejiri said, running hand through his hair.

“Maybe the two of them are similar,” Ikejiri said. “Oikawa and Rie.”

“How so?” Terushima made a face.

“Maybe Oikawa also lost the one he loved,” Ikejiri said, “My room is right next to his. Sometimes, I hear his calling out a name in his sleep. Something like ‘Iwa-Chan’ I think.”

“Iwa-Chan? That’s a weird name,” Terushima said, scrunching his eyebrows together. “It must be short for something…Niwa…Keiwa…Miwa…?”

“None of those are very common names,” Ikejiri said, “Maybe I’m wrong then.” Although he didn’t think he was.

“I’m going to watch the Auction,” Terushima said, swinging his long legs to turn his chair around. He stood up and stretched languidly before resting his hands behind his head. “You coming?”

“No,” Ikejiri shook his head, “I can’t stand to watch that.”
“Well I can!” Terushima said cheerily as he left.

The silence felt heavy as soon as Terushima left. Ikejiri’s skin crawled as he felt Cathal’s presence bubbling under the surface. He turned to his reflection in the window. Had anyone been inside the room, they would have only seen Ikejiri’s reflection staring back at him, but Ikejiri saw something entirely different. He saw Aerimus Cathal.

Cathal had a rather tall and slender build despite his imposing personality. His blond hair was short and neat and his face would almost be boyish if not for the permanent scowl he always wore.

“I don’t want to go,” Ikejiri said before Cathal could say anything.

“From what Eaen has told me, there are priceless items to be won in that Auction,” Cathal growled.
“Have you ever considered that I might be interested in those?”

“And have you ever considered that seeing beings forced to fight over those things might upset me?” Ikejiri countered, turning his back on the reflection by spinning the chair around with his foot.

“If you identify with the weak then you will always lose in the end,” Cathal said.

“This and that are different things,” Ikejiri said tersely.

“They are not,” Cathal said with a certainty that pissed Ikejiri off.

“If you were so strong then why did you lose back then? Why did the cities you’re so proud of fall?” Ikejiri shouted.

“Because I was weak like you,” Cathal answered.

Ikejiri turned back around in surprise. Cathal’s haughty expression hadn’t changed but the depth in his eyes caught Ikejiri off guard.

“What do you mean?” Ikejiri asked.

“We all wanted something we couldn’t have,” Cathal said, “It brought us together. And in reaching for those things we tore everything apart.”

“What did you want?” Ikejiri asked directly, “Stop beating around the bush.”

Cathal fell silent. For the first time, the scowl dropped from his face and a wry half-smile played around his lips.

“I wanted Eaen Rie,” Cathal answered.

Ikejiri’s mouth fell open in shock.

“But as you know he loved Yara,” Cathal continued, ”He loved her so much that he took the knife I offered and severed her ties to the world because he thought it would make her human.”

“He’s the one who cut off her head?!” Ikejiri said, his head spinning.

“He only cut her hair, the thing that connected her to the earth,” Cathal explained, ”But he didn’t know that cutting her hair would be the same as cutting her neck. The fake human body she wore fell away and he was left with her head at his feet.”

“…Did you offer him that knife on purpose? So that she would die?” Ikejiri asked.
You think I knew that would happen?” Cathal snapped, “No…I wanted him to be happy. I may have hated that he loved her, but I didn’t hate her. How could I? She was the world…all I could do was be in awe of her.”

Ikejiri pushed off the chair and stood up.

“Where are you going?” Cathal asked.

“To see the Auction,” Ikejiri said, glancing over his shoulder at Cathal. “You wanted me to go, didn’t you?”

Cathal didn’t answer but he disappeared from the mirror reflection. Ikejiri sighed before leaving the room. It was a lot to take in, Cathal’s confessions.

To be honest, he had a hard time imagining Cathal with romantic feelings, and towards another man at that. Not that it was an uncommon orientation, it was just surprising to have that in common with him.

Ikejiri climbed down the gangway from the ship and towards the red tents that were set up around the back entrance to the Auction. Daisho looked over at him as he entered, his creepy smile stretching from ear to ear. Next to him, stood a beautiful blonde woman in a red gown with a high neck and a flared skirt. Her hair was cropped in a sleek bob and her cat-like eyes held a glimmer of amusement and mischief. Behind her stood two attendants that were rather plain-looking to be in the service of a Domina. Aside from their matching uniforms, one had sandy colored hair that was gelled back and the other sported a uniform buzzcut.

“I was really hoping to see the fairy!” The Domina pouted.

“I’m so sorry,” Daisho said smoothly, clasping his hands together in front of him, “The mwyn firain has already been moved to the location for the World Fair. Can I interest you in seeing any of the other beasts I’ve got for sale?”

“What do you have?” The Domina’s eyes glittered.

“At the moment, I have several demuto beasts,” Daisho said, spreading his arms with a flourish, “Of the animal variety I have a purebreed dog, a snowshoe hare, an ocelot, and of mythic origin, I have a centaur, a mermaid, and a…” Daisho leaned in and whispered dramatically, “…a phoenix.”

“Show me! Show me!” The Domina clapped her hands in excitement.

“This way,” Daisho said with a bow.

Ikejiri nodded bowed as the Domina passed by. The guards nodded as he entered the Auction building. The difference between the warehouse-like outside of the building and the coliseum interior was jarring. He went to the private box reserved for himself, Terushima and Oikawa.

Inside, Terushima had already made himself comfortable, with his legs stretched out onto Oikawa’s empty chair.

“I thought you weren’t coming,” Terushima raised an eyebrow as Ikejiri sat down.

“Cathal wanted to watch,” Ikejiri replied.

“Next up is a harpy and a bull demuto,” Terushima said gleefully, “They both won their previous matches. It was brutal! The harpy chick completely gouged out the eyes of a bear demuto earlier and
yesterday the bull demuto crushed a centaur with just his fists!”

Ikejiri felt queasy at Terushima’s descriptions.

“Thanks, didn’t need to know,” Ikejiri muttered.

The cell doors opened in the pit below. Just as Terushima had said, out came a bull demuto and a harpy. The demuto was a giant with rippling muscles and short brown hair. Strength and power radiated off him. Ikejiri shivered at the sight. The harpy flew out of her cell and circled the arena. Their eyes met as she flew past him.

“What’s she doing?” Terushima said, frowning.

Suddenly all the lights went out and the entire room was plunged into darkness. The sound of shattering glass resounded over the panicked screaming. Terushima pulled Ikejiri down to the floor.

“Crawl to the exit!” He shouted over the noise.

Glass broke behind them as Terushima got the door open. The guards were nowhere to be seen. Ikejiri turned around and illuminated by the light from the doorway stood the harpy. She almost looked like an ordinary girl, shoulder-length brown hair with a short childish fringe and big brown eyes.

So she hadn’t just been circling the arena for nothing, Ikejiri clued in. She’d been looking for them.

“What, the bull wasn’t enough of a fight for you?” Terushima said cockily, drawing his sword. She turned quickly and kicked it away, the long claws on the end of her feet clashing against the celestial steel blade. She grabbed Terushima by the throat and bashed his head against the wall. He went limp and she threw him out the window.

“Stop!” Ikejiri screamed, his own sword trembling in his hands. She was a whirlwind. Ikejiri felt something hit his head and then the room faded to black once more.

Misaki reached into Ikejiri’s jacket, searching for the keys to the cell doors. She found a slim plastic cards with the word ‘Master’ on them. There wasn’t anything to tie him up with, but Misaki figured he’d be out cold for hours anyway. She locked the door to the room and jumped out the hole she’d made in the window.

The arena was pitch-black but she didn’t need light to see. The audience had been mostly comprised of screens where the Dominus and Domina could watch from the comforts of their own homes. The screens were now shut off. The few real audience members had fled their seats, only to find themselves locked in the seating area by Kinoshita, Narita and Saeko.

Misaki flew down into the pit with Ushijima. He stood over Terushima’s body. She bent down and pulled an identical card from his jacket. He wasn’t dead, but he probably hit his head pretty hard and the angle of his right arm didn’t look great. Misaki stood back up and addressed the Bid-Winners.

“IF YOU WANT TO ESCAPE, TOUCH THE CELL DOOR AND I WILL FREE YOU,” Misaki shouted, “THERE IS A SHIP ABOVE US THAT CAN TAKE YOU WHERE YOU WANT TO
There were murmurings among the Bid-Winners as they took in her words. Several of them pressed against the cell doors immediately, while others were hesitant. Misaki handed one of the Master cards to Ushijima.

“I’ll free the higher cells,” She said, taking off into the air.

Ushijima nodded. He started opened doors. He got to the fourth door and was surprised that the tiger demuto from earlier was sitting on the cot.

“You don’t want out?” Ushijima said in surprise.

“Free the others first,” he said, waving Ushijima on, “There’s not a lot of time.”

Ushijima did as he was asked, casting a final look at the demuto before moving on. He made it to the cell next to his and looked in curiously to see who’d been talking to him earlier. They stood in front of the door without touching it, but as Ushijima walked up they waved. He had an undercut with the top being a lighter chemically altered color than the bottom. His eyes were large and hooded, and their slant gave him a sly appearance.

“I never could have imagined this,” the demuto smiled.

He reached out and knocked on the door. Ushijima unlocked the door and it opened. The demuto strolled out and stretched his arms out.

"You're a lot bigger up close," he remarked.

Ushijima and Misaki quickly freed the rest of the the Bid-Winners who wished to escape.

“Why are there not more of them?” Ushijima asked, looking at the crowd of about twenty.

“The others want to keep fighting,” Misaki said, “And some are addicted to the adrenaline spike their owners give them.”

The dome above them cracked and sunlight poured into the arena.

“Time to go,” Misaki said, spreading her wings.

Rope ladders unfurled towards them and everyone without wings scrambled to climb up. The demuto from cell 8 walked up to Ushijima.

“Thanks for freeing me,” he said, as giant wings appeared behind him. They were bigger than any Ushijima had ever seen. “I’m a Roc,” the demuto winked, “Name’s Miya, maybe I’ll see you around again some day.”

He took off, creating gusts of wind as he beat his wings. He turned away from the ship above them, flying off by himself.

“ Aren’t you heading up?” Misaki asked Ushijima.

“I have to find Shirabu,” Ushijima said, turning towards the exit.

Misaki looked like she wanted to stop him, but instead she sighed and said, “The red tents are outside the 4th exit. I’ll make sure you two aren’t left behind.”
Something silver flashed in the air as she tossed him something. He caught it easily.

“Take this, something to help you find him,” She said, before flying off to join the others.

Ushijima opened his hand. It was a whistle.

Daisho coughed, spitting up blood onto the floor. That faking bitch! Daisho seethed with anger. The blonde Domina had lured him to the backlot, away from his attendants with the guise of wanting to see what he’d had for sale. She’d turned suddenly, punching him in the throat and mouth and then her attendants had knocked his legs out from under him.

She took his keys and then electrocuted him with a staff she’d taken out from under her skirt. She had unlocked his wares right in front of him, setting them free. Those demuto he’d worked so hard to capture. And now they were long gone, following that woman to freedom.

“Ku-ku-gu-riii!” Daisho yelled hoarsely, pressing a button hidden in his sleeve.

“What’s going on here?” Said a lilting voice. Daisho froze. Despite the cheerful look on Oikawa’s face, anger radiated off of him.

“We’re being raided,” Daisho grumbled, “A fake Domina stole my keys.”

Just then, the lights went out and screams could be heard from inside the Auction.

“I’ll go welcome our guests,” Oikawa said in that dangerously friendly voice. Then he was gone. Daisho was glad for that, even if that meant he was all alone and could barely move. An happy Oikawa was a mere buffoon, but an angry Oikawa was...something akin to a dark lord in his cold and calculating manner. It sent unpleasant shivers down Daisho’s spine.

Daisho crawled to a pile of crates and pulled himself to his feet. He pressed the button in his sleeve again, holding it near his mouth.

“Hiroo, bring me my cane,” Daisho said.

He’d be damned if those thieves took everything from him while he was lying down as useless as a log.

“And Kuguri...kill that blonde bitch.”

“Allright,” Kuguri’s dispassioned voice replied through the communication device.

“Saeko!” One of her attendants, the tawny-haired one shouted.

The woman dodged just as Kuguri jumped down from the rafters in whirl of spinning blades and
slashed at the spot where she used to be. But that was alright. Kuguri straightened up. It’d be boring if she’d died immediately. Behind her were her fake attendants and about six of Daisho’s precious demuto.

“And who’re you?” She asked fiercely.

Saeko eyed the long curved swords he wielded with apprehension. His spinning attack from earlier would have cut her into something like an apple peel.

“Kuguri,” he replied.

Behind her, one of her companions seemed to recognize his name.

“From Hawthrone?” The centaur said.

Saeko felt a sense of dread at the mention of that name. Hawthrone, her parents had spoken about it before. The island of broken children.

Kuguri had seen that expression before, a mixture of pity and fear. How boring.

“You don’t have to worry,” Kuguri said, “I was only number 12.”

He dived low as he rushed forwards, the blades arcing upwards from below. Saeko spun away, tearing off the cumbersome skirt. She tossed the keys behind her and Narita caught them.

“Get to the roof,” Saeko ordered, without taking her eyes off the new opponent. “I’ll hold him here.”

The man appeared bored with this situation, despite the prowess he’d displayed with the two curved swords he was holding. Saeko knew she wasn’t a fighter and this man was clearly much better than her. She tightened her grip on her staff. All she had to do was poke him and press the button, easy-peasy.

She barely saw him move, he was only a blur before her eyes. She parried more with luck than with skill and his first blade clattered against her staff. The second blade sliced into her leg and she bit back a cry of pain.

“Saeko!” Kinoshita rushed in with his tonfas.

Kuguri dodged his first attack easily, and sent him flying back with a solid kick to the chest. Kinoshita knelt over, coughing violently.

“I told you to run!” Saeko said angrily, standing between them. “Protect the others!”

Kinoshita hesitated.

“NOW!” Saeko roared, as electricity crackled from the end of her staff.

“Dammit!” Kinoshita punched the ground. The demuto started running, Narita leading the way with Kinoshita bringing up the rear.

“I can’t let that happen,” Kuguri said flatly.

“Well you’re going to have to go through me first,” Saeko said.

Kuguri looked at her as if that wouldn’t be a problem. Suddenly, a loud piercing howl echoed through the hallway.
“What the he-” Kuguri jumped to the side just in time to avoid being smashed against the wall. As it was, a fist still clipped his side and knocked him down painfully.

“Ha ha...well I’ll be damned,” Saeko said in disbelief.

Behind Kuguri, stood Ushijima.

“Where’s Shirabu?” Ushijima asked Saeko, ignoring Kuguri.

“He’s safe!” Saeko said quickly, “More importantly, that guy’s dangerous!”

Kuguri had gotten back to his feet and he adjusted his grip on his swords. Ushijima glared at him.

“I don’t suppose you have a grudge against me,” Kuguri said, “It was nothing personal, just business.”

Kuguri rolled to the side as Ushijima charged him. He slashed at the back of Ushijima’s knees, but Ushijima turned quickly and grabbed Kuguri’s arm, crushing it in his fist. His sword dropped and clattered on the floor. Kuguri knew his arm was broken, the bone fracture from Ushijima’s pure strength. He sliced upwards with the other sword and it cut into the back of Ushijima’s shoulder blade.

Ushijima slammed Kuguri against the wall like a ragdoll and his other sword fell as well. Saeko almost felt sick watching. Kuguri’s fighting style had sent shivers down her spine at how cold and graceful it was, how there seemed to be no openings. But Ushijima’s fighting was raw power and even Kuguri’s skill could not beat it. There were no wasted movements in Ushijima’s fighting style, just pure destruction.

It was over in what seemed like hours, but in reality had only been a couple minutes at most. Ushijima’s fists were covered in blood. Kuguri laid at his feet, alive but just barely. His face was just as bored and expressionless as it had been when he was winning. He looked like a broken doll.

“Shirabu!” Ushijima’s eyes lit up and he rushed past Saeko.

“What happened…?”

Saeko turned around and saw Kinoshita standing with Shirabu.

“He did,” Saeko said, tilting her head towards Ushijima.

Shirabu was hugging Ushijima, who looked extremely pleased.

“I’m sorry I disobeyed orders,” Kinoshita said, bowing his head, “Shirabu refused to leave, he said he heard a whistle and then he started howling.”

“It’s fine,” Saeko said, clasping his shoulder, “I’m alive because of it.”

She walked up to Ushijima and Shirabu.

“So how about finally getting on that ship I told you about?” Saeko said with a grin.
“Oh shit,” Tsukishima said, looking out at the approaching starship on the horizon.

“I think you mean ship,” Oculus said.

“No, I stand by what I said,” Tsukishima said, eyeing the black and silver flags. “We’re in for a ton of shit.”

“RAISE THE SHIELDS!” Kiyoko bellowed, “READY THE GUNS!”

She flew around the deck, instructing her crew.

“Locked and loaded, Captain!” Shouted Nametsu, a centaurian girl with long brown hair pulled up into a tight ponytail.

“Shields ready!” Yelled Kuribayashi, a timid looking girl.

“Captain, Saeko and the others won’t be able to board the ship with all our shields up!” Ennoshita said.

“I know!” Kiyoko snapped. Of all the times to be short crew members! Kiyoko cursed. Tanaka and Nishinoya should have been back with the others by now. She’d been checking the omnia but there had been nothing since yesterday.

“Kuribayashi, switch to patterned, manual controls,” Kiyoko commanded.

“What!? But I’m not as good as Misaki,” Kuribayashi stammered.

“You’re good enough,” Kiyoko said reassuringly, placing a hand on her shoulder. Kuribayashi squared her shoulders. “A-alright then!”

Kuribayashi activated the glove controls and placed her hands on the metal ball that showed the shields around the ship. She moved the shields away from the bottom and set a pattern of shields spinning around the middle.

“That’s good,” Kiyoko said, “Nametsu, shoot between the shields!”

“Roger that, Captain!” Nametsu said, taking aim.

Tsukishima sensed someone walking up behind him. He turned and saw Yamaguchi. His heart leapt in his chest at the sight, but he didn’t let it show on his face.

“You should be below deck,” Tsukishima said, “You don’t fight.”

“But what about you?” Yamaguchi asked worriedly.

“I’m a fighter,” Tsukishima said, holding out his sword, “It’s what I do.”

“This metal sings,” Yamaguchi said, reaching out to touch it, “It’s not a metal meant for fighting with.”

“What are you talking about?” Tsukishima scoffed, “It’s a sword, dummy.”

“It doesn’t want to be,” Yamaguchi said, his hand pressed against the flat of the blade. “That’s what it is telling me.”
It sounded utterly ridiculous, but for some reason Tsukishima felt like Yamaguchi was telling the truth. He wasn’t someone who could lie. He thought back to his training with the Celestial Knights. They were given an unformed, stick of metal in the beginning. It only took its shape as a sword the more they practiced and the more skillful they got. It had been a rite of passage, forming your sword through experience. He wondered if maybe the practice had been something other than fighting, if maybe then his sword wouldn’t have been a sword.

But what did that matter? His sword was a sword now, no matter what it might have been. And he needed the sword to fight.

“That doesn’t matter,” Tsukishima said gruffly.

Yamaguchi’s face dropped at those words and Tsukishima kicked himself mentally. Just then, a shot got through Kuribayashi’s shields. Tsukishima moved quickly, diverting the bullet with his blade before it could hit Yamaguchi. The Celestial steel rang out with the sound.

“Get down!” Tsukishima said, his face tight with worry.

Yamaguchi looked shocked as he took in the scene around them. More bullets were passing through the shields as Oikawa’s gunners learned Kuribayashi’s patterns. Sweat dripped down her forehead as she moved several shields manually, trying to block each shot. One of her manual shields collided with a patterned one and electricity sparked at the impact, shooting off in all directions.

“Ah!” Kuribayashi screamed and pulled her hands off the shield control ball.

“NO!” Kiyoko shouted as the shields went haywire, moving sporadically in all directions.

The ship lurched as it took direct cannon fire. The crew was knocked off balance and Kuribayashi fell out of her chair. She scrambled to put her hands back, trying not to cry from her mistakes.

On the opposing ship, Oikawa stood at the center of the bow.

“Light ’em up.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes it is supposed to be Haw-throne, not thorne
Here Be Stranded

Chapter Summary

Good friends are hard to find.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the long wait, but to make up for it I went slightly over my 6000 word count. Hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The canons of the Cetus glowed orange as they were lit. They fired thunderously, exploding against the Virago’s hull.

“This is a waste of time,” Matsukawa said from beside Oikawa. “Even if we destroy the ship, there’s no way to round up that many Bid-Winners. We don’t have enough tranquilizers or people to restrain them.”

“You’re mistaken, my dear Matsun, this isn’t about keeping the Bid-Winners,” Oikawa said lightly, “This is about destroying those who think they could take them.”

He turned to Kageyama, Kindaichi, and Kunimi, who were standing behind them.

“Let’s board that ship,” Oikawa ordered with a smile.

Large steel bolts shot out of the side of the Cetus, hooking into the Virago’s frame. The chains pulled taunt as the gears turned, pulling the two ships together. The chains blocked the Virago’s shields from closing together, leaving a door-like gap for Oikawa’s crew.

“Shit!” Kiyoko cursed, drawing her twin pulse rifles.

“I assume those heavy footsteps from the bow are the bad guys?” Bokuto said, appearing next to Kiyoko. She looked over at him and her jaw nearly dropped. He was holding what appeared to be a metal whip made of interlocked steel rods.

“Where on earth did you get that…?” She asked, “And what is it?”

“A qilibian,” Bokuto said lovingly, “It means unicorn whip.”

“Don’t tell me you’re actually going to fight,” Ennoshita said in disbelief, “You’re blind!”

“Yeah, so don’t get in my way,” Bokuto said gleefully, “I’ll be swinging at anything that comes near me.”

With that, he took off at a run at their invaders, cackling madly.
“At least he doesn’t fight with a gun,” Ennoshita remarked, watching Bokuto swinging his whip around his head with reckless abandon.

Kindaichi blocked Bokuto’s wild swings before they could reach Oikawa. Oikawa stepped neatly around them, his focus on Kiyoko.

“Hel-” A bullet grazed the side of Oikawa’s cheek. A red line appeared as it welled with blood.

“Ah…” Oikawa smiled, “Not one for greetings?”

“Get off my ship,” Kiyoko said, keeping her gun pointed at Oikawa’s head.

“No,” Oikawa said, insufferably cheerfully.

Kiyoko shot at his smug face. Kunimi blocked the pulse with his sword and it ricocheted off to the side.

“Kageyama,” Oikawa said, “Cut the rope.”

Kiyoko’s eyes widened. A dark-haired young man ran off from Oikawa’s group towards starboard. With one deft movement, he cut one of the rope ladders. Screams could be heard from people falling. Someone suddenly shoved him away from the rope.

Kageyama recovered quickly, turning with his sword. It clashed and rang out in a sound that only celestial steel on celestial steel makes. He looked up to see a familiar face glaring down at him.

“Tsukishima,” Kageyama said.

“The hell do you think you’re doing?” Tsukishima said with cold anger. For a moment, Kageyama was taken aback. He had never, in all their time training together, seen Tsukishima’s face filled with so much emotion, or really filled with any emotion other than sarcasm or annoyance.

“I’m following orders,” Kageyama said, leaping back and re-adjusting his stance.

“Wrong answer,” Tsukishima said, as they clashed swords, “Actually what you’re doing is being a huge fucking moron!”

Kageyama gritted his teeth, biting back a reply. Talking wouldn’t get them anywhere. It never had. He spun back, unlocking his blade from Tsukishima’s and then lunging and slicing at him. Tsukishima barely deflected it but he recovered quickly, knocking him back again. Kageyama cursed, Tsukishima had gotten better since the last time they’d sparred. That seemed like forever ago now. There was less reservation in his eyes and the hesitation in his movements was gone. Tsukishima kicked him in the chest. His foot held Kageyama’s sword hand to the ground and he held his own blade at Kageyama’s neck.

“Why aren’t you killing me?” Kageyama growled.

“Hinata still wants to save you, you know,” Tsukishima said coldly, “Even now, he’s probably still thinking you’re someone worth saving.”

“I don’t need saved,” Kageyama said.

“You sure about that?” Tsukishima said, bending over. He grabbed Kageyama and grunted as he turned, using his weight to toss Kageyama overboard.

“Shall I go?” Kunimi asked, as he and Oikawa watched Kageyama get tossed over the side of the
ship.

“He’ll be fine,” Oikawa said dismissively.

Kageyama was not fine. In fact, he was falling to what he assumed would be his death. He reacted to that realization with a calmness that Tsukishima would have found incredibly annoying. He relaxed his body and prepared to roll with the impact. There wasn’t much else he could do. He nearly choked as something grabbed onto the back of his jacket and stopped him from falling further.

“I’ll skin alive whichever bastard cut that rope!” A female voice fumed from behind Kageyama.

Little did she know, she was carrying said rope-cutting bastard. Kageyama wisely decided to keep quiet about that. His savior must have thought he was one of the demuto who’d been climbing up when it was cut. He then noticed that instead of getting closer to the ground, he was flying away from it. Which means that he would soon be back up face-to-face with Tsukishima. And while that didn’t scare him, the fact that Tsukishima would immediately reveal Kageyama’s identity as the rope-cutting bastard to the person carrying him did. He didn’t exactly feel like falling to his death twice in two minutes.

“L-let me down!” Kageyama croaked out.

“What?” She seemed confused, “But don’t you want on the ship?”

“Not anymore!” Kageyama shouted.

“Fair enough,” She said, swooping down. Kageyama’s stomach lurched at the drop.

“He’s the last, Saeko,” The person holding Kageyama said, letting him go.

Before him was a beautiful blonde woman with a sharp bob hairstyle and pointed eyes. She was dressed like a Domina, with two bodyguards behind her.

“Are you hurt?” The woman, Saeko asked him.

“No,” He answered.

“Saeko!” One of her bodyguards shouted, pointing up at the two ships above them.

The Virago’s shields were down and the Cetus was bombarding it at close range. The Virago cracked in half and the back end started plummeting towards them while the front hung on to the Cetus. The Cetus released its harpoons and let the front end of the Virago follow its stern to the ground. Kageyama looked away from the wreck above and saw the blonde woman’s face as she watched helplessly.

Kageyama didn’t think, only felt himself moving as he grabbed her and pulled her with him to escape the falling ship. The first half of the ship crashed and splintered apart, shooting debris in all directions. Kageyama cursed as something lodged into the back of his leg. He looked behind him only to see a huge piece of the mast falling towards them.

“Move!” He shouted, pushing the woman away from him.

She stumbled away and tried to pull him with her, but the wood piercing his leg slowed him down. He shoved her back and ducked for cover. It landed awkwardly, missing crushing Kageyama to death by mere inches.
Then the second half of the ship fell. Kageyama curled into a ball under the mast, praying to whatever deity would listen to him.

“They didn’t even want the demuto,” Saeko said numbly, “They just wanted to destroy us.”

Before her, the Virago lay in a million shattered pieces. The Cetus had turned around in the sky and sailed away. She froze as her gaze landed on a sleek piece of cherry mahogany. It was a piece of Kiyoko’s jewelry box, one that Saeko had bought for her birthday several years ago. The Virago had been more than a ship; it had been their home.

“What do we do now?” A random demuto asked.

Saeko didn’t know. Kinoshita and Narita were both silent.

Something floated down from the sky. As it got closer, Narita could make out a wide piece of wood, most likely from the floor of the ship, with a person underneath it. Narita blinked and he could almost see wings.

“Captain,” He said. Kiyoko landed and set the piece of wood with Ennoshita, Nametsu, and Kuribayashi on it down gently.

“Search the wreckage for survivors,” Kiyoko ordered.

“Yes, Captain!” Narita and Kinoshita answered.

Kiyoko tucked her hair behind her ears and tried not to let her worry or fear show on her face. She had only been able to grab onto the people closest to her when the ship fell. She didn’t know where Bokuto, Tsukishima and Yamaguchi were and she hoped that against all odds they were okay. Kiyoko was suddenly enveloped in a strong embrace. She breathed in the familiar warm and amber smell of Saeko. A wave of relief flowed through her and her arms instinctively wrapped around her in reciprocation.

“Thank god,” Saeko said, hugging her tighter.

Kiyoko struggled to find something to say but words were failing her. Saeko withdrew with a small smile on her face.

“Let’s find the others,” Saeko said.

Most of the freed Bid-Winners had disappeared into the surrounding woods during the commotion and now that the Virago lay in smithereens, the rest were inclined to follow suit.

“Well shit,” Kinoshita said, crossing his arms and surveying the damage.

“What do you think that is?” Narita said, pointing to what looked oddly like a gigantic ball of sticks.

“Is it wood?” Kinoshita asked, touching it. It felt weird, definitely not like wood. Kinoshita knocked on it.

“Um, a little help please?” Said a timid voice from inside the ball.

“Yamaguchi?” Kinoshita said in surprise.

“My antlers seemed to have grown too much and now we’re stuck,” Yamaguchi explained.

“We? Who else is in there?” Narita asked.
“Tsukishima,” Yamaguchi answered.

“Are you sure bashing it apart won’t hurt you?” Kinoshita asked.

“I-I’ll be fine,” Yamaguchi said nervously, “It’ll detach from my head if you hit it here.”

Yamaguchi knocked at a certain part of the ball. Kinoshita and Narita looked at each other and shrugged.

“Here goes,” Kinoshita said, raising his tonfa over his head.

Yamaguchi yelped as Kinoshita whacked the spot as hard as he could. The antlers fell apart in two halves, revealing Yamaguchi holding the back of his head in pain. Tsukishima was lying down, his head in Yamaguchi’s lap.

“Sorry about that,” Kinoshita said.

“What happened to him?” Narita asked, pointing to Tsukishima.

“That was my fault,” Yamaguchi said miserably, “I dropped him when we bounced off the ground and he hit his head.”

“Good thing you dropped him after you had already bounced,” Kinoshita said, “Or his skull might look like your antlers.”

“Anyway, we should take him to Ennoshita,” Narita said.

Kinoshita and Narita moved to pick Tsukishima up but Yamaguchi stopped them.

“Um! I-I can carry him!” Yamaguchi said earnestly. They lifted Tsukishima’s body effortlessly, to Kinoshita and Narita’s surprise.

“I think I tend to forget how big that guy is,” Kinoshita whispered to Narita.

“Me too,” Narita whispered back.

Tsukishima opened his eyes to see Ennoshita looking down at him indifferently.

“Oh, you’re alive,” Ennoshita said, “Congratulations.”

“My head hurts,” Tsukishima said, glaring at him.

“Want me to kiss it better?” Ennoshita raised an eyebrow.

“No,” Tsukishima pushed Ennoshita’s head aside as he sat up. He abruptly came face to face with a very worried Yamaguchi and he jumped in surprise.

“I’m so sorry!” Yamaguchi practically shouted. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine—” Tsukishima was suddenly interrupted by something incredibly soft being smushed against his lips with brute force. His eyes widened in shock. Yamaguchi pulled back quickly and eagerly searched Tsukishima’s expression.

“Do you feel better?” Yamaguchi asked.

“I-I-I…..” Tsukishima stammered, for once words were failing him.
“Yamaguchi, you broke him,” Ennoshita said flatly, hiding his amusement.

“What?” Yamaguchi squeaked, “I’m so sorry! I’ll try again!”

“I’m fine!” Tsukishima shouted, holding Yamaguchi back by the shoulders. His face was bright red and he glared at Ennoshita, who was looking extremely amused by the situation.

“So...it did work?” Yamaguchi said hopefully.

“Yes,” Tsukishima said, looking away, “Thanks....”

It was then that he noticed the state of ruination all around them. Tsukishima stood up and looked around in shock.

“What happened?” All he remembered was Yamaguchi grabbing him, his antlers growing wildly around them and then he had hit his head.

“The Virago was shot down,” Ennoshita said, “We all fell. Most of the escaped Bid-Winners have left the premises. Kiyoko and the rest of our crew are safe, but no one has seen Bokuto. I’m glad you two are alive.”

“Yeah, me too,” Tsukishima said gruffly. He rubbed the back of his head. He looked up at the sky above them. He narrowed his eyes suddenly and then took off in a brisk walk towards a pile of rubble.

Kageyama opened his eyes and took stock of his injuries. There’s the pain in his leg first off, and then his ribs feel bruised or possibly broken - Kageyama took and breath and hissed in pain - no yeah some ribs were definitely broken. He was pinned under a huge piece of wood and upon looking around he realized that had probably saved him from getting hit by other debris. He sucked in his chest painfully and tried to wiggle out from under it. He had slow success, pulling himself out painful centimeter by painful centimeter. He sat back, leaning on his arms and tilted his head back, breathing as much as he could. He opened his eyes, looking up at the space were only moments before there had been two starships.

And he saw a man falling from the sky.

Well not exactly falling, just sort of leisurely descending, but Kageyama didn’t know how else to describe it. He didn’t have any wings or some sort of parachute and as far as Kageyama knew there weren’t any demuto that could just float like that without showing any physical attributes that would allow for such a thing. The man landed neatly a few feet from Kageyama. He stumbled a bit but recovered quickly.

“Whoa! Bit uneven,” The man remarked cheerfully.

“Hey!” Kageyama yelled, “Can you help me out from under here?”

“Under where?” The man’s head whirled around, stopping in Kageyama’s direction.

“Very funny,” Kageyama said in annoyance, “Out from under this giant piece of wood!”
“Alright, yell if I move it the wrong way,” The man said, “I’m blind!”

“Of course...of fucking course,” Kageyama muttered.

“The name’s Bokuto! What’s yours, unlucky stranger?” Bokuto said, feeling around the wood.

“...Tobio…” Kageyama figured less people would know his first name.

“Huh, I know a dinosaur with that same name,” Bokuto said, “You’re not a dinosaur demuto, are you?”

“No, I am not,” Kageyama said flatly. Of course this weirdo would know a dinosaur named Tobio, Kageyama thought to himself.

Bokuto found the edge and started lifting, grunting with the effort. Kageyama used his elbows to army crawl out as best he could.

“I’m out,” Kageyama said, panting from the effort. Bokuto dropped the piece of wood in relief.

“Bokuto-san! Bokutoooo-saan!”

Bokuto and Kageyama recognized that irritated voice.

“Eh? Is that you, Tsukishima?” Bokuto said, perking up.

Kageyama buried his head in the dirt. Fuck, it was Tsukishima. He frantically pulled some pieces of wood over him, hoping in vain to hide before it was too late.

“Bokuto-San! You’re not a puddle…” Tsukishima sounded surprised.

“Nope!” Bokuto grinned, holding his arms out, “All in one piece!”

“How did you manage that?” Ennoshita asked. He had been following Tsukishima and he looked slightly out of breath.

“Ah, did I never show you this?” Bokuto pointed at his belt.

“A floater belt,” Ennoshita said, “How’d you get one of those? I thought only shipwrights had them.” They were difficult for anyone who wasn't a shipwright to obtain since you needed a licence for it.

“Akaashi gave it to me,” Bokuto said proudly.

“That makes sense,” Tsukishima said. For Bokuto, who was blind and reckless, a floater belt would be the perfect gift.

“Um, who is that?” Yamaguchi said, pointing down near Bokuto’s feet.

Kageyama froze.

“Ah, this is my new friend, Tobio!” Bokuto declared, “He’s not a dinosaur!”

“I think he’s dead,” Ennoshita said, “He’s covered in dirt and debris.”

Yes, that’s right, Kageyama thought. I am definitely dead, please go away now.

“Did you say ‘Tobio’,” Tsukishima asked.
FUCK, Kageyama thought.

He only had one shot. He pursed his lips and whistled sharply. The others were startled by his sudden movements as he whirled to his feet. He outstretched his right hand and an answering whistle sounded as his sword flew out of the rubble and back to his hand. Tsukishima ducked as Kageyama lunged for him, swinging his sword through the air where Tsukishima’s head used to be.

Time seemed to slow as their eyes met each other’s glares. Then Ennoshita kicked Kageyama’s injured leg and he fell to the ground with a thud. Kageyama let out a slew of curses.

“You know this guy?” Bokuto asked Tsukishima.

“This is the guy Hinata wants to save,” Tsukishima said with disgust.

“Ah, that one. So he’s under some sort of mind control, huh? It must be some hell of a drug to make him this unpleasant,” Ennoshita remarked.

“No, that’s what he’s like normally,” Tsukishima replied.

“Oh...remind me why Hinata wants to save him again?” Ennoshita said, raising an eyebrow.

“No idea,” Tsukishima said, “I don’t exactly share the same sentiment.”

“Well what are we going to do with him?” Ennoshita asked.

Tsukishima looked down at Kageyama. He had a strong feeling he was going to regret it but against his better judgement he said, “Bring him with us.”

They gathered back to where Kiyoko and Saeko were. The girls had cleared an area of debris and set up a small campsite, using pieces of the ship as a lean-to shelter. Kiyoko had lit a fire as well. It seemed no one had been eager to use the auction building as shelter, which was understandable considering its recent history.

The crew of the Virago settled down around the fire. Kageyama was sat between Ennoshita and Narita, ropes tying his hands behind his back. His sword was being held onto by Tsukishima.

“If I had known he was one of the enemy I would have just let him fall,” Misaki grumbled. She glared across the fire at Kageyama.

“So is he our prisoner now?” Bokuto asked, “Or are we saving him? I got a bit confused with your explanation earlier.”

“Until Sawamura gets back, he’s our prisoner,” Tsukishima said, “Feel free to be a dick to him.”

“Just how are we going to keep a prisoner when we don’t have a ship?” Kiyoko asked, raising an eyebrow.

“On a leash,” Tsukishima said, holding up the other end of the rope tied to Kageyama’s hands.

“I’m not a dog,” Kageyama said irritably.

“You sure seemed like Oikawa’s dog,” Tsukishima retorted.

“Speaking of dogs, I’d like to introduce two new members of our crew!” Saeko jumped in.

She gestured to a young man with a medium build with light brown hair in a diagonal bowl-cut.
“This is Shirabu, a dog demuto, and his friend Ushijima, a cow demuto.”

Next to Shirabu was a huge man with a muscular build and short dark brown hair. He nodded in greeting.

“You’ve met me, Misaki, Narita and Kinoshita already,” Saeko said, “And my companions here are Nametsu, Kuribayashi, and Ennoshita.”

“My name is Kiyoko Shimizu, Captain of this unruly bunch,” Kiyoko said with a smile, “Well, some of this unruly bunch…”

“I-I’m Yamaguchi Tadashi,” Yamaguchi said shyly.

“Tsukishima,” Tsukishima said curtly.

“Bokuto Koutarou!” Bokuto said, his hand shooting up in the air.

“…It’s nice to meet you all,” Shirabu said hesitantly, “I’m really grateful for what you did for us…really…” He seemed troubled and he unconsciously held onto Ushijima’s shirt. “But I don’t think we can join your crew.”

Silence fell over the group. Shirabu looked down at his lap, feeling miserable but determined about his decision. These pirates seemed like nice people, but they were considered criminals by most governments. If he and Ushijima were to join them then they’d also be wanted criminals. He didn’t leave the farm with Ushijima for a life like that.

“I think you’ve misunderstood,” Kiyoko said kindly, “It’s true that you’re free to join us, but we didn’t help you with that in mind. It’s not a requirement.”

“Huh?” Shirabu looked up in surprise.

“Do you know what the word ‘demuto’ means?” Kiyoko asked him.

Shirabu looked at her curiously, wondering what answer she had in mind.

“Demuto are beings of change,” Kiyoko said, “For ages, those called demuto have been feared, enslaved, and abused. We have also hurt others. I want to change that.”

“By saving random demuto?” Shirabu asked, “How will you do that? You can’t change the world.”

Kiyoko glanced down at Kageyama.

“I am going to make a nation where demuto can live freely,” She answered. Shirabu’s eyes widened.

“A place for demuto, away from lutum,” Kiyoko continued.

_Lutum_, Kageyama scowled. That was a word the demuto used against anyone who wasn’t demuto, namely humans. It meant ‘dirt’ or in some nicer translations, ‘clay’.

“You don’t have to join our crew and you don’t have to fight with us,” Kiyoko said, “I just want you to know that soon, there will be a place where you can live freely among others of our kind.”

“…Thank you,” Shirabu said, although he still had an uneasy expression on his face. Kiyoko chalked it up to the events of the day.

“Tomorrow we will head to Grimith,” Kiyoko said.

“We need a new ship,” Kiyoko said, “And information.”

“But only Black Hawkers can get into Grimith,” Nametsu said.

Bokuto cleared his throat and puffed out his chest.

“I’m sure we don’t even need to ask,” Ennoshita drawled, “But could you help us with that, Bokuto-San?”

The first thing that Inuoka thought when he came back to consciousness was “ow”. The second thing was, wow heaven sure has some buff-looking angels. Or maybe this was hell...probably for getting the van destroyed without permission.

“Yo,” said the scarier looking one of the two. He had a shaved head and a sharp grin.

Inuoka’s head hurt and he felt dizzy. Also his arm hurt a lot. Maybe he wasn’t dead, maybe he was just dying. That kinda sucked. He realized he was lying down in some sort of vehicle. Above him, he could see the sky and it seemed like they were moving fast.

“What city are you from?” asked the other.

“Dosne…” Inuoka answered.

“A Known city.” Sawamura ran a hand through his short hair in frustration. “This guy has seen way too much to just drop him off in a Known city, and we’re not exactly going to blend in either.”

Known cities were such a pain, filled with people who refused to acknowledge anything they deemed strange or out of the ordinary. They didn’t believe in demuto, or tangible desire, or any of the other wonderful and strange beings living in the world. Sawamura glanced at Inuoka. The poor guy probably thought the world was flat. Every Known city was protected by a subset of the Celestial Knights, a group of people called Borders.

“it’ll be fine, I visit Known cities all the time,” Tanaka said, waving his hand dismissively, “And no one there will believe anything he says.” It was a small lie, technically it was Nishinoya who always infiltrated and Tanaka who waited on the outskirts with the getaway. Known cities were primitive when it came to most things, but they were good at building useful knicknacks. And it was always fun to read the wildly imaginative and misinformed novels written by Known worlders.

“So you can get us in?” Sawamura asked.

There were only a few ways to enter a Known city without getting booted out. Normally, it would be easy for him to enter a Known city, but he didn’t have his Celestial Knight uniform. Not to mention he was currently on the run from Celestial Knights...

“Are you angels? Or devils?” Inuoka asked. The two exchanged glances.
“We’d better get him to a hospital quick,” Sawamura said, “He’s delusional from the pain.”

“What’s your name, kid?” Tanaka asked him.

“Inuoka Sho,” Inuoka answered.

“Well hang on, Sho-Kun!” Tanaka said, revving the nightrider, “We’re gonna make sure you don’t see any angels or devils!”

“What happened? Who are you guys?” Inuoka asked. His mind was started to clear, he remembered helping a guy named Kenma and then...the ground had torn apart and rose into the air. Something hit him. From there, his memory started getting fuzzy.

“You can call me Sawa...to,” Sawamura said. Tanaka shot him a strange look but didn’t say anything. “And this is Tanamura...I don’t know how much Kenma told you, but we’re his friends.” He ignored the set of dubious eyes boring into the back of his head.

“Is Kenma alright?” Inuoka asked, “He didn’t tell me much, but I could tell there was something that was really bothering him. I’ve always had a good intuition about that.”

“He’s alright now, I think,” Sawamura said. He hoped anyway. But if anyone could cheer him up it would be Hinata. Hinata just had that effect on people. He even managed to get close to the grumpy Kageyama and aloof Tsukishima, although they were always bickering. Hinata was just the glue that kept people together.

“We’re here!” Tanaka declared as the ship landed a little ways away from Dosne.

Like all Known cities, it had 4 gates leading in and out of the city and the rest was surrounded by a short waist-high wall that served as the marker for the invisible shield operated by Borders. Tanaka had landed near the wall, between the north and east gates. There was a glimmer in the invisible shield as they landed. Two figures pushed out of the shield’s membrane-like substance. Inuoka’s jaw dropped.

“You guys saw that too, right?” Inuoka’s head whipped around to look at Sawamura and Tanaka, “They just-just appeared out of thin air!”

“You stay quiet,” Sawamura said.

One was a very pretty young woman with glossy black hair cut into a short bob. She appeared to be tall, even taller perhaps than either Sawamura or Tanaka. Her companion was a shorter girl with a more severe black bob. They wore dark blue uniforms with silver lines and the Celestial emblem was emblazoned on their backs.

“Now, just let me do all the talking!” Tanaka declared.

“You stay quiet,” Sawamura said.

“Are you sure about that?” Sawamura asked worriedly.

“Trust me,” Tanaka winked, “I have a plan.”

Tanaka got out of his seat and picked up Inuoka in a princess carry.

“Eh?” Inuoka froze in shock. Tanaka grinned and then kicked open the door to the nightrider.

“Help us!!!” Tanaka shouted, “We need a hospital!”

“...Well that was straightforward,” Sawamura muttered to himself.
“Halt!” The taller girl said, “Who are you?”

“Tanamaru,” Tanaka said, wheezing with exaggerated effort, “My friend Sawato and I found this young man in the forest! I think he fell while climbing a tree!”

“Um,” Inuoka spoke up, “I can walk...it’s just my arm that’s broken.”

The taller girl was silent as she scrutinized Tanaka’s face. Great, Sawamura thought to himself, Tanaka’s bad acting was going to get them arrested.

“You look familiar…” Suddenly her face lit up, “Ryu-Chan?”

“Eh?” Tanaka was stunned.

“You don’t recognize me?” The girl pouted slightly.

“Wait...Kanoka?” This time Tanaka’s jaw practically dropped to the floor. “What are you doing here?”

“I joined Borders a few years ago,” The girl smiled brightly.

“But your parents…” Tanaka looked conflicted.

The girl briefly smiled before her colleague cleared her throat.

“Ah, Tsu-Chan this is my childhood friend, Ryu-Chan,” Kanoka said cheerfully.

“Then why did he introduce himself as ‘Tanamura’?” her colleague asked skeptically. Kanoka’s face fell.

“Ah...I ran away from home a long time ago,” Tanaka explained awkwardly.

“Anyway, let’s get your friend to a hospital,” Kanoka smiled.

She placed her hand on the shield and it opened to a parking lot. Inuoka’s eyes were practically bugging out of his head.

“Wow…” Inuoka breathed.

Tanaka grinned down at him as he stepped through the portal Kanoka had opened up. Once they were there Kanoka took charge. Inuoka was soon found uncomfortably laying on a hospital gurney getting prepped for surgery. Tanaka stepped out of the room with the two Borders officers.

“They’ll fix you up soon,” Sawamura said, “Sorry for all the trouble. I hope it heals soon.”

“It sounds like you’re saying goodbye,” Inuoka said. He felt something in his chest, a feeling that was both painful and exhilarating.

“I am,” Sawamura said, “We have to leave. Our friends are waiting for us.”

And then he felt like he was falling, like the ground beneath him was missing.

“O-of course, you need to get back to them!” Inuoka said, flustered, “Tell Kenma I hope he finds whatever he’s looking for.”

“I will,” Sawamura smiled, “Bye Inuoka-San.”
“Bye...Sawato-San,” Inuoka said as Sawamura left.

Inuoka turned his head and stared up at the ceiling. What a strange couple of days. He’d ridden in a flying car, woke up to the ground beneath him ripping apart and falling into the sky, and he rode in a hovercraft that looked like something straight out of a science fiction book! Before yesterday, he had never even left Dosne.

Who knew the world was so...big?

“Ahh,” Inuoka said aloud, “I guess I was hoping they would bring me with them.”

“You can’t go anywhere with that arm,” said a voice from the doorway. Inuoka turned to see the shorter girl standing there.

“Ah, I don’t think we were introduced,” Inuoka said, “I’m Inuoka Sho, nice to mee-”

The girl suddenly grabbed onto his head, covering his forehead with her palm.

“Inuoka Sho, I am going to offer you a choice,” she said coldly, “Forget everything from the past two days and live your life as normal, as it has always been.”

Each word felt heavy.

Forget everything, Inuoka’s eyes widened. Forget Kenma and Sawato and Tanamura and that the world outside of Dosne was full of strange and unexplainable things? ‘Normal’ suddenly felt constricting.

“Or,” The girl continued. Inuoka felt a spike of adrenaline rush through him.

“Keep your memories and join Borders.”

The hallway outside Inuoka’s room was empty but Sawamura could hear voices from around the corner.

“You aren’t going to see your parents?” Kanoka asked. “They were so worried after you and Sae-Chan disappeared.”

Sawamura peeked around and saw that Tanaka’s face was serious, a rare expression for him. He ducked back behind the corner and decided to wait for them to finish their conversation.

“Worried about their reputation” Tanaka said, “Kanoka, you’re a good girl, you try to see the good in everybody, but sometimes the bad outweighs whatever good there is. And the Dominata are irredeemable.”

Sawamura froze. The way Tanaka was talking...it was almost as if his parents were…

“Saeko and I left the Dominata when we disappeared.” Tanaka said, “And we’re never going back.”

Kanoka was quiet.
“People can change you know,” Kanoka said finally, “I am no longer part of the Dominata. I abdicated once I turned eighteen. After you and Sae-Chan disappeared I thought that by joining Borders I would have the best chance to see you two again. But I also got the chance to meet many different people, demuto and otherwise indescribable.”

“Why?” Tanaka asked, dumbstruck.

“I wanted to know why you and Sae-Chan left,” Kanoka said, “I had to know what I was missing out on.”

“But your parents…”

“I visit them once a week,” Kanoka smiled.

“What?” Tanaka blinked in surprise.

“They hated that I left at first,” Kanoka said, “It took them a year to speak to me again. But now they regularly ask me about my day and their fascinated by even the smallest things.”

“I’m happy for you,” Tanaka said.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Sawamura said, walking up to them. He smiled apologetically. “We should get going.”

“You’re leaving? So soon?” Kanoka’s face fell.

“I’ll visit,” Tanaka said, reaching over and messing up her hair, “Can’t promise it’ll be once a week, but I’ll come back soon.”

Sawamura politely averted his eyes as Kanoka blushed.

“She likes you,” Sawamura said after they were back on the nightrider.

“Noooooooalright yes, I also noticed,” Tanaka said, putting up a weak defense.

“She’s cute,” Sawamura remarked, glancing at Tanaka out of the corner of his eye.

“She is,” Tanaka agreed, “But my heart belongs to another…”

“Ah, your cap-”


The nightrider raced silently across the sky, back the way they had came. In a matter of minutes they were back to where they had left Hinata, Nishinoya, and Kenma.

“Is that Lev?” Sawamura asked.

“Yup! I’m back together!” Lev declared happily.

“I’m not returning to the group without Kuroo,” Kenma said seriously.

“And I’m not returning without Kenma!” Hinata declared.

Sawamura sighed again. Just like glue...
“So we’re going on another search and rescue mission…” Sawamura said with a sigh, “I should have anticipated this honestly.”

“Well do you have any idea how to find him?” Tanaka asked Kenma.

“The same way that Lev found me,” Kenma said, “I couldn’t sense him before because I was panicked and I wasn’t thinking clearly. But I can sense him now.”

“And where is that Kuroo-sense pointing?” Tanaka asked.

“There,” Kenma said, pointing east.

“Ah, the ocean,” Sawamura said flatly.

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Yachi couldn’t sleep. It wasn’t because of the hard bars underneath the thin blanket covering the bottom of her cage, nor was it the constant murmurs and crying of the other captured demuto. Her skin ached and she wondered how many days it had been since she had taken her last inhibitor. The last one...she had taken it while riding on Tobio with everyone.

Everyone... She wondered how they all were doing. Sawamura, Tsukishima, Hinata, Kenma, Kuroo...It felt like an eternity since she had seen them last. Maybe they had forgotten about her. She rubbed away the tears welling at the corners of her eyes.

“Yachi-San,” Akaashi said quietly. Yachi froze, worried he had heard her crying.

“Y-yes?” she said.

“I think the ship has stopped moving.” Yachi laid still and realized that he was right.

“Where are we?” Yachi wondered aloud.

“More of us might be sold to the Dominata,” Akaashi said.

“Not this time” said a voice from a different cage. Yachi and Akaashi looked around, searching for the owner of that voice.

“Over here,” it belonged to a large person who was lounging on his side. Gigantic wings were folded behind him. Hooded eyes looked out from a bored expression and he had a dark brown undercut.

“Name’s Miya, I’m a Roc,” he said.

“What makes you so sure?” Akaashi asked him.

“Daisho’s got a lot of customers, he sells some as Bid-Winners in a blood auction for Dominata,” Miya said matter-of-factly, “But he’s keeping half of us for his World Fair.”

“It’s not his World Fair,” Yachi said, her brow furrowed, “It’s Oikawa’s.”

Miya shrugged.
“Yachi-San, are you alright?” Akaashi said worriedly.

Yachi was hunched over in her cage. She was hunched over and her skin was pale and covered in sweat.

“I-it’s from wi-withdrawals…from my…in-inhibitors,” Yachi said through clenched teeth.

Akaashi had heard of mythic demuto who took inhibitors to quell aspects of their nature. A glossy sheen covered Yachi’s back. Akaashi had thought it was sweat at first, but then two gossamer wings flexed from her shoulder blades. Her ears grew pointed and her skin took on a golden shine. She stopped shaking and sat up suddenly. Her posture was different, more graceful and less clumsy. She turned towards Akaashi and he saw that her eyes were different, cat-like and bright amber.

Glancing past her, Akaashi felt a chill as he saw the look on Miya’s face. Miya had sat up in his cage when Yachi’s wings unfurled from her back. The expression on his face was a mixture of curiosity and hunger.

“Well what a surprise…” Miya said quietly, his eyes gleaming.

“What do you mean by that?” Akaashi said aggressively. He didn’t like that hungry look in Miya’s eyes.

“No wonder he kept the little girl,” Miya said, “But what are you?” The Roc’s gaze turned towards Akaashi.

“…The same as her,” Akaashi answered cautiously.

“No…Daisho doesn’t want two of the same thing,” Miya said knowingly.

Just then the stairs creaked. All three of them fell silent as footsteps approached the cages. A silver-haired man walked among the crates near the stairs. He looked around surreptitiously before pulling a file out of his satchel.

“He’s a new one,” Akaashi whispered.

“No,” Yachi said. Her eyes were sad. “I know him too…”

Chapter End Notes

Looks like Nishinoya won that bet.
“This is stupid and I hate you,” Kuroo grumbled.

Goshiki was holding onto a ribbon that Tendou had taped to the underside of Kuroo’s body.

“What? It’s really convincing!” Tendou said, stifling a laugh. “C’mon Tsu-Chan, smile a bit! Look like you’re having fun.”

“I hate this and I think you’re stupid,” Goshiki said flatly.

“No one is going to believe this,” Kuroo said.

“What’s not to believe?” Tendou shrugged, “I’m a Celestial Knight helping a lost kid with a balloon find his parents.”

“How in the hell do I look like a child?” Goshiki asked coldly.

“You’re short,” Tendou answered.

“I am 6 centimeters shorter than you,” Goshiki said tersely, “I am not short.”

“You died my hair black so suck it up,” Tendou said. He shouldered his backpack and looked around the cave. “Alright, shall we get a move one instead of standing around like three idiots arguing in a cave?”

“This argument isn’t over,” Goshiki said, “Unless you want me to drop you in the ocean.”

“Fine, fine, we’ll work on your disguise and cover story on the way,” Tendou said, waving his hand dismissively. He grabbed onto the ribbon that he’d tied to Kuroo and pulled him to the edge of the cave.

Goshiki grudgingly transformed into a huge bat. Tendou took a running jump and landed softly on Goshiki’s back. Kuroo was jolted through the air behind him. Goshiki spread his wings and took off, leaving a cloud of dust in the cave as they were propelled forwards.

“We’re not going back across the ocean?” Kuroo asked.
“No! Do you want to kill me from exhaustion?” Goshiki snapped.

“Then where are we going now?” Kuroo asked as Goshiki flew back over the cliffs.

“Into town,” Tendou said, “I’m starving.”

If Kuroo had eyes he would roll them.

“You’re a robot so you don’t understand, but eating is one of the greatest pleasures there is,” Tendou said, “Right after stealing and just before napping.”

“I don’t see what’s so great about all that,” Kuroo said tersely. He still remembered the feeling of having a body from when he’d been dreaming. If he could have kept that body he wouldn’t waste any time sleeping.

“Oh man, you’re missing out, robot-man,” Tendou said pityingly. “What do you enjoy?”

Kuroo thought about it. He thought of Sawamura, Hinata, Tsukishima, and Yachi, the strangers that suddenly burst into his life and brought him out into the world. And he thought of Kenma. And he desperately wanted to be back with them again.

“Spending time with my friends,” Kuroo said, but Tendou’s attention was already elsewhere.

“Raithridge!” Tendou shouted happily as the mountainous city came into view.

Raithridge was a city of stone and steel. It started at the foot of a mountain range and was built deep into the mountains themselves. A forest of evergreens bordered the city and a waterfall came down from the mountaintops. They landed just outside the city and Goshiki shrank back down to a human form.

Kuroo had noticed that Goshiki liked to appear entirely human while around other humans, while Tendou didn’t really give a shit about looking like a monkey or a man or something halfway in-between. The city was crawling with people in armour. Kuroo flew behind Tendou in a panic.

“This city is swarming with soldiers!” He hissed.

“Huh? Oh they’re not soldiers,” Tendou laughed, “Raithridge is a smithing city, so everyone is here to buy or make armor and weapons. It’s like fashion here.”

“Why’d you come here for food?” Kuroo asked in confusion.

“Because no one knows grilling like a smith!” Tendou said, licking his lips.

“And because we want to buy armour and weapons,” Goshiki added.

Tendou led the way to a stone restaurant that smelled of barbecue. Once seated inside, Tendou proceeded to order one of everything off the menu. Kuroo had seen Hinata stuff himself, but Tendou was in a whole different league. The amount of food that disappeared into his gullet was obscene. Kuroo watched in amazement, slightly disgusted. Goshiki ate a modest amount, neatly sipping water between bites.

“How will you be paying, sir?” the waiter asked once they were finished.

“Oh, just add it to the Ironwall tab,” Tendou said blithely.

“Ironwall…” The server narrowed his eyes, “I don’t see an Ironwall emblem.”
Goshiki kept sipping his water, clearly trying hide how tense he was. Tendou shrugged.

“Didn’t feel like wearing it today,” Tendou said.

“Then you don’t get to add it to the tab today,” The server replied.

“What? Come on, man! Just ask for Aone! He’ll back me up!” Tendou pleaded.

“I will then,” The server looked incredibly smug all of a sudden.

The server turned on his heel and headed towards a group of three men in green and white uniforms. He leaned over and said something to a huge guy with pale white hair.

“Uh, you do know them, right?” Kuroo asked.

“Oh they know me alright,” Tendou said coyly.

Kuroo had a bad feeling. At this point, Goshiki was pretending not to know Tendou despite sitting at the same table. He stared intently away from him, still drinking his water. The white-haired giant turned towards them. Recognition sparked in the man’s sharp green eyes as he pointed towards Tendou. Tendou waggled his fingers in his direction.

“He has no eyebrows,” Kuroo whispered, slightly afraid of the fierce-looking man.

Suddenly the man was on them. A huge metal spiked ball smashed into their table, sending dishes flying. Tendou was already out of his seat and peeked his head over one of the booths a few tables away. Aone bolted after him, his pair of chui swinging through the air.

“AONE!” One of the pale-haired man’s companions shouted. He grabbed Aone’s ear and yanked hard. “CUT IT OUT!”

Aone stopped moving, but his eyes didn’t leave Tendou’s. Tendou grinned like a cat.

“Back like the damn plague,” Aone’s companion hissed.

“Nice to see you too, Futa-chin~” Tendou said cheerfully.

“Is it just me? Or does everyone he know seem to hate him,” Kuroo said.

“It’s because of his repellant personality,” Goshiki said. He set down his glass on a different table, seeing as how theirs had been smashed in half.

“Please put everything on our tab!” A man with curly black hair and wide eyes pleaded with the waiter from earlier.

“I have to get my manager,” The waiter said emotionlessly.

“Why have you come back, Tendou?” Futakuchi asked angrily.

“I missed you guys,” Tendou blew a kiss.

“We need armour and weapons,” Goshiki said bluntly.

“And how are you going to pay for them when you can’t even pay for your meal?” Futakuchi glared.
“With this,” Tendou reached into his jacket and flourished a black steel card between his fingers. He flicked it around, revealing a king of diamonds in glittering silver. “It’s the only currency I have on me and I don’t think a small establishment such as this can process it. However, I have a hunch that Ironwall can.”

“Where did you get that?” Futakuchi’s eyes narrowed, “That’s from the Luck Houses’ isn’t it? And it only holds balances of over ten million dollars.”

Tendou winked.

“Unbelievable,” Futakuchi muttered.

“I’ve got our lunch, let’s go back home,” Moniwa said, his arms full of bags. Aone wordlessly took most of the bags from him. Futakuchi took some as well.

“Are you coming with us, Tendou-San?” Moniwa asked.

“Yup!” Tendou grinned.

Kuroo floated after them, speechless.

The walk to Ironwall was pleasant despite Tendou’s singing. Kuroo couldn’t help but think of Kenma and the others. He wondered what kind of weapons and armour they’d like. Hinata would definitely go for something flashy and gaudy. Tsukishima would probably pick out something simple but cool. Sawamura would suit almost any kind of knight’s armour. Yachi, she’d be a force to be reckoned with if she had a huge hammer or battle axe. And Kenma...if would be nice if he at least had a shield.

Kuroo stopped. Before him, rising out of the trees was a huge iron wall.

“I’m guessing that’s where you get the name?” He said dryly.

“Why yes! Oh, um, by the way…” Moniwa’s polite smile faltered as he realized where the words had come from, “What exactly are you?”

“My name is Kuroo,” Kuroo said, “I’ve been kidnapped by this monkey here.”

“Oh! Uh, do you want to be…” Moniwa thought desperately, “...Not...kidnapped?”

“Don’t worry about me,” Kuroo said dismissively, “I have a lot to think about.”

“Oh...alright,” Moniwa said awkwardly.

“Oi! Open up the gate!” Futakuchi shouted.

Kuroo expected the giant iron doors to groan or make some sort of grand noise as they opened, but they opened smoothly. On the other side was a large wooden house attached to the sheer mountainside. Several people greeted them as they entered, most of them making unhappy faces at the appearance of Tendou.

“I see you have no shame waltzing back in here,” Kamasaki said, glaring at Tendou.

“He has money this time,” Futakuchi said, “It’s the only reason we let him follow us. Although personally, I’d rather refuse his business.”

“As would I,” Kamasaki said, folding his arms.
“Now, now,” Moniwa said, trying to calm them down, “He’s a customer still, and an old friend.”

“That’s debatable,” Kamasaki muttered under his breath.

“What did you do to them?” Kuroo whispered to Tendou.

“I just borrowed some things,” Tendou said cheerfully.

“Without paying,” Goshiki added, “Or returning them.”

“But I have the money now!” Tendou said, flourishing the card once more, “Took me a while to earn it all though, since I had to keep sneaking into the Luck Houses.”

“I’ll bring you the catalogue once I hand out everyone’s lunch,” Moniwa said.

“We’re also going to charge you for everything you previously stole,” Futakuchi said.

“Don’t worry,” Tendou said dismissively, “I’ve got enough.”

Futakuchi gritted his teeth. Tendou’s flippant attitude pissed him off and the fact that he probably did have enough money for all his previous stolen goods plus whatever he wanted now pissed him off even more. Aone ate quickly and then headed around to the side of the house where a large barn was.

“Where’s he going?” Kuroo asked curiously.

“To feed his pet,” Futakuchi answered.

Aone opened the doors to the barn and patted his thighs like he was calling a dog. The ground shook as Aone’s pet stepped out of the barn. It barely fit through the barn doors. Shiny metal armour covered its scaly hide and two cannons were fitted on its shoulders. Goshiki’s jaw dropped.

It was definitely not a dog.

“How much for THAT?” Tendou asked, his eyes lighting up with glee.

“That’s Aone’s new pet, it’s not for sale,” Futakuchi said.

“Wait a minute…” Kuroo floated up to the armoured creature, “Tobio!?”

The dinosaur huffed, fogging up Kuroo’s front.

“Well I’ll be damned…” Kuroo said in amazement, “You got one hell of an upgrade!”

“You know this dinosaur?” Futakuchi asked.

“He’s my friend,” Kuroo said.

Tobio sniffed around Kuroo and then leaned down to inspect the others with him. Seemingly unsatisfied with Kuroo’s company, Tobio huffed and then raised his head, ignoring them.

“Sorry, it’s just me,” Kuroo said, “The others have...gotten lost.”

“Seeing as how this magnificent beast is a friend of a friend, he should be able to go with me, right?” Tendou said, sidling up next to Aone. Aone glared.

“Hey! Stop it!” Kuroo scolded as Tobio bumped him with his head repeatedly.
“I know, I know! Fine!” Kuroo turned on his laser and Tobio immediately fixated on it, jerking his head from side to side to follow the red dot as Kuroo swung it around.

“Well if you’re not going to let me buy it, then show me the things I can buy!” Tendou pouted. Aone grabbed Tendou by the back of his shirt and carried him like a kitten into the house.

“Hey, can I pick out some things too?” Kuroo asked, following Tendou.

“You don’t even have hands!” Tendou snorted.

“As gifts for my friends!” Kuroo shot back, “Whom have plenty of hands!”

Argent.

Suga squinted at the word, unsure of the meaning. Oikawa had acted like his file had some huge revelation about himself, one that would change the way he viewed the world forever. But inside the folder was just this one word in a silver looping font. Suga wondered if it was Oikawa’s personal handwriting.

“Argent?” Suga said aloud. He gasped and clutched at his throat. The word hurt to say. A stabbing pain had shot through his tongue as he said it. What the hell was that about?

Argentum enim meum et aurum lingua mea verba.

Another sentence had appeared on the single page of Suga’s file. Was it a spell? Suga was suddenly afraid. What if it was a curse? But he found himself reading aloud, his tongue burning like it was made of hot coals. As he spoke the final word it felt like something broke inside his chest. He fell to his knees, breathing heavily as he broke out into a cold sweat.

“Sugawara-San?” A small piping voice suddenly called out.

Suga pulled himself up using a crate for stability. He knew that voice. Yachi…?

“Are you alright, Sugawara-San?” Yachi said worriedly.

Suga walked unsteadily through the crates, following the sound of Yachi’s voice. The crates then gave way to cages. Suga felt a wave of horror wash through him as he realized that there were people and beings inside each cage. They were all turned away from him in fear.

And then he found Yachi. She looked different from the last time he had seen her. Less like a scared little girl, and more like an ephemeral being. But she was definitely Yachi. Something inside him was sure of it. And to that ‘something’ she looked exactly the same as she always had.

“Sugawara-San…” Yachi looked at him with an expression that confused him. She looked both sad and afraid.

Suga opened his mouth to reassure her but no sound came out. His throat still hurt. He settled for a smile instead, hoping it was a comforting one.

“Sugawara-San, can you get us out of here?” Yachi asked.
“Oikawa would never allow it,” Sugawara said, his voice raspy. Even if he snuck Yachi out, Oikawa would find them. Of that, he was certain.

“Why do you listen to Oikawa?” Yachi asked, disappointed. She remembered that night, when Suga stayed behind to stop Kageyama from fighting them. He seemed different now, like there was something binding him.

“Oikawa...he needs my help,” Suga said slowly. He was surprised by his own words. Oikawa needing help? He had never needed help before in all the time Suga and Yachi had known him. But that ‘something’ inside Suga was telling him that Oikawa needed him. Why else give him that file? Why else force him to awaken as a…

“I’m a Silver Speaker,” Suga said, more to himself than to Yachi.

“I have to tell him!” Suga was struck by a sudden urgency. He had to see Oikawa, talk to him. There were things he needed to tell him. His throat burned with words. He turned on his heel and practically ran away from the cages. His legs took him up the stairs and down the hallways, nearly knocking people over.

Oikawa was startled as Suga burst through the door. Suga had no idea what he was about to say, but the words had taken control of his mouth.

“Iwaizumi Hajime,” Suga said, out of breath from running. “You’re trying to bring Iwaizumi Hajime back.”

Oikawa dropped the papers he was holding. Suga rambled on, ignoring the stunned expression on Oikawa’s face.

“You lived together on Amaranth, you and Iwaizumi. But he succumbed to the Aes disease and became a statue,” Suga continued, his voice growing stronger, “It happened early to him because he spent too much time tending to his parents, who had already turned from the disease.”

And then he had met the spirit of Eaen Rie.

“Eaen Rie told you that you were the same as him, longing for someone who had died by the unfairness of the world. He promised you he could bring Iwaizumi back if you gave him the Arc.”

“How do you know this?” Oikawa seemed scared, “You weren’t supposed to know anything about me! You were just supposed to tell us how to get the Arc!”

Oikawa’s mind raced. This wasn’t in the plan that Eaen had told him. Eaen told him a Silver Speaker was their best bet at finding the Arc, that the World Fair had a slim chance of working but they were really waiting for Sugawara to awaken. There had been nothing said of Sugawara finding out about...about him. Oikawa retreated to the back of his mind, pushing Eaen forwards.

“Eaen…” Suga said, pausing. Now that he had awakened he could kind of see the vestiges of the man Eaen had been. He wasn’t as handsome as Oikawa, but there was an studious intensity about his expression that gripped you like the pull of gravity.

“If you know so much about my host, then you should know just as much about me,” Eaen said.

“I can’t tell you anything you don’t already know,” Suga said, feeling diminutive in Eaen’s gaze.

“You can tell me how to find her,” Eaen said.
“She doesn’t want you to find her,” Suga blurted out. He felt his ears turn red. He wished he could turn off this ‘Silver Speaker’ thing!

“I know,” Eaen actually looked...sad. “I did something horrible to her. I don’t want forgiveness, I just want to fix what I’ve done.”

Suga’s throat burned again.

“You cut her hair...with a knife made of a metal substance taken from a meteorite,” Suga’s eyes glazed over with tears, “It severed her godly connection to the planet. It killed her.”

“It did not kill her,” Eaen interrupted, “It is impossible to kill the god of this world, she will be reborn. Aerimus built the Arc for her as an incubator for her rebirth.”

“Even reborn, she will not be the same,” Suga said, “She will not remember you.”

“Then I will remind her,” Eaen said.

Suga felt a pit growing in his chest. He could see the desperation in Eaen’s eyes, the delusional belief that everything would be as it once was upon meeting the new god inside the Arc. Suga swallowed uneasily.

“If I tell you how to find her, will you let all of the demuto go?” Suga asked.

“They will be freed tomorrow,” Eaen said, “After the World Fair. It’s too late to call it off now.”

“Then I won’t tell you how to find her,” Suga said quietly but sternly, “They have to be released now.”

“You shouldn’t bargain with a desperate man,” Eaen said lightly, “Especially when he’s the one in charge.”

Eaen snapped his fingers and guards rushed into the room. They grabbed Suga and held him fast. Eaen walked up to Suga, hands clasped behind his back.

“I don’t deal in promises,” Eaen said, “I deal in pain. History has proven it to be the most effective approach.”

Suga felt his blood run cold as the guards dragged him away. They brought him to a cell. It was innocuous at first, empty and cold but dry. A chain with handcuffs hung from the ceiling. They cuffed his arms to them and left him hanging, with all of his weight on his arms. Then they closed the cell door and he was consumed by darkness.

The Medietas Sea was almost completely enclosed by land. It’s only connection, the Vespian Ocean was made impassible by the Noctis Mare, a race of particularly carnivorous and voracious merfolk.

“Are we still heading the right way?” Tanaka asked.

“Yes,” Kenma answered, “We’re getting closer.”
“If you say so,” Tanaka said. The ocean surrounded them on all sides. It was nearly impossible to tell which way they had come from. Luckily Kenma was like a compass, Tanaka thought to himself.

Kenma wondered if Kuroo could feel him coming. What if he moved even further away to avoid him? What if he decided that life was better without Kenma?

“Look Kenma! Land!” Hinata patted Kenma’s shoulder, jolting out of his negative thoughts. Kenma looked up and saw a tinge of green on the horizon.

“Have you ever been to the First Quadrant before?” Nishinoya asked them.

“Not on this side of the Grey Mountains,” Sawamura answered, “I’ve heard that it’s a mining continent.”

“He’s really close now,” Kenma said, closing his eyes.

“The nearest city is Raithridge, we can start looking there,” Tanaka said, his tone serious, “These guys are blacksmiths, people we definitely don’t want to get on the bad sides of.”

Hinata was glued to the windows of the nightrider as they landed in the airport. The city was filled with people walking around in armour and carrying weapons. Hinata admired a particularly wicked looking sword strapped to the back of a huge muscular man. He drew his own celestial steel sword and imagined it turning into something similar.

"Come on, Lev!" Hinata said excitedly. He turned around to see Lev curled up in the back corner of the ship. "Lev?" "Is there something wrong?"

Kenma looked back as well. He narrowed his eyes.

"Are you bloated or something?"

Lev looked...bigger than usual. Hinata could see a cloud of stardust accumulating around him. Hinata patted him on the back.

"Are you ok?"

"Hmm?" Lev lifted his head blearily, "I'm just tired...Let me sleep here...Say 'hi' to Kuroo for me..."

"Are you sure?" Kenma asked.

"Mhmm," was Lev's reply.

"I don't want to leave you here by yourself," Kenma said.

"Then take this," Lev said.

Some sand blew off his back and formed a tiny little lion. It leapt onto Kenma's shoulder and then found it's way into one of his pockets and promptly curled up and fell asleep.

"Alright then," Kenma said, "If you wake up, come join us."

They were given a card with their parking number by a valet as they left the airship. Sawamura was reading the Omnia as Kenma and Hinata walked up.

"Any news?" Hinata asked.
"No," Sawamura said, looking concerned, "I wonder if something happened..."

"Chikara probably just forgot," Tanaka said, his hands behind his head.

“Alright Kenma, where now?” Nishinoya asked, slapping Kenma on the back.

Kenma closed his eyes. In his mind, he could see a golden trail leading ahead of them.

“This way.” He said, opening his eyes. The group followed Kenma as he weaved through the town, stopping every so often to check the golden trail he could sense in his mind. They soon reached the outskirts of the city. Hinata jumped and his flying shoes took him up to the treetops.

“There’s a huge metal wall!” Hinata reported from the sky. He flew higher and peeked over it. “There’s also a barn and a house in front of a mountain!”

Kenma couldn’t help but pick up the pace. Suddenly the huge iron wall loomed above them.

“Please don’t say he’s behind there,” Tanaka groaned.

Kenma walked up to the wall and knocked politely.

“He’s behind there, I don’t want to let unauthorized people inside,” They said snidely.

“I already said we don’t have time for this!” Tanaka pointed a finger at the door, “Behind your big metal wall is our friend, Kuroo and we’re here to save him!”

“If you insist on coming inside, please fill out these forms,” The voice said in exasperation. A panel opened in the wall and a dour faced young man with large brown eyes and black hair parted in the middle thrust a stack of papers into Sawamura’s hands.
“...You’re kidding me...” Tanaka said in disbelief.

“Nope,” the young man slammed the panel shut.

“Well fuck,” Nishinoya muttered, staring at the papers.

Sakunami Kosuke sighed deeply, leaning back in his chair. His job wasn’t too bad honestly, but he had been hoping that he’d be learning about actual blacksmithing by now instead of being a doorman...but at least he got paid, which was more than some of his friends could say about their internships.

“What’s with the motley group at our door?” Onagawa asked, coming back from his break. “Got your lunch by the way.”

Sakunami gratefully accepted the food.

“They keep saying we kidnapped their friend,” Sakunami said through a mouthful of food, “One of their names is Sawamura, I think.”

“That’s a serious allegation,” Onagawa said, raising an eyebrow.

“Should we tell Moniwa about it?” Sakunami asked.

“He’s with some customers right now...though I say ‘customer’ loosely considering it’s Tendou,” Onagawa rubbed his temples. He brightened suddenly, “Maybe they’re after Tendou?”

They both looked at the video camera screen showing the group frantically chasing after the papers being blown about by the wind.

“I think one of them said ‘Kuroo’,” Sakunami said. He saw Onagawa’s face darkening in disappointment. “But maybe that’s their nickname for him!”

“I’ll go inform Moniwa,” Onagawa said.

“I’ll watch the door,” Sakunami said glumly.

Onagawa clasped his shoulder, “Just a couple more weeks on door duty and your rotation will switch. Trust me, you’ll be glad for door duty when every muscle in your body hurts from working the forge.”

Sakunami managed a half-hearted smile as Onagawa left.

Onagawa whistled a tune as he walked from the wall to the house. He remembered his intern days, the impatience and the frustration. And then the hell of the first couple weeks on the forge. Sakunami was a small guy, the smallest of the Ironwall members. Onagawa himself was actually shorter than most of the 6 foot members at 5’9”. But height didn’t matter in blacksmithing, strength did.

“Give that back!”

“Oi! Watch the weapon rack!”
There was a crash and then the sound of what Onagawa assumed was weapons clattering to the ground.

“What the…” Onagawa stared, unable to process the scene before him. There seemed to be a battle helmet flying around wildly, as if possessed by a crazed ghost. Kamasaki and Futakuchi were chasing after it as Moniwa waved his hands frantically. Tendou hung from one of the weapon racks, posed to pounce.

“Are we haunted?” Onagawa asked, sidling up to Sasaya.

“Ah, you didn’t see the ball thing when you grabbed lunch, did you?” Sasaya said. Evidently, he did not, Onagawa thought. Though, he had grabbed lunch quickly to avoid being around Tendou.

“Ball thing?” Onagawa’s eyes followed the floating helmet. He could slightly make out a black orb inside it.

“It says its a robot, but it’s not made of any metal I know,” Sasaya said.

“Wait, ‘it’ says?” Onagawa repeated in confusion.

“SOMEONE GET THIS THING OFF ME!” Kuroo shouted, darting up and down, trying to shake the helmet off him.

“HIYAAA!” Tendou launched himself off the wall and grabbed onto Kuroo. They crashed to the floor, knocking over a table.

“I hate you so much,” Kuroo muttered as Tendou picked him up.

“Man, that’s really stuck on you,” Tendou laughed, “Who would have thought?”

“And it’s all your fucking fault for shoving it on me!” Kuroo shouted.

“Hey, you’re the one who said it looked cool,” Tendou shrugged, “Not my fault your head is too fat.”

“And it’s not my fault your brain doesn’t have a single wrinkle on it!” Kuroo snapped.

“You don’t even have a brain!” Tendou shot back.

“That’s enough,” Goshiki said, whacking the back of Tendou’s head, “Stop antagonizing him.”

“How are you going to get it off of him now?” Futakuchi asked, panting from running around.

“Well pulling, bashing, and bashing didn’t work so I’m all out of ideas,” Tendou said gleefully.

“We could cut it off,” Goshiki suggested.

“Whether he keeps it or you break it, you owe us another 5 thousand dollars for it,” Kamasaki said.

“For a helmet!?” Tendou yelped.

“This helmet is made of Celestial Steel, tungsten, and diamond bladed spikes,” Moniwa explained. Goshiki glared at Tendou, who was starting to turn pale.

“Maybe Aone will be able to get it off,” Futakuchi sighed.
“Where is Aone?” Onagawa asked.

“With his pet, where else would he be?” Sasaya shook his head. “By the way, why did you come down?”

“Oh, right! Moniwa!” Onagawa jogged over to Moniwa, Tendou, Goshiki and the floating helmet ball.

“Onagawa?” Moniwa said in surprise.

“There’s a group of people at the wall, they said their friend is here and they want to speak to them,” Onagawa said, tipping his head towards Tendou.

“You have friends?” Kuroo said in shock. Even Tendou looked confused.

“Well, let’s go meet them then,” Moniwa said, “And get the helmet off at the same time.”

“Take me with you.”

Kiyoko looked over at Saeko in surprise. The group had agreed that only a few of them should go with Bokuto to get an airship of some kind while the others rest up in Calidara.

“If you come with me, who will lead while I’m gone?” Kiyoko asked her.

“Misaki is capable,” Saeko said, “So are Narita and Kinoshita.”

“Why do you want to come?” Kiyoko asked. She looked away from Saeko. She knew her words had hurt her.

“I love you, Kiyoko,” Saeko said gently, “But not like that anymore. At one time I wanted to be your lover, but right now I just want to be your friend.”

“I’m sorry,” Kiyoko said, her hands trembling.

“Sorry for what?” Saeko laughed gently, “You can’t control your emotions, I know that firsthand. But out there, in that big ol’ world, are people who are better suited for each of us than we are for each other. Sorry it took me so long to accept that.”

Saeko hugged Kiyoko, rocking them gently back and forth. They pulled apart after a moment, both smiling this time.

“Grab your stuff,” Kiyoko said.

It took Bokuto, Ennoshita, Kiyoko, and Saeko a day to trek to Grimith from the Auction. Halfway there, they had left most of their group behind at an inn in Calidara, a neighboring city.

“This might be a dumb question,” Saeko said, “But where are all the ships?”

The port at Grimith was old and rotted, with salt encrusting the empty docks.
“They’re under the water,” Bokuto said cheerily, “Makes it harder to steal.”

He led them to an old run-down bar near the port. A crudely written sign swinging from over the door declared it to be the ‘Harpy’s Kiss’. A drawing on the side of the establishment depicted a mermaid with the top half of a fish with sexy lady legs. Added to fish half was a scrawled pair of boobs.

“Classy…” Saeko muttered.

The patrons of the bar were loud and drunk, however Ennoshita noticed that sharp eyes followed them as they entered. Bokuto sauntered up to the bartender, a needle-thin woman with huge feathery wings behind her.

“Allo Delphi,” Bokuto saluted her.

“Well, if it ain the Horned Owl,” Delphi said with a grin, “Where’s the Rufous?”

“He couldn’t make it,” Bokuto said cheerily, hiding his emotions. Rufous was Akaashi’s nickname. “Can I get a Screech on the rocks?”

The woman turned to pour a drink and Kiyoko reeled from horror, clasping a hand over her mouth. There were huge scars where the wings were attached to the woman’s back.

“She’s not a demuto,” Kiyoko hissed.

The woman heard the commotion and turned back around with a glare. She set Bokuto’s drink down.

“Ain ever seen a graft a’fore, eh?” The woman smiled but it looked more like a snarl.

“I heard they were illegal,” Ennoshita said, stepping in front of Kiyoko to shield her view, “They were deemed human and animal cruelty.”

“Look ‘round, boy, ain no cops in Grimith,” The woman cackled.

“Settle down, guys,” Bokuto said. His voice was calm but there was an edge to it. He took a sip from his glass. “Sorry ‘bout that, Delphi.”

“If it weren’ fer ya, Horned Owl I’d’ave scratched out her eyes,” Delphi said, backing down, “Whaddaya want?”

“We need a ship,” Bokuto said, “A really, really big one!”

“An what ave ya got to offer fer one?” Delphi asked.

“A golden truth,” Saeko said, stepping forwards.

“I ain a Dominus,” Delphi scoffed, “What need ave ay fer a few pretty words?”

“It’s more than a few pretty words,” Saeko said, “It’s a trade route.”

Delphi paused, Saeko could tell she was intrigued. Saeko grinned, “A trade route through the Boiling Sea!”

“Follow me,” Delphi said, hopping lightly over the bar. She led the group upstairs. The door at the top of the stairs was closed but the surface shimmered like water. Delphi walked through it, creating
waves through the surface. Bokuto followed, disappearing into the door.

Kiyoko placed her hand on the door. It was cool to the touch, although it was not wet as she had been expecting. The other side of the door was the inside of a cave. Kiyoko, Ennoshita, and Saeko looked around in shock. There was a lake inside the giant cavern and blue light shone from the water, lighting the whole cave. An intricate walkway with hundreds of paths hung above the water.

“A ship, you said,” Delphi mumbled, “Air, star, or water?”

“Air is fine,” Kiyoko said.

“Are you sure?” Saeko asked, “Starships have better specs.”

“But they’re also more expensive,” Kiyoko reminded her, “And we’re not exactly rich right now.”

“Too poor for a starship, eh?” Delphi had a wicked look in her eye, “Ay ‘appen ta ‘ave a starship ay been tryna get rid of.”

“Why’s that?” Ennoshita asked suspiciously.

“She’s bad luck,” Delphi said, “Ain nothing wrong wiv her but folks say she’s cursed.”

“Well that’s tempting,” Saeko said sarcastically.

“She’s o’er here,” Delphi said, leading them over the walkway. She stopped suddenly and pointed down.

“That’s her,” She said with a grin, “The Crow.”

It was a galleon, with a rich black hull and oddly positioned black sails that looked like wings. The figurehead was a huge crow, wings spread in flight. Its amber eyes shone amongst the black. Kiyoko felt her heart swell at the sight of it, almost as if it were fate.

“She’s beautiful,” She breathed.

“Ain she?” Delphi said, her voice filled with pride, “Such a beauty of a ship an no one wants her.”

“We want her,” Saeko said.

“Ave ye flown a starship afore?” Delphi asked.

“Our last ship was an airship,” Kiyoko said.

“The Crow ain made a wood like an airship,” Delphi seemed to transform as she talked. She was at ease and her accent lessened. “It’s metal an it’ll fly higher than an airship. It’s faster and unwieldy, the rigging’s also different. But a starship will always outclass an airship.”

Saeko handed Delphi a rolled up map. She had figured out a route using Sawamura’s map that Nametsu had copied. Delphi unrolled it and studied the route, her eyes flicking from side to side. She rolled it back up and tucked it away in her shirt. She lifted two fingers to her mouth and blew, whistling shrilly.

The Crow rose from the depths, water streaming off of it. Delphi jumped down from the walkway, landing neatly onto the deck. Bokuto, Ennoshita, Kiyoko, and Saeko followed. Delphi led them to the helm. It was placed on the quarterdeck above the rest of the ship. Instead of a wheel, there was a place to stand between two round control sensors. Delphi stood between them and placed her hands
on them.

“The right ball controls the directions,” Delphi explained, “The left adjusts the sensitivity. You’ll want a lower sensitivity when going at faster speeds and a higher sensitivity at slower speeds.”

Delphi steered the ship forwards, towards the cave wall. Just like with the door, the cave wall shimmered as they passed through, exiting over the dilapidated docks.

“Alright, take over, Cap’in,” Delphi said, stepping out from the controls.

Kiyoko looked surprised.

“Yer the cap’in, ain ya?” Delphi said, “whatcha wait’in for?”

Kiyoko stepped between the controls and placed her hands on them. The ship teetered, nearly dumping them all overboard. Delphi tapped a control, activating artificial gravity before they slid off the side.

“Try it again, Cap’in!” Delphi shouted, “Listen ta tha ship!”

Kiyoko took a deep breath. She had flown the Virago for years, escaping pursuit and traversing perilous weather and seas. But this was a starship, not an airship. It didn’t make sense, but she could feel the ship. The Crow wasn’t going to just blindly obey her, the Crow had a spirit of her own. The Crow was scoffing at the puny girl trying to control her. Kiyoko felt a burst of anger at the disrespect. *I am the CAPTAIN.* Kiyoko roared.

The ship quieted. To Kiyoko’s surprise the controls immediately became easier, almost like second nature to maneuver.

“That’s it,” Delphi said with something like pride in her voice, “Take care o’ her.”

With that, Delphi jumped over the side, gliding down to the ground with her wings.

“I didn’t expect those wings to actually work,” Saeko said in surprise.

“She defied my expectations in many ways,” Kiyoko said, looking where Delphi had jumped overboard.

“Delphi might seem rough around the edges but she’s a good person,” Bokuto said, “Her father sold her to a Marrowman who grafted those wings onto her when she was young.”

“I was incredibly rude back there,” Kiyoko said glumly.

“She’s a mariner,” Bokuto said, stretching his arms behind his head, “Ain’t much that’ll offend her. She still traded with you, so she can’t have been too put out.”

“Let’s go pick up the others!” Saeko said, pointing into the horizon.

Chapter End Notes

Hey all you readers, thanks for waiting for this very late update!
argentum enim meum et aurum lingua mea verba = my tongue is silver but my words are gold
Chapter Summary

Eaen has a solution to his unrequited love.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait, I didn't think anyone was still reading this tbh. But i am happy to be wrong and will continue updating this story until it's finished!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So this is where you were,” Nairali said.

Eaen turned to see Nairali and Aerimus standing behind him.

“Why haven’t you joined the party?” Nairali asked, “Instead of standing up here staring down at it?”

Eaen turned back to the window. He could see the party still ongoing, the throngs of people in the garden. Everything shone, the silverware and the glasses, the bubbling champagne, the clothes and the lights. But amidst all of it, Yara shone the brightest to him, like a beacon in the dark.

“She’ll never love you,” Aerimus said, “Not the way you want her to.”

“I know!” Eaen snapped. He ran a hand through his hair. “It’s fine! I love her the way she is!”

“She’s a god,” Aerimus said coldly, “But you don’t love her like a god. You love her as if she were an ordinary woman.”

“…Is it that obvious?” Eaen asked quietly.

“Painfully,” Aerimus replied.

“What if there was a way to make her human,” Nairali said.

“Such an irresponsible thing to say,” Eaen said without turning around, “How do you plan to take responsibility for the longings and dreams you incite?”

“Do not blame your desires on me,” Nairali retorted, “Yara walks among us in human form of her own free will. Is it not she who incites your passions?”

“She sets my heart aflame with desire so strong it is nearly tangible,” Eaen said, “When I am near her, it feels as though the weight of my longing is crushing my very body.”

“So you have sequestered yourself alone in your room to avoid her?” Nairali scoffed.

“What else am I to do?” Eaen lamented, “If only she were human, truly human.”
“Creatures in this world change all the time, even animals become human. What’s stopping a god from doing the same?” Nairali asked.

Eaen felt his protests die in his throat. A horrible desire was welling up inside him, one that he’d been trying to suppress over and over again.

“If she has not already become human then she does not want to,” Eaen said. It was a line he often repeated to himself when his yearning kept him from slumber.

“Do you remember what she said to us when we first met her?” Nairali asked.

“That she wanted to understand us,” Eaen said. He knew what Nairali was going to say, knew the temptation it would hold, but he listened anyway.

“One cannot fully understand something they’re not,” Nairali said, “She, herself walks in a human form, in flesh and blood and yet you still have reservations about her desires? Perhaps it is not because she does not want to become human, but that she can’t.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Aerimus said, “She is a god. With her powers, anything is possible! It is because of her that the demuto exist.”

“Unless it’s her godhood that is trapping her, keeping her from being human!” Nairali insisted, “Of course a god cannot just become a human. Where would all her power go?”

“It would need a vessel,” Eaen said, surprising them both.

“What are you talking about?” Aerimus said cautiously.

“Something to hold her powers, her godhood,” Eaen said. He left the window and started pacing around the room. “Some sort of ark to carry the weight of her godhood...leaving her soul as a person.”

“What you are suggesting is insane,” Aerimus said, a pained look on his face.

“No,” Nairali said, her fervent gaze fixated on whatever delusions were in her mind. “What he is suggesting is evolution. We could build a world that is not limited to the imagination of a god.”

“Nairali, you should not mess with life and death,” Aerimus said, gently placing a hand on her shoulder. She brushed it off angrily.

“Why? Because it’s impossible? Why is everything we want impossible?” Nairali shouted. Her eyes stared hotly into Aerimus’ and while she did not say it, Aerimus knew what she was referring to. He looked away.

“These cities we built were said to be impossible…” Eaen said, “And in the past few years we have all made advancements that were said to be impossible.”

“Isn’t there something you want, Aerie?” Nairali said, her gaze unyielding.

“I only want the both of you to be happy,” Aerimus replied.

“Then help us,” Nairali said.

“I know that this is wrong. It is against god and against nature,” Eaen said, clenching his fists, “But still, I cannot stop what I desire. What I am asking of you is something I could not ask of anyone else.”
Tears welled at the corners of Aerimus’ eyes as Eaen continued.

“Aerie, my friend, will you stand by my side?” Eaen asked.

“Of course,” Aerimus answered.

“Go fish.”

Tsukishima glared at Kageyama. The group had rented a large room with two double beds and a sitting area. The girls, Misaki, Kuribayashi, and Nametsu had claimed the beds, pushing them together to one side of the room. It was Kinoshita who’d had the brilliant idea of playing Go Fish.

“You’re lying,” Tsukishima growled, “Give me your eights, you dirty cheater.”

“Go. Fish.” Kageyama said with all the vitriol of ‘fuck you’.

“Guys, guys calm down,” Kinoshita said, “Kageyama already said he doesn’t have any eights.”

“And I said he’s lying,” Tsukishima said.

“Misaki, can you check Kageyama’s cards please?” Kinoshita asked, rubbing his temples.

Misako got up from where she was polishing her knife and peeked over Kageyama’s shoulder. She pried his cards from his hand and slid a three from where it was hiding two eights.

“He has two eights,” Misaki said, throwing them down to Tsukishima. Tsukishima smiled smugly as he placed his other two eights down to make a book. Misaki dropped Kageyama’s hand face down on the floor in front of him.

“Kuso-yama, give me your kings,” Tsukishima said.

“Oh for fuck’s sakes’, you want my whole hand?” Kageyama said in frustration. “How do you even know what I have? Mighty suspicious there…”

“I’m good at guessing,” Tsukishima said, his glasses glinting in the light.

“Let me see those!” Kageyama launched himself at Tsukishima and ripped the glasses of his face.

“Ouch! Hey watch it, greasy-fingers!” Oculus shouted.

Kageyama dropped him out of shock.

“Uh...Did you glasses just talk?” Kinoshita asked.

Tsukishima didn’t answer. He glared down at the glasses in question.

“Well don’t blame me for your lack of dodging,” Oculus said petulantly, “I’ve been good and quiet for days now, I might add.”

“And you called me a cheater, Usotsuki-shima,” Kageyama said sardonically.
“I can’t see without them,” Tsukishima said through gritted teeth.

“Yeah, he tooooootally can’t see your hand with me,” Oculus said. “I’m not magic at all, just a normal pair of glasses.”

“Where did you get magic glasses?” Kinoshita said, slack-jawed.

“A really annoying Cave of Wonders,” Tsukishima muttered, picking the glasses back up.

“Alright, Ushijima, it’s your turn next,” Narita said, choosing to ignore what was going on.

Ushijima studied his cards intently. He turned to Yamaguchi.

“Give me your queens,” He said intensely.

“HIYESS!” Yamaguchi yelped in fear, tossing all of his cards at him.

“You didn’t have any queens,” Ushijima said, towering over Yamaguchi.

“I’m sorry!” Yamaguchi cowered. Kinoshita and Narita felt strangely like they were witnessing a shake down from a loan shark.

“Go fish, Ushijima,” Kinoshita said encouragingly.

“Where do I get the fish?” Ushijima asked.

“There aren’t any actual fish in this game,” Kinoshita said for the third time.

“Pick a card from the middle,” Tsukishima said, annoyed.

Ushijima frowned but did as Tsukishima said. The door burst open suddenly and the cards in the middle scattered from the sudden gust of wind.

“WE’RE BAAAAACK!” Saeko shouted cheerfully.

“Cards?” Ennoshita said, eyeing the scattered pile, “What game?”

“We were teaching Ushijima Go Fish,” Kinoshita said, standing up.

“I don’t like this game,” Ushijima said, tossing his cards on the ground, “No one got any fish.”

“Getting fish isn’t the point,” Kinoshita explained for the fifth time.

“Where’s Captain?” Narita asked, peering around behind them.

Saeko grinned and pointed upwards in the air. “Why don’t you come see for yourselves?”

The Crow was glorious. Pitch-black and elegant, with sails like giant wings. Orange lifters glowed at the bottom of the starship. And Kiyoko stood at the controls, dark hair blowing in the wind.

“She sure is something, that captain of yours,” Shirabu said, stepping next to Ennoshita. He hadn’t been in the room with the others and Ennoshita idly wondered what he’d been up to.

“There is a reason we all follow her,” Ennoshita said, “I trust you see it too?”

“I do,” Shirabu said.
“Then…”

“But we won’t be joining your crew,” Shirabu said to Ennoshita’s surprise. “I made a promise with Ushijima when we left the farm and going with all of you would break that.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, how so?” Ennoshita asked.

“If we went with you, he’d have to fight,” Shirabu said simply.

“I can’t deny that we get into a lot of trouble,” Ennoshita laughed, “Alright, I won’t press you two about it anymore.”

“Everybody aboard!” Saeko shouted, waving her arms.

“Then, this is where we say goodbye,” Ennoshita said.

“I’ve talked to the Innkeeper and they’ve agreed to let us work here,” Shirabu said, “So please stop by to visit every once in a while.”

“Will do,” Ennoshita said with a smile.

The rest of the crew were disappointed, but accepting of Shirabu and Ushijima’s decision. Saeko hugged them both tightly.

“Good luck with your new jobs!” She said, “Let me know if you ever need me to beat someone up for you!”

“Thanks, Saeko,” Shirabu said, struggling for air in her tight embrace. Ushijima grunted.

Shirabu and Ushijima waved as the gleaming black Crow powered up its engines and then took off into the sky. There was a knock on the wooden door frame behind them. Standing there was the Innkeeper, Reon Ohira. In his hands were two uniforms with the Inn’s swan emblem on them.

“Ready to start your training?” Ohira asked them.

“YOU!” Hinata exclaimed in surprise.

“THE MONKEY!” Tanaka and Nishinoya shouted in tandem, slack-jawed in shock.

“You stole my clothes!” Sawamura shouted, pushing through them, “And my sword!”

“I don’t know these people,” Tendou said, turning around swiftly. Kawasaki and Futakuchi held him fast.

“Ohhh I think you do,” Futakuchi said gleefully.

“How the hell did you find me?” Tendou asked.

“We weren’t looking for you,” Nishinoya said, straight-faced, “We’re just as surprised to see you here as you are.”
“You didn’t come to kidnap me again?” Tendou tilted his head in confusion.

“No, we came because Kenma…” Tanaka turned around only to find Kenma missing.

Kenma had walked past the group of people with Tendou. He could feel Kuroo’s presence and his feet took him to a barn. Kenma’s heart was racing as he reached for the door. He pulled it open and a cloud of dust stirred up as the bottom of the door scraped against the dirt. Inside was the dark outline of a huge beast and the figure of a hulking man, holding a spiked ball. Kenma took a step back, anticipation turning to fear.

“Kuroo?” Kenma squeaked out.

The man spun, swinging the ball with such force that Kenma’s hair blew back from his forehead. And then it slipped out of his hands. Kenma ducked as the ball shot like from a cannon over the space where his head was.

“KENMAAAAA!”

Kenma whipped his head around. Did that ball just scream his name…? Or was it…?

“Kuroo!” Kenma ran back the way he’d came.

Tendou laid flat on the ground, a red lump forming on the back of his head. Nearby, was a spiked helmet. Kenma felt his heart drop with disappointment. The voice that sounded like Kuroo shouting his name must have been a wishful delusion.

“Oww…” Said Kuroo, the helmet still stuck on him. He could have sworn he saw Kenma as he was flying through the air but that was probably just his life flashing before his eyes.

“So you were here,” Hinata said, crouching down to Kuroo’s level and grinning.

“Short Stop?” Kuroo said in wonderment.

“That’s some new look you’ve got there,” Sawamura said, his feet stepping next to Hinata.

Kuroo floated up clumsily. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. The last time he’d seen them was in the Cave of Wonders.

“What…? How…?” Kuroo didn’t know where to start.

“It’s a long story,” Sawamura said, “But we followed Kenma here to get you.”

“Kenma’s here?” Kuroo froze, a thousand emotions running through him.

“He’s right behind you,” Sawamura said gently.

Kenma couldn’t breathe, he wanted to run away but his feet were frozen in place. Kuroo turned around and suddenly they were face to face. Kuroo wanted to rush into Kenma’s arms but the reminder of their initial fight held him back. He still didn’t know what had happened when Kenma had turned him off or even what he or Kenma were. And as much as he wanted things to go back to the way they were before, he knew that they couldn’t. Not anymore.

“Kuroo,” Kenma said, meeting his gaze, “There’s a lot we need to talk about. I won’t run away or make excuses anymore, I’ll tell you everything. So please, come back with us.”

Us. The word that Kuroo had wanted to hear for so long. Not just Kenma, not just Kuroo...but
Sawamura, Hinata, Yachi, Tsukishima, everyone. Kuroo rushed forwards. Kenma looked alarmed and then stopped him with both hands.

“Let’s get that helmet off you first,” Kenma said. “Oh right,” Kuroo said, his voice slightly muffled by Kenma’s hands.

“Uh, Hinata,” Nishinoya whispered, “Why is that black ball talking to Kenma?”

“That’s Kuroo,” Hinata said.

“Hm, no one mentioned he was…” Tanaka trailed off.

“…Disembodied?” Nishinoya supplied.

“So you guys really aren't here for this idiot?” Kawasaki said, pointing down at Tendou. He sounded disappointed.

“Nope,” Tanaka said bluntly.

“Ah, you must be here to rescue Kuroo-San,” Moniwa said, clapping his hands together, “He did mention being kidnapped.”

Kuroo turned to Sawamura and Hinata. Beside them were two strangers he’d certainly never met before. One thuggish looking guy with a shaved head and a shorty with chemically altered hair.

“Where’s the other two, Yachi and Tsukishima?” Kuroo asked, eyeing the strangers, “Did you get new members while I was gone?”

“This is Tanaka Ryuunosuke and Nishinoya Yuu,” Sawamura explained, “It’s a long story, but they’re helping us rescue Yachi. Tsukishima is with the rest of their crew.”

There was suddenly a thundering of footsteps, as if a giant was walking in their direction.

“Oh! That reminds me,” Kuroo said excitedly, “You’ll never guess who else I met here!”

Hinata’s eyes widened as a familiar hulking figure plodded towards them.

“No way…” Sawamura breathed, his jaw dropping.

“Is that…” Tanaka trailed off, speechless.

“An armoured dinosaur…” Nishinoya finished, staring in amazement.

“TOBIO!” Hinata shouted, jumping in excitement.

The giant armoured dinosaur roared and the two metal rods on either side of his head shot out flames.

“WHY DOES HE BREATH FIRE NOW?” Sawamura shouted.

“Tobio turned into a mech! A dragon mech!” Hinata was beside himself with glee.

“…Godzilla…” Nishinoya said.

“Tobio you’re so cool!!!” Hinata hugged the dinosaur tightly, careful to avoid the armour.

Aone watched as the group of strangers greeted his pet warmly and familiarly. His face was inscrutable to most, but Moniwa knew what to look for. He also knew that arguing with him was
impossible.

Aone walked up to Hinata and stared down at him. Hinata seemed to react instinctively, rearing back and looking up at Aone’s towering figure. Aone pointed a finger down at him in challenge. The look in Hinata’s eyes changed and it seemed like some sort of instinct took over.

“Tobio isn’t a prize, he’s my friend” Hinata said, “I won’t fight you for him!”

“Not for him, for the armour,” Aone said.

“Fine,” Hinata said, eyes flashing.

“Not again,” Futakuchi groaned.

“Hey, clear Aone’s fighting arena!” Kawasaki shouted.

The members of Ironwall trudged towards the empty field next to the barn that was filled with scrap metal bins. They dragged the bins to the side, clearing the area within a white-marked rectangle.

“I’m guessing he does this often?” Tanaka said sarcastically.

“Are you gonna be alright, Shorty?” Kuroo asked Hinata worriedly, “Those muscles aren’t just for show!”

“Neither are mine!” Hinata said, his eyes narrowed in determination.

“Yeah...they just don’t show,” Kuroo said.

“Have some faith in him,” Sawamura laughed, nudging Kuroo with his arm, “Hinata is a Celestial Knight afterall.”

“Good luck, Shouyou,” Kenma said with an encouraging smile.

“Thanks, Kenma!” Hinata grinned.

Kuroo was surprised to hear Kenma call Hinata by his first name. He felt a pang of jealousy and then anger at himself for feeling jealous. Didn’t he want Kenma to become close to other people?

“Is the armour that important?” Kuroo asked.

“Uh, yeah it is! It’s fucking awesome!” Nishinoya said, his eyes shining in excitement.

“It’s not about the armour,” Hinata said, “He challenged me because he doesn’t think I’m worthy of being Tobio’s friend!”

“Um, I’m pretty sure he didn’t say anything like that,” Kuroo said.

“It was in his eyes,” Hinata said.

Hinata stepped onto the field. Across from him stood Aone, huge and menacing.

“On each side of the field is a sunflower,” Moniwa announced, “You must protect your sunflower as if it were the most important thing to you in the world. Whoever loses their sunflower, loses the match.”

Hinata drew his sword and Aone wielded his chui in each hand. Hinata moved first, running at Aona
head-on. Chui against Celestial steel screamed out, unlike the musical sound when Celestial steel clashed against Celestial steel. Hinata was fast, but so was Aone, and Aone had the advantage of height and brute strength. He pushed Hinata back, leaving tracks of dirt from Hinata’s heels where they dug in. Hinata was able to deflect most of the pounding blows from Aone’s chui but they still made Hinata’s arms tremble from their weight and his knees nearly buckled several times.

Hinata knew he had to change strategies before Aone simply pounded him into the dirt like a nail into wood. Hinata leapt backwards to regain his footing. He jumped and his flying shoes took him over Aone’s head. But he underestimated Aone’s reach.

Aone jumped, rotating his shoulders and his chui reached Hinata as he extended his arm in a powerful thrust. The chui hit Hinata in the stomach, sending him crashing to the ground. Hinata coughed, unable to breath properly. Aone could have easily crushed Hinata’s internal organs with that hit, but he settled for just enough to knock him down. Aone walked over him, taking his time as he approached Hinata’s sunflower.

Hinata glared in frustration at Aone’s back. But with Aone had left his own sunflower unprotected. Hinata staggered to his feet. He could try to save his own sunflower or attack Aone’s, there wasn’t enough time to do both. He could probably get to Aone’s flower first, Aone hadn’t looked back since he knocked Hinata down. Plus, even if he managed to get to his own flower in time, he’d still have to protect it from Aone, who’s strength clearly overpowered his own. But that sunflower was meant to represent something important to him. No matter what, he had to protect it.

Hinata started running clumsily. Aone was nearly at his flower. Hinata leaped into the air, allowing his shoes to carry him faster than he could run. He threw his sword at Aone’s back. Aone turned sharply and deflected Hinata’s sword with one of his chui. It landed in the dirt behind him. He looked up at Hinata.

“If you could move, why didn’t you cut down my flower?” Aone asked.

“Protecting my flower is more important than destroying yours,” Hinata said simply.

“And how will you do that?” Aone asked, “I stand between you and your flower.”

“No you don’t,” Hinata said, raising his thumb and forefinger to his lips. His eyes looked like they were glowing and the tips of his sword raised into the air, pointing at Aone’s back. Hinata whistled piercingly and his sword shot forwards.

Aone spun, his chui once again knocking Hinata’s sword aside. At the end of his rotation, he let go of a chui and it flew into Hinata’s chest. Hinata fell, this time blood leaked out of his mouth and he gasped for air. Aone approached him and looked down at him as if he were a shot bird. In Aone’s hand was Hinata’s sunflower, its stem crushed and then ripped off.

“You lose,” Aone said, dropping the flower onto Hinata’s chest.

The ground shook and then suddenly a shadow fell over Hinata and Aone. Hinata blinked in surprise. Standing over him was Tobio. The dinosaur bent its head protectively over Hinata’s body and glared at Aone. Tobio roared and Aone had to duck out of the way of the flamethrowers on either side of Tobio’s head. Aone dropped his chui and lifted his hands in the air.

“The loss is mine,” Aone said.

Tobio nudged Hinata gently with his nose.

Aone simply walked away. Sawamura, Kenma, Tanaka, Nishinoya and Kuroo rushed onto the field, surrounding Hinata.

“Are you alright?” Sawamura asked worriedly.

“Oh fuck that’s blood,” Tanaka said, turning pale.

“Hang in there, Shorty! Don’t go into the light!” Nishinoya said, slapping his cheek.

Moniwa pushed through them with a first aid kit.

“Let me take a look,” Moniwa said, cutting Hinata’s shirt off him. Hinata’s was bruised all over and he winced under Moniwa’s careful touch.

“It looks like a couple ribs have been bruised or fractured,” Moniwa said, “He’s gonna need to rest for about 3 to 6 weeks.”

Moniwa skillfully wrapped Hinata’s chest, applied band-aids to several of his cuts and then instructed him to take painkillers.

“What did Aone mean by the loss was his?” Hinata asked, once he was all bandaged up.

“Armour is meant for protection,” Moniwa explained, “As members of Ironwall, what we value above all else is the ability to protect what is important to us. You were not able to protect your sunflower, but the dinosaur-”

“Tobio,” Hinata corrected.

“Yes,” Moniwa smiled, “Tobio decided to protect you. Aone decided to let Tobio keep the armour so that Tobio could protect what is important to him.”

Hinata practically beamed. That meant that he was important to Tobio, that Tobio wasn’t just a dumb dinosaur who didn’t have feelings. And as much as Hinata tried not to think about it, he couldn’t help but hope that the other Tobio, the human one, also cared about him in some way.

“What is Oikawa planning?” Tsukishima asked. He’d taken it upon himself to interrogate Kageyama.

They were in the hold of the Crow, away from prying ears and eyes. Kageyama was tied up inside the brig while Tsukishima sat on a stool outside the bars. With the exception of the ropes around Kageyama, the two were almost mirror images of each other in scowling expression and guarded posture. Kageyama glared at him silently.

“You betrayed us and now you’re a prisoner here,” Tsukishima said simply, “Oikawa hasn’t come for you and frankly I hate you. I would start begging for mercy if I were you.”

“If you hate me, why don’t you just kill me?” Kageyama said, “Too scared?”

Tsukishima often asked himself the same question. And every time a certain orange-haired person annoyingly came to mind. And when using Oculus’ powers, Tsukishima could see the same orange-
haired figure in Kageyama’s mind.

“It’s not my place to kill you,” Tsukishima said finally.

“Why did you betray Hinata?” Kageyama’s pulse quickened at the mention of his name. He cursed himself inwardly. Hinata’s name was like a chain, much stronger than the ropes around him. He thought he had already broken free from it, but the weight in his chest proved otherwise.

“You...care about Hinata,” Tsukishima said, his eyebrows drawn together, “I can see it. So why? What does Oikawa have over you?”

Everything. Kageyama’s mind was a mess. Tsukishima held his gaze and Kageyama was startled as his glasses clouded over. Through the clouds, a floating island appeared.

“Amaranth...” Kageyama said in shock. Tsukishima was surprised that Kageyama could also see the images Oculus was showing him.

The image of the city grew sharper until they could see the ruined buildings, statues covered in moss and vines, and more notably, they could see people. Amaranth was a botanical city. Gardens had long overgrown their beds, reaching further and further, encompassing all in their wake. Glass from once tall greenhouses was shattered and scattered among the unruly foliage, glinting like diamonds.

Tsukishima was surprised by the vast amount of stone statues, frozen mid-movement as if imitating life. A group of three children scrambled over a fallen wall. Kageyama in childhood looked just as sour as he did sitting across from Tsukishima in present. His expression was a scowl as he looked over his shoulder. The light brown haired child with him seemed a few years older and had a benign smile as he surveyed the landscape. Tsukishima recognized him as Oikawa Tooru.

“Who is that?” Tsukishima asked.

The third child looked about Oikawa’s age and he had a similar scowl on his face. But he was bigger than Kageyama and he seemed more sure of himself.

“His name was Iwaizumi,” Kageyama said.

The scene shifted and Iwaizumi sat by himself in a dark cavern. Long tendrils of bioluminescent roots hung from the cave ceiling, lighting the cavern in a greenish-blue glow.

Kageyama sat up, a look of shock on his face.

Behind Iwaizumi were the sleeping figures of young Kageyama and Oikawa. Iwaizumi was talking, but the others were clearly asleep.

“I don’t trust you,” Iwaizumi said, “I’m not like you. I won’t fail to protect who I care about.”

Iwaizumi’s face twisted as whatever was talking to him responded.

“DON’T-!” Iwaizumi was cut off as his body suddenly turned to stone, like the statues littering the streets.

“NO!” Kageyama jerked against his ropes.

He was hit with a mixture of shock and pain. His heart raced and he felt cold. Oikawa woke first. He rushed to Iwaizumi’s side, at first not realizing what had happened. But he touched Iwaizumi’s arm and the cold stone shocked his fingers. He flinched and then a look of horror transformed his face.
He fell against Iwaizumi, holding him tightly, as if the heat of his body could turn Iwaizumi back into flesh.

Oikawa stiffened suddenly and Kageyama recognized the composed demeanor of Eaen Rie taking over. The next moment, Kageyama remembered very clearly. His younger self woke up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He cried out at the sight of Iwaizumi. Oikawa/Eaen wrapped his arms around him and quieted his sobs.

“We are going to get him back,” Oikawa/Eaen said, “We’re going to get everyone back.”

“How?” Young Kageyama asked.

The lens cleared.

“You think Eaen Rie is going to save him,” Tsukishima said.

“Eaen Rie is what brought us to the Celestial Knights!” Kageyama snapped, “He got us off Amaranth, the city where no ships go anymore. He even found Yara but some thief stole her before we could get to her! We tried doing recovery missions in secret but the world is too big for only a handful of us to search. We needed the entire order of knights.”

“So you’ve been betraying us all since the beginning,” Tsukishima stood, his gaze cold with anger, “Drugged and controlled our colleagues, our friends, and sent them on a wild goose chase!”

“We didn’t have a choice!” Kageyama shouted.

“YOU COULD HAVE ASKED US,” Tsukishima roared, kicking the bars. Tsukishima swore as Kageyama glared at him.

“I’ve never liked you but I respected you,” Tsukishima said, trying to contain his anger, “We may not have been friends but I thought we were teammates. If you had asked, I would have complained but I would have helped. And so would Hinata, Sawamura, Suga, Asahi, and Yachi. Without question.”

“I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone,” Kageyama said.

“And why the fuck not?” Tsukishima asked.

“You don’t understand what we have to do to save him,” Kageyama said.

“So you’re just blindly trusting this guy?” Tsukishima snarled, “Just how stupid are you?”

Kageyama was silent. This time Oculus couldn’t show Tsukishima anything.

“Fine then,” Tsukishima said, “Rot down here.”

He turned and left, kicking the stool out of his way.

Kageyama didn’t relax until Tsukishima’s footsteps faded up the stairs. His heart was still racing from witnessing the scene in Tsukishima’s stupid magic glasses. For as long as Kageyama knew, Amaranth was quarantined off from the rest of the world. Ever since the fall of the cities, the people of Amaranth have been struck by mors petram. No ships flew near in fear of catching the disease. With the ever-growing plants, there was always enough food, but soon there weren’t many mouths left to feed.

Oikawa’s parents had abandoned him, preferring to spend their days in a haze of drugs. Kageyama’s
were beaten to death by a street gang who wanted their garden. And Iwaizumi’s...they had turned to stone when he was ten years old. He tended them everyday, brushing off the dirt from their bodies and tearing the vines away from them.

Until now, Kageyama had believed mors petram had taken Iwaizumi suddenly, like the disease had taken everyone else. But now he had the feeling that Eaen Rie was somehow the cause. Eaen had said that he had a sin, one that he had to make up for.

But what was his sin?

The entrance to the baths was brightly lit and the boys could already feel the warmth from inside.

“Take as long as you need,” Moniwa said, “The towels are over there and there’s soap and shampoo inside the baths.”

“Thank you,” Sawamura said with a smile.

Moniwa closed the door and left the group to themselves. The changing room was lit by rock lamps that cast a soft pinkish-orange glow. Kenma balked as Hinata whipped off his shirt and pants, stripping down to his birthday suit. Kenma averted his eyes, but there was nowhere to look. The others had also shed their clothing.

“Is this your first time at a hot spring bath?” Sawamura asked.

“I have only ever bathed in my own home,” Kenma mumbled.

“No need to be shy!” Nishinoya said, slinging an arm around Kenma’s shoulders. “This is called ‘bonding’ and there’s no better way to do it than to take a nice bath together!”

Kenma wiggled out of Nishinoya’s arms and sighed. He reluctantly took off his clothes. They entered the baths and the sight almost took Kenma’s breath away. There were huge pools of steaming water. The scent of soap permeated the air.

“Yahoo!” Tanaka and Nishinoya shouted, jumping into the nearest pool.

“Owowowow-ahhhhhhh,” Hinata said as he sank into the water.

The water was hot but it felt amazing against their weary skin. Sawamura sank up to his ears and closed his eyes. Even Kuroo splashed into the water and then let himself bob on the surface.

“Whoa,” Nishinoya said, looking at Hinata’s body. While short, Hinata’s figure was surprisingly muscular and pale lines of scar tissue marked his body. A wicked bruise was spreading across his torso.

“It’ll heal,” Hinata said nonchalantly, “You should have seen me after my first week of training!”

Kenma layed back in the water as the others chatted in the background. He drifted away to the other end of the pool. Their voices became muffled as his ears sunk below the water. Something bobbed against his head and he knew without looking that it was Kuroo. He sat up and saw that Kuroo was covered in soap bubbles, the spikes of the helmet sticking up through them.
"Let's get that off, shall we?" Tanaka said, wading over.

Tanaka grabbed onto the sides of the helmet. Kenma grabbed onto Kuroo.

"Alright, one, two, three, pull!" Tanaka said. They pulled and Kuroo immediately slipped out of their hands and bounced across the bathroom. He crashed into a pile of shampoo bottles.

"Not so hard!" He complained, floating back up.

"Let me try next!" Hinata said, splashing over.

Hinata tried next, then Nishinoya, then Sawamura, then Tanaka again. Kuroo flew through the air again and again until finally, with a loud pop! He came loose from the helmet.

"Finally!" Kuroo shouted, splashing around in the water. The group sank into the baths, exhausted.

"There sure isn't a dull moment with you around," Sawamura said, leaning back. Kuroo floated across the water to Kenma. He didn't say anything, but Kenma knew what he wanted.

"Can I tell you all a story?" Kenma asked. The others perked up.

Kenma took a deep breath, and then began.

"This planet is alive. A long time ago, its soul used to walk among us in human form, in flesh and blood. Its name was Yara. One day, she met a group of three people. They were unlike any others she had met before, their ideas and their ambitions intrigued her. Their names were Nairali Amaranth, Eaen Rie, and Aerimus Cathal..."

Of all the places in the Shining Cities, Yara’s favourite was the gardens of Rie. Unlike Amaranth’s bountiful greenery, Rie’s gardens were purely for beauty. They attracted bees, butterflies, and sleep-deprived scholars alike. Yara stood at the edge of one of the gardens, looking out at the blue expanse of sky.

There were less parties, Yara had noticed. Eaen had been throwing himself into work, and while he was the same eager, friendly person, he now had an air of secrecy about him and a restless excitement that confused her. Nairali had still not spoken to her since the night Yara had told her there was no longer a growing soul within her womb. Yara had mourned the death, as she did with every soul that became untangled and evanesed, but she could not feel the depth of Nairali’s loss and it had driven a wedge between them. Humans, it seemed, were still so hard to fully understand.

She turned around and look over at the library. She knew Eaen was in the top floor of the tower. It had been a while since she had been invited into his personal chambers along with Nairali and Aerimus. Through the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of a familiar figure.

“Aerie!” She called, running over. She saw a flicker of confusion cross his face. Her own face fell slightly as she realized he must not think them close enough for her to use that nickname. She wondered how long she would have to know him before she would be able to call him as familiarly as Eaen did.
“I was wondering when the next party would be,” She said, composing herself. Oh, how she missed the parties! She yearned to be surrounded by dancing and laughing, by joy and music. The last party, she hadn’t even been able to dance with Eaen or Nairali or Aerimus.

“Party?” Aerimus said. He smiled, “It has been a while, hasn’t it?”

“It has been much too long!” Yara exclaimed, “I wish to dance with everyone!”

“Well, I happen to have an invite to a very special party,” Aerimus said, taking a fancy envelope out of his coat pocket with a flourish. He tapped it against his cheek as if he were thinking. “I wonder who I should give it to?”

“It is your decision of course,” Yara said, “But I would very much like to go!”

“It is yours then,” Aerimus said with a laugh, tapping her on the head with it.

“Oh! Thank you!” Yara beamed, taking the envelope and hugging it to her chest.

“It starts at 9pm tonight,” Aerimus said, “In Eaen’s chambers.”

“I cannot wait!” Yara said, twirling around.

She felt as though she had finally been accepted by them and her heart swelled with giddiness.

The chambers were almost messier than Yara remembered, with papers, books, tools, and various parts scattered about. Eaen had always been messy, leaving books here and there. But there was a thoughtfulness about his mess that revealed how much he cared for the items. No book was ever left to fade in the sunlight, nor did any pages ever sport the dusty outline of a footprint.

Yara danced her way to the main room, gracefully stepping between the scattered objects. She wondered when all the guests would arrive, what music would play and what food there would be. She opened the door to the study.

“Glad you could make it,” Eaen said, taking her hand and bringing her into the room.

It was brightly lit, with lights strung across the tops of the bookshelves and candles casting their soft orange glows. Aerimus and Nairali were there as well, smiling at her as she came to join them. Something large was covered by a sheet at the window.

“What is that?” Yara asked curiously.

“A surprise for later,” Eaen said, “Aerimus tells me you have been yearning for a dance.”

“Yes, that is true,” Yara said. Eaen spun her gently and as she turned he caught her hand.

“Then,” Eaen bent, lifting her hand to his lips, “May I grant your wish?”

“You may,” Yara laughed.

Aerimus started the phonograph and the delicate piano notes of nuvole bianche drifted through the room. She closed her eyes and let the music guide her movements. Eaen’s hands were strong and reliable as he led her across the floor. The music picked up in pace and intensity and Eaen spun her faster and faster. Her hair spun around them, wrapping them in its long golden tresses. And then there was a lull for the both of them to catch their breath.

“Yara, I love you,” Eaen said, his face full of candor.
“I love you too,” Yara replied happily.

Eaen’s face fell. There was no depth in her words, no desire or passion. She loved him no more than she loved the flowers in the garden outside. They spun again, resuming the dance.

“I love you more,” Eaen said, their hands clasped.

“What does that mean?” Yara asked.

“It means my love for you is so deep it is unbearable,” Eaen said.

“Is it painful?” Yara asked.

“It is very painful,” Eaen answered, “But it is also very joyous. And I wouldn’t want to give it up for anything in the world.”

“It sounds very complicated,” Yara said.

“It is,” Eaen smiled, “But it is the most important thing about being human.”

“What is it like?” Yara asked. Eaen stopped as the song came to an end.

“Do you wish to understand it?” Eaen asked her softly, “I can teach you.”

“Yes,” Yara said, “I would like to understand.”

Eaen walked over to the veiled object and pulled off the sheet. Yara was transfixed the strange sight. It appeared to be a black globe with metal rings of celestial steel surrounding it. Its inky blackness reflected their image.

“What is it?” Yara asked.

“I call it, the Arc,” Eaen said, “Now close your eyes.”

Yara closed her eyes, tingling with excitement. She felt Eaen’s hands pull her hair back from her face. And then…

A sharp stinging pain as though her entire body had been sliced through.

Chapter End Notes

I finally got to dragon mech Tobio *wipes tears from eyes*

Also, upon re-reading this I realize I made Ushijima really fucking dumb and I'm sorry.
He was meant to be just really literal.
Here be Vines

Chapter Summary

More of the past is revealed.

Chapter Notes

I know what you must be thinking, "Wow! ANOTHER update??! So quick!!" and that's because I haven't stopped writing since I uploaded the last chapter. In fact, this chapter is even a bit longer than my usual chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“They thought that by severing Yara’s connection to the planet would turn them into a human woman,” Kenma said solemnly, “But it killed them.”

“And the cities fell…” Sawamura said.

“Then…who is he?” Nishinoya asked, looking at Kuroo.

“I’m the Arc, aren’t I?” Kuroo said, bobbing up and down in the water. “Isn’t that obvious?”

The others looked at Kenma. Kenma swallowed nervously.

“You’re not the Arc, Kuroo,” Kenma said, “I am.”

“Uhhhh…” Kuroo said doubtfully, “No offence, but you don’t exactly look it.”

“I stole your body,” Kenma said. He immediately cringed at his bluntness and wished he could take it back. But he didn’t know how else to say it.

“How? Why?” Kuroo asked. There was no accusation or anger in his tone, just bewilderment.

“I wanted to be free,” Kenma said, “I wanted to see the world with my own eyes, touch things with my own hands. But I didn’t have any, so when you picked me up I took yours.”

“Then…where is my body?” Kuroo asked, “Because I don’t remember looking like you.”

“I took your cells and reorganized them to make my own appearance,” Kenma explained, “I couldn’t change the hair colour so I dyed it.”

“If you’re the Arc, how are you…alive?” Tanaka asked, “I mean, Eaen Rie and them didn’t give it a soul, did they?”

“They gave it Yara’s soul,” Kenma said, “I was created from Yara and Eaen Rie’s machine.”

“So they’re like your parents?” Tanaka asked, trying to wrap his head around it.
“Yeah, kind of,” Kenma made a face as he said it.

Hinata had made the same comparison before but Kenma still wasn’t sure what to think or feel about it. Yara as a mother was one thing…but Eaen Rie as a father? That seemed…disturbing.

“Wait! So then, who the heck am I?” Kuroo asked, utterly confused.

“You really are a thief,” Kenma said, poking him, “I met you when you broke into Astraea and stole the Arc.”

“I don’t remember doing that,” Kuroo said.

“You lost your memories when I stole your body,” Kenma said, “And I’ve been lying to you ever since. I’m sorry.”

“So I really was a thief…” Kuroo fell silent in thought.

“Then, do you know how to save Yara?” Sawamura asked.

“No,” Kenma said, looking down at the water.

“Then how are we supposed to fix the world? To regain our memories, stop mors petram?” Sawamura splashed the water in frustration.

“Does Oikawa know?” Hinata asked suddenly, looking at Sawamura. “Back in the Cave of Wonders, Oikawa attacked Bokuto and Kuroo…does he think Kuroo is the Arc.”

“He must,” Sawamura said, “That’s another problem we have.”

“Oikawa…who is he?” Kenma asked.

“I told you we had an internal struggle,” Sawamura said, “Our order was taken over by three individuals, Oikawa Tooru, Terushima Yuji, Ikejiri Hayato. They called themselves the Alastors and with the influence of a pollen from a red plant, they spread chaos throughout the order. They want to find the Arc.”

Tanaka’s eyebrows were furrowed and he appeared to be thinking deeply.

“Oikawa…Oikawa…Where have I heard that name?” Tanaka’s eyes shot open and he smacked his palm with his fist. “He’s that possessed guy I met at the Luck Houses.”

“You met a possessed guy at the Luck Houses? When?” Nishinoya asked.

“When you were passed out under the table with Tendou,” Tanaka said.

“You still owe me for leaving me like that,” Nishinoya grumbled.

“Wait, you ran into Oikawa?” Sawamura repeated, trying to clarify, “Are you sure we’re talking about the same man?”

“Hmm brown fluffy hair, dumb good looks and irritating smirk?” Tanaka said.

“That sure sounds like him,” Hinata remarked, “But what do you mean by possessed?”

“Look, I know how crazy it sounds and it’s a long story, but basically our captain, Kiyoko was flaring and I guess she could somehow sense something about him. She said he was…someone else
and then he changed! His whole demeanor and the air about him seemed like a different person entirely. And then...” Tanaka looked uneasy, “He called himself ‘Eaen Rie’.”

The room fell silent.

“You’ve lost me,” Sawamura said.

“Eaen Rie is long dead,” Kenma said, standing up. “Even if he survived the fall, it happened a hundred years ago.”

Kenma splashed to the side of the bath and climbed out. His skin was pink from the heat and his fingers and toes were all wrinkled.

“But what if he’s like a ghost?” Tanaka said, following Kenma out of the bath. “I mean, killing Yara probably left some unfinished business behind, who’s to say he didn’t get trapped on earth as a vengeful spirit or something?”

“Because it’s impossible,” Kenma said, “Yara told me that when a soul dies it evaneses and scatters across the world as stardust until it is gathered into a new soul. There are no such things as ghosts or restless spirits.”

“...If you say so,” Tanaka said, looking unconvinced.

“Uh, hey Tanaka,” Sawamura called, “Can you help me carry Hinata? He passed out in the bath.”

Kenma dried off and dressed quickly. The air seemed cold now to his damp skin and he shivered.

“What did I look like?” Kuroo asked, suddenly popping in front of Kenma’s face. “Was I handsome?”

“I don’t remember,” Kenma said, pulling his sweater over his head, “It was five years ago.”

“Awww,” Kuroo pouted, “I wish I could remember. I wonder if I’ve forgotten anyone from my past.”

Kenma paused, guilt gripping his heart.

“I’ll give your body back,” Kenma said quietly, “I promise.”

“It’s no big deal,” Kuroo said nonchalantly, “Don’t get me wrong, I miss having a human body. But if you knew how to give it back you would have already, right?”

“Yeah,” Kenma said, sniffling.

Kuroo bumped against his back. He wished he had arms to hug him.

“Well isn’t this a touching scene,” Tendou’s voice came from the doorway.

Kenma wiped his eyes and turned to face him.

“Who are you?” Kenma asked.

“I’m the one who snatched your friend there,” Tendou said, “And I still need him.”

“For what?” Kenma narrowed his eyes and there was an edge to his voice.
“We have a world fair to get to,” Tendou said.

“Too bad,” Kenma said coldly, “He won’t be coming with you.”

“I don’t think I asked your permission,” Tendou said, tilting his head to the side, “Yo Kuroo, coming?”

Kenma stiffened, almost afraid of what Kuroo’s response would be.

“I’m not going,” Kuroo said.

Kenma released the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding.

“Oh really?” Tendou said, raising an eyebrow, “What if I said you could get your body back if you went there?”

“How do you know about that?” Kuroo asked.

“I was eavesdropping,” Tendou bragged.

“We aren’t going to be fooled by your lies,” Kenma said angrily.

“It’s not a lie,” Tendou said seriously, “It’s a hunch. And my hunches are always correct.”

Warm hands cupped Suga’s face. A wet cloth wiped the sweat and grim from him and he winced in pain. His arms were burning with pain.

“You poor thing,” said a kind voice.

Suga opened his eyes. His vision was hazy but he could see the silhouette of someone with golden hair. He was overcome with a feeling of familiarity. The hazy features sharpened into the form of a beautiful woman with tanned skin and a charming face.

“Nairali?” Suga rasped, the name springing to his lips.

“Prydori, is that you?” The woman sounded hopeful.

“No,” Suga said regretfully. He didn’t know why, but disappointing this person filled him with sorrow. “I am sorry.”

“I knew it couldn’t be the case,” the woman smiled sadly, “But I couldn’t help but hope.”

“He loved you,” Suga said.

He didn’t know why, but it was imperative that she knew how much his grandfather must have cared for her. In fact, Suga also cared for her, even though he was not the one she wanted.

“You remind me of him,” She said, a bit of wonder in her voice, “I wonder if all Silver Speakers know exactly what to say to sway a person’s heart.”

“I couldn’t sway Eaen’s heart,” Suga said.
"I’m afraid no one but Yara could do that," Nairali said.

She raised her hand and tucked a red flower behind Suga’s ear. She gently touched his chin and turned his head to admire it.

“I can’t help you find her,” Suga said, his heart heavy. “The world itself does not want her to be found.”

“You don’t need to tell us where she is,” Nairali said softly, “Women liked to be courted, but not chased after.”

Suga was transfixed by Nairali’s graceful movements, from her breathing, to the way she turned her head and tucked her hair behind her ear. She smiled at him.

“Could you invite her to our World Fair?” Nairali asked him, “In return, I will convince Eaen to release you from this horrid place. You won’t have to report to him anymore, just to me.”

Suga could hardly think of a better proposal.

“Yes,” He said, leaning forwards and ignoring the pain in his arms, “I will ask her and if she refuses then I will sway her heart so that she agrees to attend.”

“Thank you,” Nairali smiled dazzlingly, "I knew I could count on you."

She unlocked his handcuffs and caught him as he fell forwards. She was strong, Suga thought, as the pain blinded him and pulled him into unconsciousness.

“I wonder if he’s having a sweet dream?” Terushima said as Nairali’s consciousness faded from his appearance. Shrugging, he then carried Sugawara out of the cell.

Oikawa stood outside with Ikejiri.

“How did it go?” Oikawa asked.

“Amaranth didn’t let me watch,” Terushima said, “But from the looks of it, it went well.”

“Clean him up and send him off,” Oikawa said, “The other preparations are all finished.”

“Are you sure?” Terushima said doubtfully, “He doesn’t exactly look ready. I know we’ve been waiting for him to awaken or whatever, but this isn’t what I expected.”

“The Argent will bring Yara to us,” Eaen said, taking over Oikawa’s body.

“How?” Terushima asked.

“When he wakes, you will see,” Eaen said mysteriously before leaving Oikawa’s body to its original owner.

“Why are you still here?” Oikawa asked, annoyed.

100 Years Ago
After their grand escape from Dominus Semi’s office, Tsutomu had flown them to his crummy apartment in Caelum. He couldn't think of anywhere else to go. Tendou had quickly made himself at home in the small but tidy space, inspecting the living room. Tsutomu, in contrast, had fallen to his knees, once again in human form.

“What am I going to do?” he lamented.

“Calm down,” Tendou said, peering out the window, “First, we need to come up with a new plan. As it is now, we should pack up and run! Does Dominus Semi know where you live?”

“Plan? You planned this?” Tsutomu said slowly.

“Yeah, it sucks this one didn’t work out, but I didn’t anticipate that rich bastard being such a selfish prick. I thought if I could present a good enough business angle on it, the cities could all be saved,” Tendou said, closing the blinds, “Hurry and pack, we should use the cover of night to hide our escape from this city.”

Tsutomu balled his hands into fists, his fury quickly taking over.

“Your plan just ruined my life, you know that? And now you want me to leave the city with you? And lose everything?”

Tendou held up his hands, trying to calm Tsutomu down.

“I know you’re mad and you have every right to be,” Tendou said, urgency in his voice, “But we are in danger now. The Dominus will send people after us. He doesn’t want anyone finding out about his crooked business plan.”

Tsutomu faced him, his eyes full of hurt and anger.

“Leave me out of this,” Tsutomu said, shaking with anger.

“But…” Tendou fell silent.

“Save the cities? The Shining Cities floating above us? Full of the rich and prosperous?” Tsutomu laughed harshly, “Why do they need saving? Why are you trying to be some kind of hero when you’ve just ruined my life? How do you even know the cities are going to fall?”

“I…” Tendou let his mouth close.

For the first time since Tsutomu had met him, Tendou looked lost for words.

“Get out of my house,” Tsutomu said scathingly, “I don’t ever want to see you again.”

“You don’t believe me,” Tendou said quietly, “No one ever believes me.”

Tendou got up from the couch and slowly walked to the window.

“I’m sorry,” Tendou said before climbing out the window.

A swish of a simian tail was the last glimpse Tsutomu said of him as he left.

“What a crazy idiot,” Tsutomu grumbled to himself.

For some reason, his apartment felt smaller than it had a few moments ago. He curled up on his couch and tried to go to sleep. He rolled over. Propped his head on his arm. Then rolled onto his
back. Sleep was evading him. For some reason, he couldn’t get that crazy monkey man out of his head.

Tendou laid down on the roof of Goshiki’s apartment building. He stared up at the undersides of the Shining Cities floating above Caelum. They created three dark circles where no stars shone. Goshiki’s words repeated in his mind: *Why do they need saving? Are you trying to be some kind of hero?*

“I just don’t want to do nothing anymore,” Tendou said aloud.

A dark shadow fell over him. Tendou sat up and turned around to see a giant bat.

“I don’t have a job anymore,” Goshiki said, “Take some responsibility.”

“Huh?” Tendou blinked.

“I said I’m unemployed now,” Goshiki snapped, “What’s your next plan?”

“You...wanna help me save the cities? Even though they’re full of rich people?” Tendou asked, excitement growing in his chest.

“They’re still people,” Goshiki grumbled.

“Tsuuuuu-Chan!!!!” Tendou exclaimed, scrambling to his feet, “I knew I had a good feeling about you!”

Tendou flung his arms around the giant bat and nestled his face into Goshiki’s short fur.

“Do you even have another plan?” Goshiki said, struggling to wiggle out of Tendou’s grasp.

“Nope!” Tendou said cheerily, “But I’m confident that together, it will definitely be a success!”

They were suddenly backlit by a giant spotlight that blinded them both.

“TENDOU SATORI. GOSHIKI TSUTOMU. PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD AND SURRENDER. YOU’RE UNDER ARREST.”

“Huh?” Goshiki froze in fear.

“Oh dammit,” Tendou said, stepping back and raising his hands, “It’s the Praesidium.”


“Well...we did piss off a Dominus…” Tendou remarked glumly.

Underneath Cathal, the city of Architecture, was the prison of Umbra. It was a maze of darkness whose twisting paths only ever opened downwards in sudden slopes or random holes. And each prisoner bore heavy shackles that pulled them down if they were so unlucky as to slip. But there was one inhabitant of the prison who wore no shackles and could roam freely without fear of falling like a stone from the floating city.
Kaerulus stretched languidly, his narrow hazel eyes squeezing shut as he yawned. His padded feet made no sound as he walked along the cavern. Prisoners clung to the walls, feeling blindly in the dark. When Kaerulus grew up, they would have reason to fear for their life, but for now he walked past them without a second thought. It had been several days since he had been taken to this strange place and there was much of it left to explore. He wondered if his mom or siblings were here too. His brother Viridus and his sister Rutile always picked on him for lacking any caprine features, but their harassment would be better than being alone.

“Hold on tight!” Said a voice from ahead.

Kaerulus watched as a pair of inmates attempted to climb up one of the holes leading down into the open sky.

“You’re heavy, Tsu-Chan!” One complained.

He was a tall and slender man with shocking red hair that stood in all directions. On his back, arms and legs wrapped tightly around him, was a glum looking man with straight black hair in a severe bowl-cut.

“Shut up,” Tsutomu snapped.

But he wasn't actually angry. It was mostly his fault they were stuck in jail. If he had just listened to Tendou and left his apartment immediately - or even better, if he hadn't taken them to his easily-found apartment in the first place - they probably wouldn't be in this mess. Tendou had also just saved him from plummeting to his death.

“Why are you still hanging around me?” Tsutomu blurted out, unable to hide the emotion in his voice. “Nothing good has ever happened to you while I’m around.”

“Nothing good?” Tendou laughed, “We escaped that stupid Dominus’ office because of you. And I would never have had the balls to quit like that if you weren’t in the room with me.”

“What does that even mean?” Tsutomu said, flabbergasted, “You met me that day! What basis did you have for trusting me so much? You didn’t know I was a bat demuto!”

“I had a good feeling about you,” Tendou said, “And I am an excellent judge of character.”

“Well that good feeling got you stuck in jail,” Tsutomu grumbled.

“And it’s gonna get us out!” Tendou said, undeterred.

He reached for a handhold and pulled them up farther.

“See, Tsu-Chan?” Tendou said happily as his head popped up over the ledge.

Kaerulus froze. His sleek black body blended in with the darkness of the path but his hazel eyes stared right into the inmate’s.

“Hiya,” the inmate said, “I’m Tendou and this is Goshiki.”

“Who are you talking to?” Goshiki asked, peering over Tendou’s shoulder. He saw a tiny black kitten.

Tendou pulled them over the ledge and collapsed onto the safe firmness of the stone path.

“Well aren’t you a cute little guy,” Tendou said, rolling onto his side and reaching out a hand.
Kaerulus hissed, his fur standing on end. His serpent tail whipped forwards, like a scorpion ready to strike.

“Whoa!” Tendou scrambled back, “What is that?!”

“It appears to be a chimera kitten,” Goshiki said, “But an incomplete one. He doesn’t have any goat legs.”

“I am NOT incomplete!” Kaerulus shouted, “I am the son of the Fearsome Bone-Splitter Niveus and the Beautiful Night-Eater Aurantine!”

“Never heard of ‘em,” Tendou said. “My mother’s parents, Grishra and Mroudin ravaged the giant clans of Azar and my father and his brothers, Cereus the Griever, Atar the-”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Tendou waved his hand, “You’ve listed like 6 names now and still haven’t mentioned your own.”

“You want to know my name?” Kaerulus blinked in surprise, “I’m Kaerulus.”

“That’s it? No epithet?” Tendou tilted his head to the side.

“A bit underwhelming after those other grand introductions you just gave us,” Goshiki remarked.

“That’s because I haven’t split any bones yet,” Kaerulus explained matter-of-factly, “But once I get bigger I’m going to have a fearsome name too!”

“Hmmm, as it is, Kaerulus is a bit of a mouthful already,” Tendou said, “Can we call you ‘Kaeru’ for short?”

“I don’t like that,” Kaerulus made a face.

“Does your snake tail have a name too?” Tendou asked.

“No,” Kaerulus said, “That’s my tail.”

“Ah, so no separate consciousness?” Tendou said, inching closer.

“Why would there be?” Kaerulus asked.

“Because it has a face?” Tendou shrugged.

“Of course,” Kaerulus scoffed, “My tail would be pretty useless if it didn’t have a face.”

Tendou felt mildly offended and his own, face-less tail twitched in irritation.

“Most tails don’t have faces,” Tendou said tersely.

The hair on Kaerulus’s back raised suddenly. His tail whipped back and forth, the snake’s eyes searching the dark corners.

“We need to hide,” Kaerulus said quietly.

“Why?” Goshiki asked. Tendou quickly placed a hand over his mouth.

Whatever it was, Tendou could sense it too. A dark, ominous presence hung over them.

Kaerulus turned and ran silently down the path, his tail held out straight behind him for balance.
Tendou kicked off his shoes and followed in his socks. Goshiki did the same as Tendou dragged him along behind them. Tendou soon lost sight of the small black figure but every now and then a pair of glowing hazel eyes glanced back at him. They fled the presence for what felt like hours. At times the presence felt so close it was breathing down the back of their necks before fading back behind them.

Finally, the presence was gone and the three of them collapsed, panting heavily.

“What was that?” Goshiki asked between breaths.


“He must be a monster,” Tendou said, his face pale, “I’ve never felt anything like that.”

“He’s a Distortionist,” Kaerulus explained, “A being that distorts the space and physics of things around him. It’s really hard to look at him, it makes you feel all queasy, like your insides are turning inside out.”

“Gross,” Goshiki said.

“I’m supposed to replace him when he dies,” Kaerulus said proudly, “Soon everyone will run away from ME in fear.”

“Wait, if your his replacement, why did you run too?” Goshiki asked.

“Because I ate his pie,” Kaerulus said, “And he got really mad.”

“You don’t eat people?” Goshiki asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Not yet,” Kaerulus grinned.

“Cute,” Tendou said wryly.

The three of them were suddenly pressed against the ground, like a heavy weight had fallen over them. The overwhelming feeling of dread was back, accompanied by a horrible sensation that felt like they were being turning into paste. Tendou strained to turn his head and his eyeballs burned as he saw the Warden.

The Warden’s image was blurred and seemed to be constantly undulating and shifting, almost as if a mirage were in front of him. He picked up Kaerulus by the scruff of his neck and walked away. The pressure released and Tendou and Goshiki gasped for air. Tendou rolled over and threw up, spilling out the half-digested remains of the chalky mushrooms that grew on the walls and served as the prisoner’s main food. Goshiki was quick to do the same, unable to hold it back.

“I hope to god we never cross paths with him again,” Tendou said weakly.

**Present Day**

Hinata was laying on the floor of the bath house, a towel placed over his lower half. His face was flushed and bright red. Sawamura, Nishinoya and Tanaka were crouched around him, fanning him with their hands when Kenma burst back into the room.  

“There’s something we need to discuss,” Kenma said, “Get dressed and come with me.”

The others exchanged confused looks. Sawamura gently slapped Hinata awake. Hinata groggily pulled on his clothes and followed the others out of the changeroom. Kenma was waiting for them, along with Kurro, Tendou and Goshiki.

“You again?” Tanaka said in surprise.

“Thought you’d be long gone,” Nishinoya said.

“Who’s your friend?” Tanaka asked, gesturing to Goshiki.

“Goshiki Tsutomu,” Goshiki said with a nod.

“What’s the issue?” Sawamura asked.

“They want Kuroo to go with them to some event,” Kenma said, “They think he could get his body back.”

“Have you heard of the World Fair?” Tendou asked smoothly.

Tanaka and Nishinoya moved before the others could react. Tanaka had Tendou pressed against the wall and his expression was suddenly serious.

“What do you two know about it?” Nishinoya asked, one his knives held to Goshiki’s neck.

The others stood silently in shock, not knowing what to do.

“Whoa! Whoa! Calm down there!” Tendou said, raising his hands.

“What’s the matter, Tanaka?” Sawamura asked, placing a hand on Tanaka’s shoulder.

“My sister, Saeko and a few members of our crew were investigating a shady Auction that was abducting demuto,” Tanaka explained without taking his eyes off Tendou, “Shortly before we left to find Kenma, one of them reported back to Kiyoko. Some guy was rounding up demuto to bring to his ‘World Fair’.”

“Are you working with them?” Nishinoya asked, lightly pressing his knife against Goshiki’s throat.

“No!” Goshiki snapped, “We’re just trying to get into the fair!”

“Why?” Tanaka asked.

“Because I have a feeling something bad is going to happen!” Tendou said, pushing Tanaka back. The effort was useless as Tanaka held him in place. “I don’t want to fail again!”

“Fail what?” Kenma asked.

“Fail to save everyone,” Tendou slumped against the wall, “What’s the point of being a Guess Monster if all I can do is save myself?”

Tanaka let go of Tendou and Nishinoya withdrew his knife.

“Do they have someone you care about?” Nishinoya asked.

“I don’t know,” Tendou answered, “But I can’t find him anywhere else.”
“Maybe...they have Yachi and Akaashi there,” Sawamura said, hope budding in his chest.

“Ah-Ah-Ah-Akaashiiiiii?!?” Tendou squeaked, “What’s that monster doing still alive? I thought he died years ago!”

“I doubt it’s the same guy,” Goshiki said rationally, but his shaking hands gave away his own fear.

“There’s no way!” Hinata exclaimed, “Bokuto really loves Akaashi! There’s no way he’s a monster!”

“The Akaashi we know is a really cool dude,” Kuroo added.

“So he’s not a Distortionist?” Phew!” Tendou said with relief.

Kenma, Kuroo, Sawamura, and Hinata unanimously decided to keep their mouths shut.

“Where did you learn about the World Fair?” Nishinoya asked.

Tendou and Goshiki exchanged glances.

“We’re a...bit older than you would probably guess…” Tendou said.

“What do you mean?” Hinata asked.

“And why does it matter?” Nishinoya asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Because we were there when the Shining Cities fell,” Goshiki answered.

The others stared at them in shock.

“Well damn,” Tanaka said, breaking the silence.

“We tried to warn the cities, but no one listened to us,” Tendou said, “They threw us in jail and left us to rot. That’s where we met Kaerulus.”

"He was a chimera without goat legs,” Goshiki said.

“He helped us come up with a new plan and we spent a whole year preparing for it,” Tendou stiffened. “But the plan failed. Something...unexpected happened.”

And that was the real bane of being a Guess Monster. Throw something unexpected in their way and they aren't able to deal with it. That was the reason Tendou always failed in the end. Because even with supernatural abilities, there are things that you just can't predict. And Tendou hadn't predicted what the Distortionist would do.

“I wanted to forget our failure,” Tendou said, “I drowned myself in gambling, and fleeting amusements.”

Tendou took a deep breath. That had been, admittedly the lowest point in his life. Goshiki had left, thoroughly disgusted by Tendou’s moping. Tendou had thought he’d spend the rest of his life drowning in alcohol and money that had no purpose other than to buy more alcohol and win more money.

“At the Luck House, before you kidnapped me,” Tendou said, straightening up, “I was wandering down the halls when I came across a secret meeting. They were talking about collecting the most powerful demuto in order to create a body.”
“Uwahh, that sounds creepy,” Hinata said, making a face.

“Is that why you said I could get my body back?” Kuroo asked, horrified, “I don’t want some man-made freaky body!”

“That aside,” Goshiki took over, “When Tendou told me about it I thought that we might be able to find our friend, Kaerurus. We were separated when the Shining Cities fell.”

“We knew him when he was just a kitten, but if he’s survived these past hundred years then he should be extremely powerful by now,” Tendou said proudly.

“And you think it’s possible that he was taken to the World Fair,” Sawamura said, a worried expression crossing his face. According to Lev, Yachi is secretly a mwyn firain and Akaashi is a distortionist. What if they were also taken to this World Fair?

“Who’s running this World Fair?” Hinata asked.

“I only heard one name,” Tendou said, “But that’s impossible since it belongs to a guy who died a long time ago.”

“Bold statement coming from a guy who’s over a hundred years old,” Tanaka said sarcastically.

“That guy was human though,” Tendou said, frowning, “He’s the founder of the city Rie.”

A feeling of dread weighed down the group at those words.

“What’s wrong?” Tendou asked, confused by their reaction.

“Oikawa,” Hinata said, his expression dark.

“You were right Tanaka,” Sawamura said, “However impossible it may be, Oikawa is possessed by the spirit of Eaen Rie.”

“It’s not just him,” Tanaka said, “There was another one. Kiyoko knocked him unconscious so I never met him but she knew he was hiding another soul inside him too.”

As they were talking, an uneasy thought had been growing in the back of Sawamura’s mind.

“Kenma,” Sawamura turned to him, “What if they’re all here.”

Kenma’s eyes grew wide.

“Three people took over our order, wanting to find the Arc,” Sawamura said, “What if killing Yara made the souls of the Shining City founders unable to evanse?”

Kenma stood in shock. He wanted to protest — to vehemently deny the very possibility — but there was nothing he could say. The thought of Eaen Rie gripped him with an irrational and all-encompassing fear.

“Maybe Yara is afraid of them,” Kuroo said, “And maybe the world is too. Maybe that’s why they can’t evanse.”

“It would explain why Oikawa suddenly wants to find the Arc,” Sawamura said grimly.

“What should we do?” Hinata asked.
“We will go with Tendou and Goshiki,” Sawamura said, “We need to see if Yachi and Akaashi are at the World Fair.”

“But-”

“But Kenma and Kuroo can’t come with us,” Sawamura said, interrupting Hinata’s protest.

“What!?” Kuroo said, “Why?”

“Now that we know Oikawa wants the Arc, it’s too dangerous for you two to go,” Sawamura said firmly, “We will regroup with the Virago pirates and Tsukishima. You and Kenma will stay with them while we free the captured demuto.”

“I want to help,” Kenma said. He was afraid of meeting Eaen and the others, but he also felt frustrated at being left out of the rescue mission. “You all helped me find Kuroo, I want to repay the favour.”

“Then help us prepare,” Sawamura said, ruffling Kenma’s hair.

Asahi stood in the armoury. He picked up a piece of unrefined celestial steel and closed his eyes. Stardust gathered around him in a cloud of golden dust as the metal became soft and malleable in his hand. It scattered suddenly as the metal shifted from a simple rod to a giant battle axe. It felt right in his hand and he took a test swing that cut the air with a satisfying swoosh.

“That’s not exactly standard-issue,” said Michimiya, standing in the doorway.

“Sorry!” Asahi jumped and turned around guiltily.

“It’s fine,” Michimiya laughed, “I won’t snitch on you. I think it looks pretty badass actually.”

Asahi looked down at the axe with a thoughtful expression. Most Celestial Knights used swords, forging the celestial steel to suit their needs. But Asahi had always been drawn to battle axes more than swords.

“I wonder why we use swords anyway,” Michimiya said, running her fingers over the bars of unrefined celestial steel. “This sounds crazy, but sometimes I get the feeling that celestial steel is meant to be more than metal for weapons.”

“What do you mean?” Asahi asked.

“Like this,” Michimiya picked up a rod and closed her eyes.

She held it in a strange way, horizontal with one end resting in front of her mouth. Stardust gathered again in a giant swarm. Asahi shielded his eyes from the flurry. A clear note rang out from the middle of the cloud. The stardust swirled and scattered as more notes followed. In Michimiya’s hands was a slender tube with holes in the top. Her fingers were placed gently over some of the holes and as she pursed her lips and blew, the celestial steel sang out.

“What do you think?” Michimiya said, lowering the instrument.
“That’s amazing…” Asahi said, in awe, “What is it?”

“Have you never seen a flute before?” Michimiya asked, tilting her head to the side, “Or did I make a mistake in shaping it?”

“I don’t know,” Asahi said sincerely, “I haven’t listened to music much.”

“Lately, I’ve been having horrible dreams,” Michimiya said, clutching the flute, “Music helps me calm down after.”

The flute in her hand turned back into a metal rod.

“Hey, Asahi,” Michimiya said quietly, “Do you get the feeling that something terrible is going to happen?”

Asahi was silent. It had already been a couple days since he’d last seen Suga. And he hadn’t seen Kageyama come back with Oikawa and the others from their previous battle. But whenever he asked, all he was told was “I don’t know” or “They’re probably resting”. Something was going on behind the scenes, something that neither he nor Michimiya were privy to.

“I wish Sawamura were still here,” Asahi found himself saying.

A pained look crossed Michimiya’s face.

“Me too,” she said, “I still can’t believe he would betray us. It feels wrong, like a bad dream.”

Asahi thought back to when he first joined the Celestial Knights. He remembered the starship landing, like something from out of this world. It descended in a cloud of golden dust shimmering and shining. Sawamura had descended from the ship, his figure outlined by light. He remembered the feeling of having to go with them, a calling from deep inside him. And he remembered saying goodbye to someone...a desperate boy chasing after him as the door closed and the starship carried him away.

“When did you become a Celestial Knight, Michimiya?” Asahi asked suddenly.

“I was ten years old,” Michimiya said, a faraway look in her eyes, “Captain Kurokawa found me, his starship appearing suddenly above me.”

“It’s like a miracle, isn’t it? Them finding us right when we need to be found,” Asahi said.

“It’s part of being a captain,” Michimiya grinned, “We can sense when a new Celestial Knight has been chosen. And then we go to find them.”

“Captain Kurokawa found Sawamura too, didn’t he,” Asahi said.

“Yup!” Michimiya said, remembering the time fondly, “Back then it was Ikejiri, Sawamura, and I.”

In those days, Michimiya had been infatuated with Sawamura Daichi. They dated for a while after she confessed to him. But soon after, Oikawa found Sugawara Koushi. And Sawamura's gaze had been drawn away from her. She didn't blame Sugawara for that, and while she had been hurt and angry with Sawamura for a long time after, these past years had given her time to heal. And until recently, she had regarded both of them as dear friends.

“Do you ever remember before you were a Celestial Knight?” Asahi asked.

“That was a long time ago,” Michimiya leaned against the rack holding the celestial steel and crossed
her arms, “I remember my parents, but sometimes it’s hard to remember their faces…Do you remember anything?”

“No,” Asahi lied.

The morning sun was bright. Blindingly so. But it was also warm, incredibly warm and the air was sharp and clear as he breathed in for the first time. He lifted a hand to his face and marvelled at the ease in which it moved. He’d never felt something like that before. That airy, fluid motion that he could control without even trying to. He stretched and loosened the extra dirt from his limbs.

He looked around and noticed a small boy sleeping on the ground next to him. He crouched down and looked at his face. His hair was brown and messy and he was covered in dirt. He lifted the boy’s hand and looked carefully at his fingers. They were rough and his nails were ragged. His Maker might not have been the most skillful of sculptors, but it did not matter. The boy had put his heart into making a sculpture of mud and whatever power that was on this earth had brought him to life.

“Thank you, Maker,” the golem said, smiling. The boy moved and grumbled as he woke.

“Whoa!” the boy yelled, jerking his hand back in surprise.

“I’m sorry!” the golem yelped, surprised by the child’s outburst.

“Who’re you?” the boy asked suspiciously.

“I don’t have a name,” the golem answered.

“Weirdo,” the boy muttered, rubbing a hand through his hair.

The boy's eyes widened suddenly as he looked past him to the mound of left-over dirt.

“Wha-! Where’s my statue?” he cried out.

He scrambled to his feet and looked around frantically.

“Did you break it?” he asked accusingly.

“No, I-!”

“Liar!” The boy yelled before angrily running away.

He disappeared among the dark decrepit buildings of a ruined city but the boy’s form was outlined by a faint aura of gold that only he could see. The golem slumped over, feeling dejected. This was not how he expected meeting his Maker would go. His nature required him to serve the one who made him, even if the one who made him didn’t like him. Unsure of what else to do, the golem followed after the boy.

The city was dark, shadowed by massive green vines that intertwined around each other, choking the tall skyscrapers and blocking out the sun. Mold and rot grew on the sides of buildings that looked like they struggled to remain upright. Many of the skyscrapers were worn down, the thick metal beams of their skeletons the only remaining structure.
The golem found the boy entering an old house. He stayed hidden behind a crumbling wall and watched. He heard shouting inside and the crashing of stuff being thrown. The boy’s small body was thrown out the front door into the dirt.

“Told you not to come back here,” A large man said. His face was hidden by shadows and his clothes stained and dirtied.

“Let me see him, let me see my son!” A woman begged from inside.

The man turned and a resounding slap echoed down the empty street. The golem gasped, covering his mouth.

“Take her to the back room,” the man said, sounding tired.

He turned back around and stepped into the dim light of a streetlamp. To the golem’s surprise, the side of the man’s face was red from being slapped.

“Run away, Yuu-Kun,” the man said sternly, “There is nothing but disease here.”

“I won’t leave without my mother,” Yuu replied, his hands clenched at his sides.

“She doesn’t have much longer,” the man said, “None of us do. But you can go somewhere else, escape this rotten place.”

“I don’t want to,” Yuu said stubbornly, “My mom is here. I’m not leaving even if I die!”

“Even if you die?” The man said angrily, “You don’t even know what death is. Do you think sacrificing your life is brave?”

“What else can I do?” Yuu said helplessly.

“You can live,” the man knelt and looked the boy in the eye, “Live and struggle and thrive. If you make it, Yuu, if you live and grow up into a fine young man then the rest of here won’t have died in vain. You will remember us.”

“I don’t want to be alone,” Yuu said.

“Yuu,” The man smiled, “Do you know how incredibly huge this world is? I’ve heard that there is a sea whose water boils, vast plains of cold snow where the sky changes colour, lakes that glow at night, and above us,” – the man pointed up above them at the dark green net of thick vines – “Above us and above the vines that are suffocating us, are cities that float in the sky...In a world as big as this, you will never be alone. I promise.”

The golem had felt something in his chest as he watched the two of them. It was warm and it felt like something inside his chest was being squeezed. That night, Yuu slept outside the house. From the window, two slender arms draped a blanket over him.

After that night, Yuu never visited that house again. The golem spent most of his days following after Yuu in secret. Many times, he saw him look up at the dark green sky of vines. It was a lonely view, the golem thought.

“Hey!” The golem jumped.

Somehow, while he was distracted, Yuu had circled back and gotten behind him.

“Stop following me,” Yuu demanded, “What do you want? Why are you following me?”
“I have nowhere else to go,” the golem said.

“Just go somewhere else,” Yuu replied. “Anywhere else.”

“Is that your wish?” the golem asked, dejected.

“Yes,” Yuu said.

After that, the golem didn’t follow him anymore. He walked back to the spot where he’d been created, shaped from the mud by Yuu’s small hands and given life through a force he still didn’t understand. Life was unexpectedly cruel, the golem thought to himself as he looked at the city in yearning. Days and nights passed. The golem stood in the same spot, as if he were nothing more than a mud statue again.

And then one day a tiny golden aura came sprinting out of the city. Behind him, was a huge insectile creature. The golem felt his chest seize with worry and before he knew it he was running as fast as he could. The golem’s legs were strong and they carried him to them quickly. He ran past Yuu, towards the thing chasing him. Yuu’s eyes widened as he saw him pass.

“What are you doing? Are you crazy?!” Yuu shouted.

The creature had a translucent white body, its organs pulsing underneath the shell. It ran on six skittering legs and waved two larger bladed legs above its head. The golem drew back his fist and punched it in the throat. Although he was made from dirt and mud, in human form the golem’s fist was as solid as any other. The creature fell back, writhing disgustingly. The golem spun into a kick that crushed its neck and knocked it to the ground.

“You’re strong…” Yuu said, stunned.

The golem finished it with a stomp to its head. The head exploded under his foot, spraying a foul smelling liquid.

“…And an idiot,” Yuu’s face paled, “That stuff is poisonous!”

“Huh?” the golem said as his leg fell off.

The stump of his leg hissed as the dirt dissolved from the creature’s poison.

Yuu fainted.

“Sorry about that.” Yuu woke up to the stranger’s face leaning over him. “I guess it freaked you out a bit.”

Yuu jerked upright and pushed the guy over. He stared at the guy’s leg in disbelief. It was a stump, but the instead of any blood, bone, or flesh, the inside was filled with mud. Yuu reached out cautiously to the stranger’s arm. It felt like skin and was warm to the touch.

“You feel human, but your leg is…” Yuu looked up at the guy’s face. “Who or what are you?”

“I’m a golem,” the golem said, “I don’t have a name.”

“A golem…” Yuu’s brow furrowed in thought, “Where did you come from?”

“You made me,” the golem said, bowing to him. “Thank you for creating me.”

“I made you?” Yuu’s jaw dropped, “Wait, do you mean you’re my statue? The lumpy statue of mud
I made a week ago?”

“I’ve been trying to tell you that…” the golem said, smiling a little.

“You’re my statue…holy crap you’re my statue!” Yuu said excitedly. “Hey, can I name you then? Since you’re mine and all.”

The golem flushed with embarrassment and happiness at Yuu’s words. Yuu stared at him in fascination.

“Of course,” the golem mumbled happily.

“Azumane,” Yuu said with a grin, “For east peak since you’re as tall as a mountain! And Asahi, for the morning sun.”

“Azumane…Asahi,” Asahi repeated, getting used to the sound.

He liked it immediately.

“And I’m Nishinoya Yuu, the evening and west valley,” Yuu declared.

Asahi liked his name even more.

Chapter End Notes

IS Akaashi the same distortionist? Who knows~ He is or he isn't.

*side note: Caerulus has been changed to Kaerulus, the edit has been made to the only other time he was mentioned in the story so far.

Please let me know if you noticed any continuity issues...I've been writing this for a long time and its hard to keep track of my notes bc I'm a disaster.

Fun fact, I wrote Asahi's flashback in like....2016. Just hadn't gotten around to putting it in.
Tanaka opened the door of the nightrider and a bunch of sand poured out onto the ground, where it collected into a vaguely cat-like form.

“Jesus, Lev, what happened?” Tanaka said in disbelief.

“I’m tired,” came Lev’s reply, “I think I have growing pains.”

“Yeah well, you’re growing into a pain,” Tanaka said, looking into the cabin’s sandy interior in despair. “How did you get so big?”

“I think the nightrider just got smaller,” Lev pouted, “It was getting so cramped inside.”

“I don’t think you’re going to fit back in,” Tanaka said, “You’re going to have to walk or something.”

“Fine…” Lev lurched to his feet. His figure was hazy, the sand seemingly unable to hold his shape in a solid form and sand particles floated loosely around him.

“Just follow me, okay?” Tanaka said, hopping into the pilot seat. Lev nodded, loose sand sprinkling the ground below his head. Tanaka flew slowly as Lev lumbered along behind him.

At the edge of the Mediatas Ocean, Nishinoya, Tendou, Goshiki, Sawamura, Hinata, Kuroo, Kenma, and Moniwa stood looking out at the horizon.

“Is it just me, or did there used to be a fuckton of water here?” Nishinoya said, pointing out at the expanse of mud and brine before them.

“The tide’s low,” Moniwa explained.

“Low?? It’s straight up gone!” Nishinoya exclaimed.

“The Mediatas Sea is also known as the Dry Sea,” Moniwa explained, pushing up his glasses, “It’s technically a shallow basin. The tides are really slow, taking a week at a time. Then the water dries up and you get what you see here.”
“What’s that?” Hinata asked. Through the centre of the sea was a white path.

“That’s the spine,” Moniwa answered, “It goes all the way to the other side. Travellers often challenge themselves to walk the entire length before the tide comes back in. You can even rent a skiff in case you don’t make it in time.”

Moniwa pointed to the beach where someone stood with a line of skiffs. Hinata’s eyes lit up.

“We don’t need one,” Sawamura reminded him, “We actually already have a ship.”

“But Tobio won’t fit on the nightrider,” Hinata pointed out.

“You...have a point,” Sawamura said reluctantly.

“Then Tobio and I will walk across the spine!” Hinata said, jumping up and down in excitement.

Sawamura racked his brain for a reason to say no but in the end he sighed in defeat.

“Fine, but we’re going to fly overhead,” Sawamura said.

“Yes!!!” Hinata said, pumping his fist in the air and jumping up and down.

“Sawamura,” Moniwa said, placing a hand on Sawamura’s shoulder, “About the thing you asked me…”

Sawamura held the smile on his face but his eyes turned serious. Moniwa pressed a folded piece of paper into his hand.

“This is all I could find out,” Moniwa said, “This information is a year old, I’m afraid. With any luck, he’ll be al...accomodating.”

Sawamura had the feeling that Moniwa was going to say ‘alive’ but thought better of it.

“Yeah,” Sawamura said wryly, “I hope so too. Thank you.”

“This might be too much to ask, but please look out for Tendou too,” Moniwa said, bowing deeply, “He’s caused us a lot of trouble, but well, we’ve known him for so long that I almost feel responsible for him in a way.”

Sawamura was surprised. He’d gotten the impression from the members of Ironwall that Tendou was less than liked. He wondered if Moniwa was alone in his sentiments or if Ironwall was secretly full of tsunderes.

“The Nightrider!” Hinata shouted, his eyes shining.

“You called?” Tanaka shouted down from the window. He landed the ship and opened the door.

“UWOAHHH!” Kuroo said, flying around the nightrider excitedly, “When did you get an upgrade?”

He spied the dents in the hood and the roof and paused. “You didn’t steal it, did you?”

“Not recently,” Nishinoya grinned, patting the sleek black side of the ship.

“We banged it up a little on the way here,” Tanaka said, “But she’s still a beauty.”
“We might have a slight problem,” Sawamura said.

“Another one?” Tanaka groaned.

“The dinosaur,” Sawamura said, turning and looking at Tobio.

“He won’t fit,” Nishinoya said immediately.

“Neither will Lev,” Tanaka grumbled.

The giant sand lion walked over to them slowly.

“Whoa…” Sawamura said, his brows drawing together in concern.

“Lev,” Kenma said with concern, “What’s wrong?”

“Kenma…” Lev collapsed in front of him, “I can’t hold everything anymore.”

Lev’s form fell apart in front of their eyes.

“LEV!” Kenma shouted, plunging his hands into the pile of sand as if he could somehow hold him together. The others stood in shock. A form of a person stood up from within the sand. Kenma looked up at them desperately.

“That idiot.” The words were tinged with anger and sadness.

“Yaku?” Sawamura said in shock. Yaku stood amongst Lev’s sand and rage radiated off him.

“I told him this would happen,” Yaku said bitterly.

“What’s going on?” Sawamura asked.

“Lev is a being made of tangible desire,” Yaku explained, “Specifically Yara’s tangible desire. Since being in contact with Yara’s soul, tangible desire has been gathering inside Lev. It’s finally gotten to the point where it’s too much for his body.”

“What can I do?” Kenma asked, grabbing onto Yaku’s front.

“You can’t do anything in that form,” Yaku said, “It’s already at its limit just holding your soul.”

“Can we do anything?” Hinata asked, his hands balled into fists.

“You?” Yaku snorted, “You’re a human. Your body isn’t nearly strong enough.”

“What about me?” Kuroo said, floating over.

Yaku’s expression changed sharply, his eyes widening with fear.

“You stay away!” Yaku said, holding his arms out in front of him.

Kuroo flinched back, shocked by Yaku’s rejection. Kenma turned to say something to Kuroo, he wasn’t sure what, but he needed to say something to the hurt expression on his face. There was a blur of orange in the corner of Kenma’s sight and sand suddenly flew everywhere.

“Hinata!” Sawamura shouted as Hinata plunged into the pile of sand.

“Hey!” Yaku said angrily. He grabbed at him but missed.
“You guys sure are an impulsive group, aren’t cha?” Tendou remarked.

Sawamura buried his face in his hands and felt like screaming.

“Should we go after him?” Nishinoya asked.

“Wait out here,” Kenma said, standing up, “I’ll go get him.”

“I’m coming too,” Kuroo said.

Kenma looked up at him and for a moment Kuroo was afraid he was going to say no. Instead Kenma smiled.

“Thanks.”

With that, they both plunged into the pile of sand.

“They’re at Raithridge” Ennoshita said to Kiyoko, “They found Kenma and Kuroo.”

He closed the Omnia. With the battle at the Auction he hadn’t had a chance to check or update it in the past few days and apparently he’d missed a lot from Sawamura.

“We’ll meet them there,” Kiyoko said. She closed her eyes and smiled as the wind blew through her hair. Flying the Crow felt just as good as flying by herself did. “Tell Tsukishima we will be reuniting with his crew soon.”

Ennoshita nodded and left to find their sullen ward. He heard the clash of swords as he approached the back of the deck.

“Are you even trying?” Misaki sounded unimpressed.

There was a loud series of thuds as Ennoshita rounded the corner. Tsukishima glared up at Misaki, who stood over him with a cool expression.

“Sorry for not living up to your expectations,” Tsukishima said, moving to rise to his feet.

Misaki kicked in square in the chest, knocking him back down.

“You want to stand?” Misaki raised an eyebrow, “Only the strong get to stand. An enemy will not wait for you to get your footing back. You have to take it by force.”

Tsukishima scowled.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Ennoshita said, knocking against the wooden call of the cabin.

Misaki and Tsukishima looked over at him.

“Tsukishima-San, we’ll be picking up your comrades soon.” Ennoshita expected him to be happy or excited but Tsukishima’s expression was unreadable.

“Can you let me go for now, Misaki-San?” Tsukishima said, suddenly polite, “I’m sorry for today, I
will be in better shape next time.”

“Uh, sure,” Misaki said in confusion.

Tsukishima stood and walked past Ennoshita.

“What’s up with him?” Ennoshita asked.

“No idea,” Misaki shrugged, “I can never really tell what that kid’s thinking. He’s got potential and he’s a good fighter, better than good actually, but the longer a fight goes on, the worse he gets. It’s like he gives up as soon as things don’t go his way.”

Misaki sheathed her sword. “Or maybe he just doesn’t care.”

“Those weren't the eyes of someone who doesn't care,” Ennoshita mused.

Tsukishima stood in front of Kageyama’s cage. The pirates’ medic had re-bandaged his leg since Tsukishima had seen him last.

“We’re picking up the others soon,” Tsukishima said coldly. Kageyama’s scowl didn’t change. Tsukishima narrowed his eyes. “That means Hinata will be here.”

“I know what it means,” Kageyama snapped.

“Oh do you, now?” Tsukishima said sarcastically.

“What do you want from me, Tsukishima?” Kageyama asked coldly.

For once, Tsukishima didn’t snap back immediately. There was a desperate and ugly feeling welling up inside Tsukishima and he didn’t know what to do about it. All he knew was that looking at Kageyama pissed him off. So did talking to him, but that was nothing new. Only now it evoked a depth of emotion that Tsukishima couldn’t identify.

A flash of Akiteru’s image passed before his eyes. Oh, so that was it. Disappointment.

“I wanted you to be better,” Tsukishima said without meaning to.

“What was I supposed to do?” Kageyama shouted, leaping to his feet and knocking over the wooden chair in his cage.

He kicked it against the bars and swore when pain shot through his leg. Blood seeped through the new bandage.

“Do you think I wanted to betray you all? That I wanted everything to end up like this?” Kageyama was breathing heavily, “I didn’t want you to get involved at all...Why did you have to find the Arc?”

Tsukishima felt a pang go through him. So Kuroo was the Arc then. Kenma had lied to them too. What was with Hinata constantly believing in people who lied to him? And why did it annoy Tsukishima so much? Tsukishima drew his sword. Why was he keeping Kageyama alive again? So he could just betray them all again later? So that Hinata’s heart and spirit would break all over again?
So that they would all be disappointed again? Akiteru’s image flashed through his mind again.

No. Tsukishima wasn’t going to let that happen. It was enough that only he felt disappointed.

“Don’t do this,” Oculus said suddenly. It had been a long time since he’d last spoken. He didn’t speak much when Lev wasn’t around and Tsukishima had suspected his power was weaker the farther away they were.

“Don’t stop me,” Tsukishima said, opening Kageyama’s cage.

The cage was small, but Tsukishima only needed to pierce through Kageyama’s chest. A quick thrust and maybe then the cacophony inside him would cease. Kageyama scowled at him, the way he always did, but there was a hint of fear behind his eyes. Tsukishima drew his sword back and then thrust it forwards.

Sand exploded out of the front of Kageyama’s chest, pushing Tsukishima backwards. Tsukishima’s sword was knocked out of his hand as more sand seemed to accumulate out of nowhere.

“What the hell?!!?” Tsukishima shouted, struggling under the mound of sand.

Kageyama’s jaw dropped. In the split second before Tsukishima’s sword had reached him, his little sand figure had climbed out from his inside pocket and suddenly grew in size, overwhelming Tsukishima.

The sand settled in a mound that looked embarrassingly just like Hinata. Kageyama felt his face turn red and he hoped Tsukishima would be too shocked to notice.

“Shouyou, what are you doing?” Kageyama hissed, “Get back inside my pocket!”

The sand figure lifted its head and shook it vigorously side to side like a wet dog. Sand flung everywhere and Kageyama squeezed his eyes shut.

“What am I?”

Kageyama froze. That voice. That was...but it was impossible. He blinked sand away from his eyes and looked forwards. Sitting on his legs, covered in sand, was Hinata Shouyou. The real flesh and blood, Hinata Shouyou.

“Eh? Tsukishima?” Hinata blinked. Before him, was Tsukishima, lying underneath a bunch of sand.

“How the fuck are you here? What the hell just happened?”

“I jumped inside Lev and ended up here,” Hinata said, looking around. He straightened up suddenly and Kageyama cursed as it jostled his injured leg.

“Sorry,” Hinata said, suddenly aware that he was sitting on someone. He turned around.

Hinata’s face was suddenly centimeters away from Kageyama’s, the tips of their noses touching slightly. They both turned bright red and jerked their heads away. Kageyama smashed the back of his head against the bars of the cage.

“This is real, right?” Hinata whispered to Tsukishima, “I’m not dreaming or inside a Cave of Wonders?”

“This is real.” Tsukishima said, standing up. Sand cascaded off him, “You’re on the Crow, the pirates’ new starship.”
“So then, you’re really here,” Hinata said, turning back to Kageyama. His bright eyes were filled with hope.

“He’s a prisoner,” Tsukishima said.

The reality of their surroundings suddenly rushed in as Hinata realized they were inside a cage.

“Why?” Hinata asked, turning around. “The red flower shouldn’t be able to control you if Oikawa isn’t around!”

Kageyama found himself unable to lie to Hinata’s earnest face.

“The red flower was Amaranth’s creation,” Kageyama said, “Foul Lover, it rewrites your memories and gives you reason to fight against things you normally love. It gives Amaranth hold over your thoughts.”

Tsukishima glared at him from behind Hinata. Kageyama lowered his gaze.

“I planted it on our ship and I used it to turn Sugawara-San.”

Kageyama couldn’t bring himself to meet Hinata’s eyes. He had pictured this moment in his mind many times, but on the battlefield and not in the hull of a pirates’ ship where he was being held prisoner. He had thought about how they would fight and how in the end, he would defeat Hinata, looking down at his desperate face. But right now Hinata’s face was barely inches from his and there was only a quiet that felt cold and unfamiliar.

“Do you want to kill him,” Tsukishima asked, taking a step towards them. He offered his sword to Hinata.

“For betraying us?” Hinata said without turning around.

“Yes,” Tsukishima replied, “This entire time, he’s been helping Oikawa.”

“You mean Eaen Rie,” Hinata said, his voice low.

Tsukishima’s eyebrows drew together. Tsukishima wondered if Hinata had hit his head, or if maybe the magic teleportation had scrambled his brains.

“How do you know about Eaen Rie?” Kageyama asked, jerking his head up.

“He’s possessing Oikawa, isn’t he,” Hinata said. “You can’t trust him!”

“I know that!” Kageyama shouted. “But what choice do I have?”

“Us,” Hinata said, his voice softer now. “You can choose us.”

There it was, Tsukishima thought, Hinata's strange ability to draw others to him. It was a quality Tsukishima could never admit to him that he admired.

Kageyama stared at Hinata with a mixture of confusion and awe. He didn’t know why, but Hinata’s clear gaze shone in a way that told Kageyama that for some crazy reason, Hinata still believed in him. He felt his face getting hot.

“Oikawa believes that if he helps Eaen bring Yara back to life, that Yara will then bring an important person to him back to life as well,” Kageyama explained, “But to do that, we have to create a body for her from powerful demuto.”
“We are going to find another way,” Hinata said. There was a conviction in his eyes that pushed back at Kageyama’s doubts.

“How?” Kageyama asked. His tone was derisive, but deep inside he hoped that Hinata would have an answer.

“We’ll make a plan,” Hinata said, holding out his hand. Bokuto’s words circled in his mind. “I’m going to prove to you that you can have faith in us.”

“Grand words,” Kageyama said, but he couldn’t help smiling wryly.

Kageyama looked at Hinata’s outstretched hand. It was small, but right now it seemed strangely reliable. He gingerly took it, almost as if he were afraid of corrupting that hand. But it was stronger than it seemed and Hinata pulled him to his feet. Sand fell in glittering specs as Kageyama stood.

It took him a second to realize that the sand wasn’t falling, but rather more sand from the floor was rising up to float around them. It swirled around them, like a tornado. Whispers filled the air, although he couldn’t tell what any of them were saying. Hinata was glowing. Kageyama looked down at their hands and saw that he was glowing too.

Tsukishima watched as the golden sand swirled around Kageyama and Hinata. Through Oculus, he could see things that they couldn’t. The whispers were coming from them. Something inside him eased and with suddenly clarity he realized what had been bothering him.

It was Hinata’s unwavering trust in Kageyama. It reminded him of the trust he had had in Akiteru and the shattering disappointment when it had been broken. And the guilt from forcing Akiteru to lie to him, to protect him. Because Tsukishima had been too weak to know the truth.

“What the hell?” Kageyama’s vision was getting blurry. He gripped Hinata’s hand tighter.

“Are you doing this?” He asked. Hinata always seemed to be able to do things that he couldn’t even dream of.

“Nope!” Said a cheery voice.

A face appeared in the sandy walls of the tornado. It grinned rakishly at them.

“Lev!” Hinata said in surprise.

“No!” Lev said joyously, “I am the HERO MAKER!”

The glow became blindingly bright and the two of them were enveloped in sand.

Tsukishima squeezed his eyes shut as sand whirled around the room. When he opened his eyes, Hinata and Kageyama were gone.

“Why do my crewmates keep on disappearing on me?” Tsukishima mutter in annoyance. He turned and left, climbing the wooden stairs silently.

Tsukishima navigated the ship wordlessly, just putting one foot in front of the other with no real
thought towards his destination. He should tell someone, but who? Sawamura wasn’t here and it wasn’t like Kiyoko was his captain. And what would he even say? They disappeared in a tornado of sand?

He reached his bedroom. He opened the door and Yamaguchi turned around, looking guilty.

“Um! I’m sorry for intruding,” Yamaguchi stammered, his cheeks flushing.

Both of his hands were held behind his back. The sight pushed away Tsukishima’s thoughts.

“What are you hiding?” Tsukishima said teasingly, “A love letter?”

“What’s a love letter?” Yamaguchi asked innocently.

“Nevermind,” Tsukishima walked over and draped his arms over Yamaguchi’s shoulders and pulled him close, closing his eyes.

Yamaguchi stiffened but he was solid and he was warm. Yamaguchi’s heart was beating thunderously inside his chest.

“Ts-Tsukkii?” Yamaguchi squeaked.

“Shut up, Yamaguchi,” Tsukishima said, breathing in Yamaguchi’s scent.

“Are you feeling okay?” Yamaguchi asked.

“Yeah,” Tsukishima said.

“That’s good,” Yamaguchi sounded genuinely happy and Tsukishima snorted.

Tsukishima peaked down behind Yamaguchi’s back. Clutched in Yamaguchi’s hands was a picture.

“What’s this?” Tsukishima reached over and plucked it from Yamaguchi’s fingers. It was the old picture of Akiteru, from before he’d gone to the mines. Tsukishima’s face clouded over.

“Where did you find this?”

“I’m sorry,” Yamaguchi said miserably, “I just wanted to know more about you.”

Tsukishima held out the picture back to him. Yamaguchi looked at it and then him in confusion.

“That’s my older brother, Akiteru. He died,” Tsukishima said.

He flopped down on his bed and then rolled onto his back. Yamaguchi sat down on the floor next to the bed, leaning his back against it.

“I’m so sorry,” Yamaguchi said, taking the picture carefully.

He studied the gentle expression of the man in the picture. Sandy blond hair and smiling eyes.

“He looked like you,” Yamaguchi said, surprising Tsukishima.

“He looked more like our mother,” Tsukishima said.

“What was he like?” Yamaguchi asked.

*He was a liar,* Tsukishima thought. *He pretended to be stronger than he was, happier than he was,*
and when the lies were pulled away, he was gone.

“He was always cheerful,” Tsukishima found himself saying. Just like Hinata. “I looked up to him because he always seemed like he could do anything. He was my hero.”

Tsukishima closed his eyes and he could see his older brother, grinning just like he did in the picture.

Akiteru ruffled his hair.

“Well, I’ve got to get going, Kei,” Akiteru said, “The Master is waiting.”

“Can’t I come with you this time?” Kei whined.

“Not until you’re older,” Akiteru said with a smile, “Now go back home and help Mom.”

“Alright,” Kei sulked.

He watched as Akiteru’s sandy blond head grew farther and farther until it nearly blended in with the wheat. And then Kei followed him. Akiteru reached the end of the field and crossed the wooded area until he got to the base of the mountains. Kei followed him, keeping far enough behind so as to not alter his brother’s sharp hearing.

But instead of travelling up the winding mountain trail, Akiteru walked along the path leading to the mines. The deafening noise of the mines grew louder and louder as they walked closer. And then Kei saw Akiteru join a line of men, rough-looking and dirty. He grabbed a miner’s helmet, gloves, and changed into a pair of coveralls.

Akiteru turned around and for a split second Kei thought he met his eyes. But then he turned again and entered the mines. Kei had returned home, hurt and confused.

But Akiteru never came back. Only his helmet did.

“He lied to me, and for a long time I was angry about that,” Tsukishima said, “But lately I’ve been more mad at myself for being so pathetic that I had to be lied to. Maybe if I hadn’t been such a kid, he wouldn’t have had to lie to me about it.”

“I don’t think he didn’t trust you,” Yamaguchi said, “I think he probably just wanted you to be proud of him.”

“But I would have been proud of him being a miner too,” Tsukishima said, “I just wanted to be trusted with the truth.”

“Tsukki,” Yamaguchi took a deep breath, “Can I trust you with a secret?”

Tsukishima sat up. Yamaguchi looked nervous, which made Tsukishima’s heart flutter with anticipation.

“I don’t actually look like this... not all the time, I mean,” Yamaguchi fiddled with a strand of hair.

“You’re a Qilin, right?” Tsukishima said, “It makes sense that you have more than one form. I did wonder why you look so human all the time.”
“I have two other forms,” Yamaguchi said, his ears turning pink.

“Can I see them?” Tsukishima asked.

Yamaguchi closed his eyes. His body turned pink and his antlers grew larger from his head as he took his animal form. Tsukishima watched in awe. Yamaguchi looked like a deer, with pink antlers and short golden fur with golden scales on his underside and legs.

“Wow,” Tsukishima said, reaching out a hand, “Can I touch your fur?”

Yamaguchi lowered his head and let Tsukishima’s hand touch his forehead. Yamaguchi’s antlers flushed red and he began to transform again. His form became humanoid, but this time his antlers grew even bigger, like scarlet branches. His skin was pink, with a light dusting of freckles and his hair grew long and turned gold. Fangs protruded from his mouth.

Yamaguchi opened his eyes cautiously, afraid of Tsukishima’s reaction. Tsukishima stroked Yamaguchi’s head.

“You look pretty,” Tsukishima said, seemingly without thinking.

“P-p-p-pretty?” Yamaguchi squeaked.

“Which form is the most comfortable for you?” Tsukishima asked.

Yamaguchi changed back to his human form, but this time he left his antlers at a small size.

“This one,” Yamaguchi said, “I can’t talk in the animal form and the other one is for when I use my powers.”

“Like...cursing?” Tsukishima asked, remembering Nishinoya and Tanaka’s golden hands.

“I don’t normally do that!” Yamaguchi protested, his face flushing with embarrassment, “I thought they were going to sell me!”

“Yeah, I can see why you’d think that,” Tsukishima said, thinking of the pair’s delinquent appearances.

He reached out and touched Yamaguchi’s short antlers.

“These suit you,” he said, almost fondly.

“Um!” Yamaguchi felt his face flush. His words tumbled out in a rush. “If there is anything bothering you, you can tell me! You can rely on me!”

Tsukishima’s mouth fell open slightly in surprise. He cleared his throat, covering his face with his hands. God, why was he so cute? This qilin was going to be the death of him.

“Did I say something wrong?” Yamaguchi leaned in, trying to see Tsukishima’s face. He was suddenly aware of just how close he had moved. Yamaguchi didn’t know what was bothering Tsukishima, but he knew he wanted to make him feel better. Ennoshita’s words echoed in the back of his mind.

This was to cheer Tsukki up, Yamaguchi reminded himself, swallowing nervously. He leaned in the rest of the way and pressed his mouth against the backs of Tsukishima’s hands. His stomach felt fluttery and he wondered if this “feel better” method worked on qilins too.
“What are you doing?” Tsukishima yelled suddenly, jerking backwards. Yamaguchi fell over him in surprise. Tsukishima’s face was bright red and his glasses were askew.

“Kissing you better?” Yamaguchi said innocently, tilting his head to the side.

“Why???” Tsukishima said, flustered.

“Because I like you,” Yamaguchi said, beaming, “And I want you to feel better. I don’t like when you’re sad.”

“You’re killing me,” Tsukishima shook his head in embarrassment, “You don’t just kiss anyone to make them feel better!”

“But Ennoshita said-”

“He was joking! It was sarcasm!” Tsukishima interrupted.

“A joke? So it’s not something that people do to make people feel better?” Yamaguchi asked, looking at Tsukishima with huge sad puppy eyes.

“Well, some people do,” Tsukishima said, “People who love each other romantically.”

“Romantically,” Yamaguchi repeated, looking thoughtful, “Then it’s fine, isn’t it? Because I love Tsukki.”

I love Tsukki. I love Tsukki. I love Tsukki. His words rang around and around in Tsukishima’s head. He was speechless. Yamaguchi almost seemed to be shining in the light coming in from the window. Fuck, he was so blindingly bright. He looked like an angel.

“Do you know what you’re saying?” Tsukishima swallowed. His mouth felt dry. “Do qilins even have romantic partners?”

“We mate for life,” Yamaguchi smiled.

Tsukishima was wrong. Yamaguchi was a demon after all.

Kageyama blinked. He was still holding onto Hinata’s hand, but they weren’t on the starship anymore. They were inside a cave. Pillars of gold and sapphire extended to a ceiling that seemed like it was miles above them. Piles of gold and jewels and other treasures were stacked around them, like they were in some dragon’s horde. And before them, was a tall man made of sand. He smiled at them.

“What’s going on?” Hinata asked, “Are you Lev?”

“Welcome! I am Leviathus, the Imagination of the Great Arc,” Leviathus said with a bow.

“Your full name is Leviathus? That’s so cool!” Hinata exclaimed.

“What do you mean by ‘Imagination of the Great Arc’?” Kageyama asked suspiciously.
"The Great Arc is the being created by the ‘soul’ of the world and the ‘body’ of material from outer space. I am its facility of creation."

"Then shouldn’t you be attached to the Arc?" Kageyama asked.

"I was separated from the Great Arc when they asked me to recreate a human body for them. Their mortal form was too weak to contain me."

"Is that why you collapsed?" Hinata asked.

"I apologize, but I am unaware of the circumstances you speak of," Leviathus said, "Right now, my main consciousness is in a deep sleep. I am its unconsciousness."

"Do you know why you are asleep? And how we can wake you up?" Hinata asked.

"When I was separated, my form scattered across the world. I do not know why, but it seems my form has been gathering together again," Leviathus explained, "It is too much for my current form to hold. My main consciousness is trying to hold us together."

"What happens if you can’t hold together?" Kageyama asked.

"We will envelope the surrounding area in tangible desire," Leviathus answered, "It is impossible to predict what strong emotions will create should we lose control over ourself. It could mean the end of the world."

"Can we help you?" Hinata asked. Leviathus eyed him curiously.

"You are mortal," Leviathus said.

"Is it impossible?" Hinata asked.

"No."

Hinata was surprised by Leviathus’ answer.

"But it would come at a great cost to your body," Leviathus said. "The Great Arc carries a small part of me with them, but they refused to carry any more because it would damage the body they are using."

"You’re my friend, Lev," Hinata said, smiling, "I would put my life on the line to save any of my friends."

"It would not be your life," Leviathus said.

Hinata’s legs felt stiff. He wobbled and fell against Kageyama. They both looked down and saw that Hinata’s legs had turned to stone. Kageyama’s heart raced with panic.

"No, nonononono!" Kageyama said, holding onto Hinata’s tightly. Hinata’s warm and soft body stiffened as it turned to stone, save for his head.

"It might take your limbs," Leviathus said, "It might take your senses."

Hinata’s body returned to flesh and the two of them fell over. Hinata’s vision darkened and he yelled in surprise. But no sound reached his ears. His head banged into something and he cried out, spinning wildly. And then suddenly his sight and hearing were back and he saw Kageyama looking at him, worriedly. A red bump was on Kageyama’s forehead.
“And it might take your memories,” Leviathus said.

“Don’t!” Kageyama shouted, hugging Hinata close to him. “Don’t you dare take them!”

“Kageyama,” Hinata’s voice was muffled.

He pulled his head off of Kageyama’s chest.

“It’s okay, Kageyama,” Hinata smiled, “Even if I forget, we can always make new memories. But if I don’t do this then no one will make any new memories ever again.”

“It doesn’t have to be you,” Kageyama said, standing up. He turned to Leviathus, “Take mine instead, I’ll hold your damn powers!”

“No!” Hinata grabbed onto Kageyama’s arm, “I said I’d do it first!”

“You’re such an idiot!” Kageyama said, scowling.

“Then we’ll both do it!” They said in unison. They turned to Leviathus, their faces set with determination.

“The burden might be lessened with the both of you,” Leviathus said, “But it will still be hard.”

“Bring it on,” Hinata said.

“Very well,” Leviathus said, as his form scattered.

The cave around them shifted and they were suddenly standing on a marble platform. Above them was a vast sky, swirling with clouds. And at their feet was a mirror-like ocean, still and calm.

“Contain the Sea or contain the Sky,” Leviathus’ voice came from all around them.

“What?” Hinata said dumbly.

“How?????” Kageyama exclaimed angrily.

Leviathus didn’t answer them.

“Contain it…” Hinata looked at his hands, “We don’t even have a bucket or anything.”

“It’s impossible…” Kageyama said, staring into the distance. “We’re just human. This is the power of a god.”

Hinata looked up.

“No, we’re not just human,” Hinata said calmly, “We are Celestial Knights.”

Kageyama turned and looked at Hinata. Hinata’s eyes were focused and determined, shining with an intensity that sent shivers through Kageyama’s body.

“And a Celestial Knight’s greatest ally is the sky.” Hinata braced his feet and they jumped.

Golden wings sprouted from his shoes and took him up into the clouds. Kageyama shouted as Hinata quickly disappeared into the sky above. Hinata flew higher and higher, until Kageyama was barely a speck below him. Clouds enveloped him like smoke, growing darker as he flew. He looked down and fear shot through him as he realized he could no longer see Kageyama. He was alone.
His wings faltered and suddenly he no longer knew if he was flying or falling. The clouds around him grew darker still. Hinata felt as if he was being swallowed up or buried underground. The clouds around him were almost black and he could see an undercurrent of lightning flashing around him, like an electric dragon circling its prey.

“Are you some kind of thunder god?” Hinata asked, grinning, “If I capture you, does that mean I win?”

Hinata smashed his fist into his palm. Strange puzzles weren’t really his thing, but a fight? Oh that he could do.

“Come at me, Thunder God!” Hinata shouted, rushing into the darkness.

A giant dragon head of lightning rose out of the dark clouds before him. Electricity crackled around it. Hinata drew his sword and struck. Hinata’s hands burned as his sword passed through the body of the beast.

“Ouch!” Hinata winced, but didn’t give up. He attacked again, his sword passing through once more. His hands hurt so badly he could barely hold onto his sword.

The dragon circled and turned towards him once more. Hinata saw his scared reflection in the dragon’s merciless eyes as it bore down on him, its gaping maw swallowing him up.

“Someday, you will come across an enemy you cannot fight,” Captain Sawamura said, “What will you do then?”

“Um, ask for help?” Yachi answered timidly.

“No enemy will wait for your allies to come to your side,” Captain Sawamura said.

“Give up.” Tsukishima said bluntly.

“Never an option,” Captain Sawamura said, whacking him on the head.

“There is no enemy I cannot fight,” Kageyama answered confidently.

“Naive,” Captain Sawamura said with a stern look.

“Train until I can beat it!” Hinata said, pumping his fist in the air.

“Assess the situation,” Sawamura said, “Why can’t you fight it? Until you know that, you can never hope to win, no matter how hard or for how long you train.”

Hinata could smell burning. His whole body burned as the dragon passed through it. The celestial steel of his sword sang as the lightning ran along it. Maybe that was it. He couldn’t cut down the lightning dragon, but maybe he could redirect it. Hinata steadied himself, an idea forming in his head. It was risky and it was stupid and dangerous, but excitement filled him and he found himself grinning.

The dragon bore down on him again and he adjusted his grip. The pain faded away as he closed his eyes and concentrated only on the blade in his hands. The air crackled with electricity as the dragon neared. Hinata spun with his blade, meeting the dragon and leading it in an arc. He fought to keep
the sword in his hands as the dragon nearly ripped it away.

The celestial steel sang as he lead the dragon through the black clouds until they pierced through the top layer like a lance. The dragon absorbed into his blade, crackling with delight.

Hinata opened his eyes and gasped.

“Someday, I will reach the sky,” Hinata said, reaching out with his hand and closing it into a fist over the moon.

“Reach the sky?” Natsu tilted her head in curiosity, “Then what will you do?”

“Huh?” Hinata didn’t have an answer.

He hadn’t expected that question. Little kids were pretty amazing with the things they thought about.

“I guess I’d admire the view,” Hinata said, stretching his arms out wide and looking up, “It’s a view that no one else has seen, so I had better bask in it and take it all in!”

“Take in the sky?” Natsu said.

“Yup!” Hinata grinned at his little sister, “It means to really appreciate it, to feel it in your body.”

Hinata breathed in slowly and gazed at the horizon. He didn’t know why, but something felt different now. It was like his breath was stretching further and further across the entire sky with every breath. He breathed in, drawing in the clouds. His lungs felt infinite as he breathed out. Ahh, Hinata thought. His awareness seeped through the sky, hugging the planet.

“So this is the view at the summit of the world,” Hinata said.

And then he breathed in the sky.

Chapter End Notes

So the mystery of how Tobio crossed an ocean is solved! How convenient, eh?

Plot holes, what plot holes? *sweats nervously*

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