The Calm Before the Storm
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Summary

Mukuro Ikusaba has dedicated her entire life to her sister Junko. She only knows how to be a pawn, a living weapon for her sisters use.
That is, until she meets Makoto Naegi
A story that may answer the question "What if Mukuro joined the side of hope?"

"The tale of a despair that turns into hope begins here!"
Bow down to the Queen

Chapter Notes

EDIT: excuse the first chapter. It sucks. I know. But oh boy it gets better from here kiddos. I finally learned how to write not terribly? So enjoy. Stick it out. Its worth the ride.

Thud. Thud. Thud

Mukuro's eyes snapped open at the sound of footsteps making their way past her bedroom door. Though asleep moments before, her military-trained body was already sprung into action at the odd noise filling her and her sister's quiet apartment.

Stealthily, she lifted her covers and slid out of her bed, maintaining total silence as to not alert the possible intruder, or wake the sleeping Ultimate Fashionista who was most likely enjoying her beauty sleep in the room across from her own. Dozens of scenarios flitted through Mukuro's mind, and while the sound could've just been her imagination; she wasn't prepared to take the risk of putting her sister in danger.

Giving her vision a moment to adjust to the stark darkness of her bedroom, she reached underneath her mattress, pulling out the black-metal handgun she kept there in case of emergencies, since Junko refused to let her keep any of her more... "despairingly deadly"... weapons in her room. (She had tried to argue with her sister that any weapon was a "despairingly deadly" weapon but she wouldn't listen to a single word)

Maintaining a basic firing stance, she advanced towards her door, turning the handle as quietly as humanly possible. Seeing that the hall was empty, she stepped forward, closing the door behind her as she did. Casting a quick glance towards her sister's own bedroom door, she was comforted to see that it was closed. Mukuros cold expression softened at the knowledge of her sister sleeping peacefully unaware of the dangers in their very own home.

Suddenly, Mukuro heard another thud, followed by the sound of shuffling. Her hand tightened around her gun's handle at the louder noise, before holding it in front of her in firing position and stepping towards the sound's origin, which she quickly pinpointed as coming from the living room.

As she etched closer and closer down the hall, she heard another noise, one that almost sounded like.... laughter? Her steps quickened and her pulse pounded in her ears. Just as she turned the corner fully facing the danger, finger on the trigger of her gun, the 'intruder' spoke loudly.

"I am your Queen Mr.Bubbles! Feel the wrath of my despair!" Junko proclaimed at the small fishtank placed ontop of their coffee table.

She sat cross-legged on the carpet, with a black-and-white bear-patterned blanket draped over her head. She held a flashlight in her hand, flicking it on and off infront of the fishtank, no doubt terrifying the poor goldfish inside. Mukuro sighed before lowering her gun and flicking on the light, illuminating the small apartment with a soft yellow glow.
Junko stopped laughing abruptly and turned to Mukuro, while holding a flashlight to her face as if she was about to tell a ghost story. "Ah! Gooooood Morning Mukuro! Did you sleep well?" She asked cheerfully, even though from what Mukuro could read from the small clock on the counter, it was 3 am. Mukuro rubbed her eyes tiredly, adjusting once more, this time to the bright light.

"Oh. I was worried..." She mumbled, stifling a yawn. Junko rolled her eyes and lowered her flashlight.

"Seems a little more than just worried," she said, giving a dirty look to the gun in Mukuro's hand..

"Do you mind feeding the fish when you're done?" She questioned politely, attempting to play along in hopes of keeping Junko happy. Junko waved her hand in dismissal and addressed her attention back to the fish.

"Fine, fine." Junko paused, tilting her head as if having second thoughts. "I'll feed... if he denounces his religion and commits his entire being to serve me" She clapped her hands together as if this was the best idea she's ever thought of. Mukuro couldn't help the small smile that spread across her face at her sister's delusions.

"I don't think fish have religions Junko.." She pointed out lightly. Junko gave Mukuro an odd look, and for a moment she was worried she said something wrong. She braced herself for some sort of retaliation from Junko, but instead, her sister sighed.

"I suppose I'll feed him then. All hail Queen Junko!" She shouted, raising a fist in celebration. Mukuro silently prayed the neighbors wouldn't complain about this tomorrow morning. Junko looked towards Mukuro expectantly, and on cue Mukuro smiled slightly at her sister and repeated the mantra, raising her fist to match her sisters as she did.

"All hail Queen Junko."
The Soldiers Quarrel

Chapter Summary

Mukuro receives a slightly unexpected guest. One who reveals just how little she knows of her beloved sisters true intentions

Chapter Notes

So I've decided to alter the events leading up to the first game, (The time this story is taking place) and make it more unique! Ill try and include as many points from the canon story to make it more believeable but i thought it might be fun to change the events slightly. I hope to write in some more characters from the first game and second game starting next chapter so stay tuned! Id love to hear what you guys think of this so far, since it is my first fanfic and i have no idea what im doing ;-; Anyway, i hope you enjoy!

That was one of the good nights. One of the nights where Junko didn't scream and yell at her, where Junko didn't throw things at her head or try to stab her just because she knew Mukuro could dodge every blow.

Mukuro woke up the next morning jadedly, still reeling from the events of the night prior. Though she would have preferred to have a full 8 hours of sleep, she was glad to see Junko in good spirits. Smiling softly at the thought, she sat up out of her bed, embraced by the soft rays of sunlight filtering in through her grey curtains. A quick glance at the alarm clock perched on her nightstand confirmed Mukuro’s worry that she had overslept.

Yesterday night, after making Junko promise to keep the noise to minimum and not set anything on fire (A recurring problem in the Enoshima/Ikusaba residence), she must've fell back asleep right away, completely wiped out. Still a bit wobbly from her extended rest, she shuffled towards her door. Taking a moment to examine herself in the mirror Junko had hung against the back of the door, she noted how messy and unkempt her short black hair was; and how the black shirt and matching black shorts that served as her pajamas were so wrinkled they seemed as if they were just run over by a cargo truck.

Though her twin was given the title Ultimate Fashionista, Mukuro had gained none of her sister’s talent or even interest in the idea of makeup and fashion, only wearing makeup when Junko needed to practice some new technique. Mukuro hoped Junko would be just as tired as she was and not comment on her unruly appearance once she woke up.

As she opened the door, she was greeted by the aroma of freshly brewed coffee filling the hallway. She walked towards the inviting smell, following the scent to the living room. She wasn’t surprised to see a still sleeping Junko sprawled across the couch like a lazy cat, her bear-patterned blanket draped over her neatly.

What did surprise her slightly, was the apathetic looking man sitting at the dining table across from
the room, lazily holding a mug filled with what she assumed was the coffee she smelled earlier.

“You can almost pretend she’s not a complete lunatic when she’s sleeping like that” Matsuda muttered before taking a sip from the mug, keeping his eyes on Junko as he spoke.

His tone was bored and sarcastic, clearly not a morning person himself. His hair was as equally disheveled as Mukuro’s and dark circles lined his pale blue eyes.

“Junko called me over to ‘celebrate’ her latest ‘victory’. I hope you don’t mind that I made myself comfortable after the idiot passed out” Mukuro eyed him warily, her military-trained eyes picking up on how Matsuda seemed more…on edge than usual.

Mukuro and Junko had known Matsuda since childhood, and Mukuro always saw him somewhat as a brother figure to her. As Junko’s boyfriend, he would always be there to take care of her sister when Mukuro couldn’t, and for that she respected Matsuda. Right now, he seemed very tense, his fingers wrapped a bit too tightly around the mugs handle, and though he watched Junko, his eyes were unfocused.

“Matsuda?” She asked hesitantly. She flinched back a bit when his head turned sharply towards her, his face eerily blank. She waited for him to say something, anything, but he stayed still like a statue. “Matsuda?” She repeated, louder and more firm. This time it was his turn to flinch, and Mukuro sighed in relief once his eyes regained focus and his face returned to normal.

He looked away quickly, muttering a quick ‘sorry’ under his breath before sipping his coffee once more. Mukuro couldn’t read his face to gain more insight as his messy black medium-length locks shielded his expression from her.

Mukuro watched him cautiously. “Was it something Junko said?” She asked, lowering her voice just in case her sleeping sister were to wake up. Mukuro didn’t even need to hear Matsuda’s answer, the way his body tensed up was all the response she needed. He lowered his mug to the table with a sigh.

“You should really do something about your hair, it looks like you’ve lost your comb and decided to use a ceiling fan instead.” He mumbled snidely, trying to shift the topic away from him and Junko. Mukuro felt her face turn red as she raised a tentative hand to her hair and narrowed her eyes at him.

“What did she say to you?” Mukuro persisted, glaring at him. Though Mukuro didn’t gain any of her sister’s flare for fashion, she did share some of her stubbornness. Matsuda looked back at Mukuro, matching her expression with a glare of his own.

“Someone as dull as you shouldn’t meddle in my business” He spat, keeping his tone low and filled with contempt. Mukuro felt her rage bubbling inside her, she hated when Matsuda acted like this. Stubborn, crude, and just plain annoying. She hated when he acted like Junko.

"If Junko is involved, it is my buisness aswell." Mukuro spat back, not willing to give up just yet. He stood up abruptly, almost knocking over his chair

“You’d think even someone as dense as you would be able to see just how disposable you are. What will happen to you when Junko decides she doesn’t need you anymore?” He hissed, his own face turning redder by the moment. That’s when Mukuro noticed it.

He was afraid of something. The rage drained from her in an instant, regaining her soldier-like composure. Mukuro didn’t mind when Matsuda insulted her appearance, he did so with everyone. That’s just his personality. But this was different. The way his
hands were trembling, the way his eyes looked at her expectantly. Like he was actually waiting for a response. Before she could even think over his question, he sat back down, picking up his mug once more and turning away. “She wants to help with my research.” He stated clearly, still keeping his voice low since the still sleeping Junko was just in the other room. Mukuro stiffened for a moment, analyzing his words.

As the Ultimate Neurologist, Matsuda Yasuke had earned a permanent place at the top of his field. Hope’s Peak Academy had provided him with everything he needed to further develop his research, including billions of dollars in equipment fitted with the latest technology. His latest project had been heavily gossiped about around the academy, though no one but him truly knew all the details. From what Mukuro had heard, it had something to do with memory alteration and replacement. Why Junko would be interested in such an unusual topic was lost to Mukuro. Nevertheless, Mukuro trusted her sister. She didn’t see why Matsuda would be so shaken up about her wanting to help. Shouldn’t he be happy?

“Why not just let her? Having something to do might help keep her… stable for a while.” Mukuro asked carefully, trying not to set Matsuda off again. He shook his head and looked at her as if she was an idiot child for merely asking.

“She doesn’t just want to help. She wants to...She wants to be a test subject” He explained, frustrated. Mukuro’s expression turned dark.

“No.” She stated almost immediately. Her voice was deadly serious and sharp. Matsuda turned to look at her, narrowing his eyes. She may not know everything about the project, but she knew enough to know that it meant possibly losing Junko forever. She couldn’t take that risk. It made her sick just thinking about it.

“You’re almost as pig-headed as she is. Maybe you are twins after all” He taunted, still not understanding how serious Mukuro was.

“You even let her into that damned research centre and I won’t hesitate to slit your throat.” His smirk wavered for a moment at the sincerity in Mukuro’s words. She stepped towards him, stiffly taking the mug away from his hands and moving towards the sink. Matsuda stood up and followed her across the room and further into the kitchen.

“You really think you could get her to change her mind?” He questioned, this time a bit more earnest. She dropped the mug into the sink as loudly as she could, the clinking of the glass echoing through the room. Matsuda, startled slightly by the sound, flinched, and it was Mukuro’s turn to hide her smirk. She turned to face Matsuda, and just as he opened his mouth to speak, the sound of shuffling and footsteps in the living room snapped his jaw shut. He glared at Mukuro before turning away and returning to his position at the table.

“Mukuuurrrrooo~ Wakey Wake-“Junko stopped mid-step in the kitchen doorway upon seeing Mukuro smiling slightly at her, standing coolly in front of the sink. Junko somehow managed to maintain her immaculately orderly pink pigtails, even after sleeping on the sofa. She had brought the bear blanket with her, it draped over her shoulders like a cape. She watched Mukuro oddly.

“Good morning Junko” Mukuro said before stepping past her sister, taking the blanket off Junkos shoulder.

“Oh uh yes… Good morning...” Junko eyed Mukuro warily as she folded the blanket in two and placed it back in their closet, not used to her sister being so… cheerful. Junko shook her head, regaining her over-the-top persona in seconds. “Hey, hey I hope you two weren’t having any fun without me~” She sing-songed, winking at Matsuda even though he wasn’t even looking at her.
Junko abruptly clapped her hands together “Oh! That’s right, Matsuda dear, have you thought about what I asked yet?” Matsuda instantly tensed and looked towards Mukuro. Her cheerful demeanor dropped as she glared at him.

“Matsuda was just leaving. He has some business to take care of. Isn’t that right Matsuda?” Mukuro explained with a monotone expression, her tone implying there was no room for argument. Begrudgingly, Matsuda stood up, taking the hint.

“I guess I do. We’ll have to continue our chat later Junko.” Mukuro didn’t take her eyes off Matsuda as he stepped towards the door, watching him with a cold expression. Junko rolled her eyes and let out a high pitched whine.

“You’re so despairingly boring Mukuro, I can feel my brain mmmeeellltttiiiing!” Junko exclaimed, falling to the ground with exaggerated motion. Mukuro stepped around her sister who was now spread out on the ground, wiggling her arms around and followed Matsuda to the doorway. She crossed her arms and glared down at him as he slipped on his shoes and slid on his black overcoat. He paused for a moment, looking at Junko over Mukuro’s shoulder before turning and opening the door. Once more, he hesitated in the doorway.

“You never answered my question.” He muttered quietly, keeping his voice so low that only Mukuro could possibly make out his words. Mukuro turned her head to watch her sister, who had begun to make squishing noises with her mouth as she simulated what Mukuro guessed was her brain melting. Mukuro smiled gently at her twin before turning back to Matsuda.

“You underestimate how much I love my sister Matsuda.” She whispered with as much determination as she could muster. Matsuda merely scoffed.

“I don’t. Your love for her is the very thing I think will end up killing you Mukuro. God knows it’ll kill me one day.” He nodded once in acknowledgement before closing the door, leaving Mukuro with the despair of his words filling her mind, like a dense fog settling over her.

No. He’s wrong. Junko would never betray her, Junko was her sister. Mukuro only knew how to live for Junko. Without her, she would just be another pathetic soldier without a cause to fight for. A lost soul without purpose. Surely Junko saw her as more than just a pawn. After all, a Queen is only as good as her soldiers.

I am more than just a pawn…

Right?
Revelations

Disposable.

Pawn.

Just...Another....Soldier

“Mukuro?” Junko asked, breaking Mukuro away from her thoughts. She looked up at her sister from her position at the table, to where Junko was standing with her hands on her hips, an irritated yet slightly dark expression on her face.

“How depressing. A true Ultimate Soldier would never act like a total ditz and blank out.” Junko taunted, leaning towards Mukuro, eagerly waiting for some kind of retaliation. Mukuro remained emotionless, breaking away from her sister’s glare.

"Of course, sorry Junko. It won’t happen again.” Mukuro replied passively. Junko was right. Mukuro never lost focus. Ever since Matsuda left early that morning, she had been acting oddly around Junko, but she couldn’t pinpoint why. She felt her heart clench with guilt at the thought of upsetting her sister. Junko puffed out her cheeks in frustration.

“There should be a limit to how disappointing you can be” Junko whined before turning and stomping towards her room, her cotton-candy pink pig-tails swishing behind her as she strode off. Mukuro watched her sister carefully, her conversation (or rather argument) with Matsuda still playing over in her head.

Mukuro had always believed that she was the one who had to watch over Junko, that she was the one who had to shield her sister from the world. Even through all of Junko’s talk about despair, Mukuro only had one goal: To protect her sister. If that meant following her towards a hopeless future, she wouldn’t hesitate to clear the path. Even so, she couldn’t deny the seed of doubt that was growing deep inside her, a vine slowly winding its way around Mukuro’s throat. The thought of Junko leaving her behind and betraying her was heart-shattering, like someone took a mallet and slammed it right into Mukuro’s chest. She couldn’t let that happen. Mukuro was the only one who could truly understand her sister. She had to make Junko see her as an ally, not just a worthless, disappointing soldier. Mukuro was jolted from her thoughts at the sound of Junko’s high-heels clacking against their hallway as she strode towards her. Mukuro looked up at Junko questioningly.

“Ready to go? If we leave now we should be able to catch the 11 o’clock bus.” Mukuro asked flatly as she stood up from her seat. Junko made a disgusted face at Mukuro, placing her hands on her hips dramatically.

“But the bus is despairingly gross. And besides, the chances of dying on a bus are only 1 in 6,696,307.” Junko stated boredly, waving her hand in dismissal at the mere thought of a fatality risk lower than 1 in 1,000,000. Mukuro bit the inside of her cheek nervously, desperately thinking of a way to please her sister.

“Well we can always walk instead… Though we won’t get there until atlea-“ Before Mukuro could even finish her sentence, Junko already started walking towards the door, slinging her black-and-white spotted purse over her shoulder. She paused in the doorway, tilting her head in thought.
“A 1 in 47,273 chance of dying…how hopelessly exciting!” She exclaimed eagerly before striding out the door, and Mukuro’s heart lifted at the praise from her sister. Not wanting to be left behind, Mukuro hurriedly slipped on her worn-out black converse and followed Junko out the door.

As Mukuro expected, the walk was unpleasantly long, seeing as the grocery store was quite a distance away. The streets were crowded and noisy, filled to the brim with people and street vendors attempting to earn some cash from the various shoppers wandering the city. Though not an unusual sight for a Sunday afternoon, the large mass of people made Mukuro uncomfortable. As a member of Fenrir, the military group Mukuro had gained her skills as Ultimate Soldier from, she had handled live grenades, jumped out of moving vehicles and faced an array of dangers without hesitation. Yet, nothing made Mukuro more nervous than the feeling of strangers eyes watching her every movement, her every step. She could feel her heartbeat’s erratic pulse in her ears, and she had to clench her fists tightly just to calm herself, the feeling of her nails digging into her palms grounding her.

She knew that the by passers weren’t really looking at her, but her sister. As a professional model and Ultimate Fashionista, Junko’s name was known world-wide, plastered on practically every magazine in the world. Mukuro wasn’t suited for attention, and preferred to stay along the side-lines, content with being invisible to the world around her, so long as it meant her sister could have the attention and adoration she deserved. Many stopped and watched in awe as Junko walked by, their faces lit up by the mere sight of her. Usually when out with her sister, Junko would stop to talk with some of her fans, autographing photos and basking in their praise. But Junko wasn’t even sparing a single person so much as a mere glance.

Mukuro furrowed her brow in confusion, looking up at Junko but her twin just kept walking straight ahead, keeping her eyes on the path in front of her. About half-way through the walk, Mukuro was acutely aware that neither of them had said a single word to each other, the tension between them strung tightly, like a wire seconds away from snapping. Trying to cut through the silence, Mukuro attempted to make conversation.

“The streets are quite busy. I wonder if the store will be as packed when we get ther-“

“Mukuro.” Junko interrupted, her voice oddly serious

“Y-yes, Junko?” Mukuro replied hesitantly, taken aback by the darkness of her sister’s tone.

“I need you to do something for me.” Junko said sweetly, the tone of her voice switching quickly to something so child-like it was borderline sickening.

“Of course, anything.” Mukuro said immediately, her response instinctive. She noticed the corners of Junko’s mouth twitch into a small smirk before making her request

“I need you to trust me.” Mukuro looked at her sister with a lost expression, confused by what she was implying. Mukuro’s heart tightened, desperately trying to reassure her sister

“I do trust y-“

“I need you to do what I ask, without question. Can you do that?” Junko said firmly, interrupting Mukuro once more, her tone back to the serious nature it held before.

“O-of course, Junko. You know I’d do anything for you” Mukuro answered instinctively, without hesitation.

“Perfect.” Junko replied, a pleased smile tugging at her lips. “When we arrive to the store, start
shopping without me. There is some business I need to take care of beforehand.” She continued, reciting the instructions as if she was simply reading off a shopping list.

“O-okay.” Mukuro found nothing wrong with letting her sister go alone around the store, the area was well guarded and it wasn’t like Junko would be too far to reach if something did end up going wrong. Finally, Junko turned to Mukuro, still managing to navigate through the busy crowd of people as she looked at Mukuro’s face.

“You may be a dull girl Mukuro, but maybe you can be a useful soldier after all…” Junko mumbled, just loud enough for Mukuro to hear as she smiled condescendingly.

Though it was the closest thing to a compliment she had ever gotten from her sister, Mukuro couldn’t help but feel disturbed by her words. Useful. Matsuda’s earlier words played through her head, a solemn despair settling over her mind like a dense fog.

*You'd think even someone as dense as you would be able to see just how disposable you are*

Mukuro clenched her fists in frustration, trying to remain calm. For all the years she spent at Junko’s side, her heart never wavered once. Why now? She spent so much of her life like a statue, her emotions practically non-existent. And now, faced with the fear of not being good enough, the shield she had built to prevent her feelings from clouding her judgement was crumbling down, revealing the scared, shy little girl who only knew how to solve her problems through violence. Mukuro had to be better. She had to do this, since without Junko she was nothing. She could never be her own person….

...Right?
After walking the rest of the way in silence, it wasn’t long before the twins arrived at their destination. Unlike Mukuro had predicted, the small grocery store was practically empty, barely a dozen shoppers filling their carts with food items as they travelled through the aisles.

As soon as they entered through the automatic sliding doors, Junko took off without even so much as alerting Mukuro. She watched Junko as she strode towards what Mukuro could see as the pharmacy counter, talking cheerily to the frail girl behind the counter. Upon seeing Junko, the girls face lit up, pushing strands of her long plum-coloured hair behind her ears nervously. The employee seemed somehow familiar to Mukuro, though she was unable to match the girls face to a name. The way Junko talked kindly with the timid girl left a hint of jealousy in Mukuro’s heart, though she quickly shook it off. Mukuro felt the urge to spy on the two, but she had made a promise to her sister and was determined not to let her down. So, as Junko asked, Mukuro began to wander through the store, immersing herself in the task of shopping in an attempt to distract herself from her worries.

As she entered the frozen food isle, she felt a chill run down her spine, though it wasn’t a result of the low temperature. Mukuro knew the feeling well, and had trained herself to pick up on the feeling instinctively. She was being watched. As turned towards one of the many display cases holding countless boxes of ice cream and other frozen items, she could hear the patter of footsteps against the white pristine tiles as someone who she assumed was her follower approached her. Discreetly slipping her hand into her pocket, her fingers closed around the cold steel of her dagger, not willing to take the risk of running into a possible assailant unarmed.

She felt a light tap on her shoulder and in a reflex movement, her hand swung out of her pocket, slicing the dagger through the air and towards her target. Time seemed to slow down as she turned her head in sync with her strike, and upon being faced with a pair of frightened washed-out hazel eyes, Mukuro leap backwards, the momentum of her blade still carrying towards the area where Makoto Naegi’s throat used to be only seconds before. Barely inches away from a fatal strike, Naegi’s eyes widened in fear as he stumbled back and fell onto the cold floor, trying to distance himself from Mukuro’s knife. Her heart began to beat erratically, her brain desperately trying to stutter out an apology.

“N-Naegi...O-oh I-I thought someone w-was, I-I didn’t m-mean to...” Her voice trailed off as she saw that Naegi was smiling weakly at her. Mukuro’s heart skipped a beat as she stared at him like a deer caught in headlights, confused by his kind smile after almost harming him.

“I’m fine! Don’t worry about it. Besides, it was my fault for sneaking up on you like that, I don’t blame you for reacting the way you did.” His expression was totally sincere, smiling reassuringly at her though she still caught the glint of fear lingering in his eyes. She didn’t know what she did to deserve his forgiveness, not to mention his kindness, but she could feel her nerves calming down slightly at his words. Realizing he was still staring up at her from the ground, she extended her hand out to him. He looked at Mukuro hesitantly before accepting her assistance, Mukuro pulling him up with ease, like he weighed barely anything. Naegi smiled brightly at her and brushed the dust off of his navy-blue jeans.

“She was being watched. As turned towards one of the many display cases holding countless boxes of ice cream and other frozen items, she could hear the patter of footsteps against the white pristine tiles as someone who she assumed was her follower approached her. Discreetly slipping her hand into her pocket, her fingers closed around the cold steel of her dagger, not willing to take the risk of running into a possible assay...”

“Even though you did almost kill me, that was pretty cool. I mean, I’ve never seen someone move so quickly.” Oblivious to Mukuro’s now blushing face, he continued talking “Well, my sister does move pretty quickly when the manga she orders arrives, but I don’t think she could ever move as gracefully as you!” He exclaimed cheerily, and Mukuro froze in place, not sure how to respond to his praise. She nodded once in acknowledgement and stared at him for a few moments, before
breaking away from his gaze.

“Junko isn’t here right now, if that’s what you were going to ask earlier.” She mumbled neutrally, though even she was surprised at the hint of disappointment in her tone. Naegi tilted his head, confused.

“I didn’t come to see Junko. I just wanted to say hi to you. Probably my bad luck that I ended up startling you though huh?” He said casually, a smile still plastered on his face. Mukuro didn’t know why he was being so kind to her. She had only met Naegi once before during orientation at Hope’s peak, and even then she barely said anything back. Yet, even though Mukuro was a practically a stranger, he didn’t hesitate to approach her. He more than likely knew of Mukuro’s dangerous abilities (Especially now after almost being a target of them) but still decided to strike up a conversation with her. Why? Why wasn’t he afraid like the others? Junko had always told her she was a useless girl, but this boy was showing her otherwise. She wasn’t worth anyone’s time, she couldn’t be. If she lost focus at all, she wouldn’t be able to fulfill her role to Junko. She had to be there for Junko. She had to. No one would ever care about her except Junko. She had to help her sister, she had to. No one could ever love her. She had to help Junko. She had to. She…had…to…?

“M-Mukuro?” Naegi asked, his hand grasping hers, trying to get her attention. Worry was strewn across his soft features, she must’ve blanked out for a while to make him so concerned. Mukuro raised her free hand to her cheek gently, her fingers touching the single tear that had run down her face. Was she… crying? She looked back up at Naegi, to only see a flash of vibrant pink hair from over his shoulder. Standing at the end of the aisle, watching the two with a Cheshire-cat smile, was Junko. Mukuro’s expression instantly hardened, her heart beat began to pound so loudly she thought Naegi might be able to hear it. He must’ve picked up on her panic because he tilted his head, concern on his face. “Are you alri-”

“I have to go.” Mukuro interrupted quickly, still not breaking away from Junko’s condescending glare. Naegi seemed a bit confused by her sudden change in demeanor but nodded once hesitantly, letting go of her hand.

“O-okay. I’ll see you tomorrow at school then?” He asked hesitantly as if he was afraid he did something to scare her away, and Mukuro couldn’t help but feel guilty. She nodded once quickly at him before walking nervously towards Junko who was standing with her arms crossed; like an impatient mother waiting for her child. Against her better judgement, she turned her head slightly to look back at him, and she couldn’t help the way her heart clenched at the sight of him watching her with a distraught expression. She turned away quickly, focusing her attention fully on Junko. Instantly she noticed the small paper bag in Junko’s hands, the words ‘Administrated by Mikan Tsumiki’ written on it dainty lettering. Junko looked down at Mukuro, and even thought the two were the same height she couldn’t help but feel small under her sister’s glare. Mukuro opened her mouth to question the bag, but before she could, Junko shot her a look that almost made her recoil.

“Remember what you promised earlier?” Junko teased, her voice high-pitched and child-like.

*Do what I ask, without question*

Mukuro nodded solemnly in response. Satisfied, Junko turned and headed for the door.

“I-I didn’t get a chance to pick up any groceries yet…” Mukuro called out to her sister, but she kept walking.

“It’s fine. I already got what we came for anyway” Junko said lightly, waving the little paper bag in the air. Knowing Junko wouldn’t bother to wait for her, Mukuro forced herself to stand straight and regain her soldier-like composure as she followed Junko towards the exit.
As the two walked out of the store, Mukuro spotted the plum-haired girl who she now realized was Mikan Tsumiki, the Ultimate Nurse, waving at Junko from her spot behind the counter. Mukuro caught Junko smile brightly at the girl, Mikan practically swooning under Junko’s attention, fiddling with her nurse’s apron. Mukuro would feel sick if she wasn’t already panicked by her breakdown only a few moments before.

She expected Junko to tease her endlessly as they walked back home, but the Ultimate Fashionista kept her eyes straight ahead, lost in thought. Mukuro decided that she had gotten on Junko’s bad side enough for one day, and her heart wouldn’t be able to take another round of taunting, so she stayed quiet along with her. Mukuro knew something had shifted in their relationship. Junko seemed slightly… darker. As if someone had pulled the blindfold off of Mukuro’s eyes and she was finally able to see everything for how it really was. Though she would never admit it, to anyone including herself, she was afraid.

Mukuro decided to eat dinner in her room that night. (Leftovers from the night before, since she wasn’t able to pick up any fresh ingredients) It had been a long day, and she wasn’t mentally prepared to endure more of Junko’s tormenting, so sitting alone for a while was a nice reprieve. After barely touching her dinner, she flicked off the lights and crawled under her covers, clinging to them like a lifeline. Just as she began to slowly drift into sleep’s embrace, Mukuro heard her door creak open, the sound of Junko’s heels clicking against the wooden floor echoing through the darkness of her bedroom. Mukuro froze, snapping her eyes shut to pretend she was still asleep, as if she were a child caught staying up past her bedtime. She felt her mattress shift as Junko perched on the edge of it. Junko sighed, catching Mukuro off guard and causing her to flinch.

“You’re such a disappointing girl Mukuro… You can shoot people’s hearts and brains no problem, but you can’t even woo some stupid boy into liking you.” Mukuro closed her eyes tighter, to the point it was almost causing her pain to do so, just so she could block out the haunting tone of Junko’s voice. “You’d think after spending 3 years being some mercenary groups bitch you’d learn how to follow orders. Buuuuut I guess not. You should’ve never let your silly little stone soldier heart try to think for itself. But I guess it can’t be helped!” Mukuro clenched the blankets tighter, struggling to keep herself still “So, me being the generous sister I am, I’ll give you one last warning.” Junko leaned forward, whispering into Mukuro’s ear “Meddle in places you shouldn’t be, dear sister, and you might just end upon the wrong side of this war.” Mukuro could feel her hands shaking and tears threatening the corners of her eyes as the mattress shifted back to its original form since Junko stood up from it, the slamming of her door signifying she was safe once more. With a heavy heart and a tear-stained face, what moments before was a sweet dreams embrace became a nightmare’s ruthless struggle as she was dragged to sleep’s grasp.

“H-huh?” Mukuro stuttered, her body frozen in fear

Junko smirked, though the expression didn’t carry to her eyes which were now hollow and cold.

“You were always such a naïve girl Mukuro. Nothing more than an obedient little worker bee, always ready to sting for her Queen.”

Mukuro opened her mouth to reply, but instead of words, crimson liquid poured from her lips. Her trembling hands reached towards her sister, but Junko seemed miles away and right in front of her at the same time
“Never the less, a worker has her purpose.” Junko continued, as Mukuro began to cough and choke on the metallic-tasting liquid filling her lungs. “To use its little stinger and protect her Queen. Do you know what happens when the bee has served that purpose?” Junko questioned eerily. Mukuro’s wobbling legs gave in and she fell to her knees, a sickening squelching sound resounding as she landed in the pool of blood now surrounding her. Mukuro looked up pitifully at her sister, who began to melt into the crimson pool, limbs dripping into a deep red as a sinister giggle echoed from her blood-drenched lips.

_It dies._
Mukuro sat up abruptly in her bed, gasping for air to fill her lungs. The scarring images of blood still stained her mind, the lingering fear of her nightmare causing her heart to beat erratically.

“Just a dream... Just... a dream...” She whispered shakily to herself through jagged breaths, desperately trying to reassure herself that it wasn’t real. Weakly she lifted her hands to rub her face, trying to stimulate blood flow in an effort to keep herself more alert. Her throat felt dry and scratchy, she must’ve been screaming as she struggled through her nightmare. Though she couldn’t help what she did in her sleep, Mukuro silently prayed she didn’t disturb Junko. The thought of further upsetting Junko sent a chill down Mukuro’s spine. Trying to distract herself and push the memory of her nightmare away, she pulled herself out of bed, walking towards the kitchen to get a glass of water to soothe her throat before she could make another attempt to fall back asleep. Just as she took a couple weak steps down the hallway, she heard the click of their apartment door opening. Quickly, Mukuro pressed herself against the wall of their hallway, her black t-shirt and shorts making her seem almost invisible in the darkness of the apartment as she listened to whoever was entering.

“-caught on footage, so I’ll go clear the tapes enough so that those idiots won’t be able to tell that you were with me.” The voice mumbled as they entered, the door creaking as he stepped inside. Mukuro instantly recognized the sound of Matsuda’s voice, his tone sounded tired and slightly worried. Mukuro wondered what Matsuda would be doing at their apartment so early, but the sound of high heels clicking loudly against the wooden floor following behind him answered her question. Mukuro hadn’t remembered Junko telling her she was going anywhere that night, she must’ve been so distraught that Junko wearing high-heels in the middle of the evening seemed unimportant. Mukuro silently swore to herself for being so careless.

“Where was all this concern earlier?” Junko taunted snidely, her voice both teasing and yet filled with venom as she closed the door behind them. Mukuro slid slowly along the wall and towards where the two had entered in hopes of getting a better look at the situation, careful to keep out of sight.

“Excuse me for being a bit more worried about keeping my god damn job than whether or not everything was going according to your stupid plan.” Matsuda spat, frustration lining his words. Mukuro inched close enough to gain a glimpse at the two as they stood in the doorway, illuminated by the soft moonlight shining in from the apartment windows. The silver light made Junko’s pink hair seem almost metallic as she giggled, grabbing Matsuda’s tie and pulling him towards her until their faces were only inches apart.

“Now, now Matsuda... Keep acting so petty and I may decide you aren’t worth the trouble anymore...” She purred, her voice so quiet Mukuro could barely make out the words, before letting him go and turning sharply, walking towards the dining table. She pulled something from her purse that Mukuro could barely make out in the dim light and dropped it haphazardly on the dining table, before walking out of Mukuro’s line of sight and into the kitchen. Matsuda watched Junko carefully, still standing on the doormat frozen. Even from a distance, Mukuro could see the pain in Matsuda’s eyes. She knew exactly what he was going through, how although she loved her sister more than anything else in the world, being around Junko was like being around a live grenade. Never knowing when she was going to blow up and take them down with her. After a few moments of listening to the clinking of glasses coming from the kitchen, Matsuda stepped forward and sat down.
at the dining table, eyes trained on the object Junko had placed there. He cautiously reached for it, sliding the object towards himself. Mukuro crouched down and took a few extra steps forward, her curiosity making her momentarily forget the risk of being caught. From her new position, she could see that the object was the little bag Junko had gotten when the two had gone shopping. A thousand questions flitted through Mukuro’s mind, each one only instilling her doubts about what her sister truly thought of her, and how little her sister has told her about her true plans.

“Matsuda dear do you want some coffee? We’ve got a lot of thinking to do y’know and I need you to be extra alert!” Junko exclaimed from the kitchen, her voice light and airy, a total contrast to the darkness she spoke with before. Matsuda furrowed his brow and looked up from the bag.

“The caffeine won’t do much to keep you awa-“ He cut himself off abruptly, closing his eyes and shaking his head to clear the thought. “Sure.” He said instead, before turning his attention back to the bag. Junko returned back to the table shortly after, the scent of freshly brewed coffee filling the room as she placed two cups down on the table. Matsuda looked up at her.

“I don’t think you should come by my office anytime soon just in case someone gets suspicious; I wouldn’t want you to be targete-“ Junko sighed loudly, interrupting his words before dismissing his worry with a wave of her perfectly manicured hand.

“Ugh, all this lovey dovey ‘caring’ crap is making me sick. Can we focus on the task at hand?” She said pointedly, nodding towards the paper bag before lifting her mug and drinking the steaming liquid inside. Matsuda sighed, his annoyance clear.

“You know Mukuro is going to kill me for this.” He mumbled solemnly, and Mukuro tensed up at the sound of her name. Junko rolled her eyes.

“Oh don’t worry about her. She won’t be interfering with our plans anytime soon.” She smirked and Mukuro almost staggered back, Junko’s words cutting her deeply. Mukuro could feel her hands start to tremble. Matsuda seemed disturbed by Junko’s words as well, as he opened his mouth to ask something, but before he could get a word in Junko spoke again. “Now let’s get back to business shall we?” Her tone implied there would be no room for argument. Matsuda nodded solemnly, sending a wild grin across Junko’s face. “Excellent. Now, first things first. Matsuda dear, have you heard of the Hope cultivation plan?” Matsuda narrowed his eyes, not sure what she was trying to get at.

“Yes… though the academy has been working on it for years, it hasn’t made much progress. They’ve even been trying to use some of my research on the way memory can affect talent in hopes of-“

“The researchers have recently entered the experimental stage of the project.” Junko interrupted before blowing on the steam from her mug casually. Matsuda’s eyes widened in shock.

“What?” He practically shouted as his face turned pale. “T-that’s impossible, if it was anywhere near testing I would’ve been one of the first to be notified…” He began to run his hands through his hair nervously. Mukuro had little knowledge of the academy’s past, though Matsuda had once told her about its origin when Mukuro had shared the news of her and Junko being invited to attend the school early that spring. When he heard the news, he seemed almost sad. “Those of us who are chosen to attend, picked from our normal lives and brought up into greatness or whatever they say about us on their goddamn t-shirts, to the academy, we are nothing but research samples. Another name in their list of data. The academy doesn’t care about us. The only goal of the academy is to create a hope that will save our world. Sometimes I wonder if that kind of dream is even possible…” At the time, Mukuro had no idea what he meant by those words. Even now, listening to the two speak, she was hopelessly lost. Matsuda shook his head, refusing to accept Junko’s statement as fact.
“There’s just no way… I know for sure that they haven’t been granted permission to begin animal experimentation, even just sending the request takes months! There’s no way they would even be able to begin-“ Matsuda cut himself off upon seeing Junko’s knowing smile. She giggled lightly, leaning forward on the table; resting her head in her hands as she did.

“Well, you’re not wrong. There’s no way they could begin animal experimentation… Unless…” Junko trailed off, waiting for Matsuda to catch on. His expression darkened as he realized something, though Mukuro was still racking her brain to come up with an explanation.

“Unless… they aren’t going to use animals…” He said solemnly. Junko smiled widely.

“Ding ding ding! Corrrrrrect! When denied the access needed to begin a humane way of experimentation, the academy was simply forced to go to extremes to complete their beloved project! It just so happened that one of those extremes was continuing with the possibility of killing their test subjects!” Junko began to giggle uncontrollably, a wild darkness in her eyes. Human experimentation? Though Mukuro had killed and tortured people in the past when with Fenrir, she couldn’t help but feel sick at the thought of innocents being used as lab rats.

“But… But who are they using as test subjects?” Matsuda asked hesitantly, his face still pale and shocked. Junko leaned back in her chair, smirking.

“Let’s see… to even begin creating talent artificially, you’d need to use test subjects that are completely lacking in talent itself.” Junko explained, her tone professional and business-like, similar to how a teacher would talk to her students “Now I wonder where the academy would find a bunch of disposable, talentless fools who would do anything to become successful and talented?” Junko over-exaggerated her words, sarcastically playing up the fact she already knew the answer.

“The reserve course… They’re already so desperate to enter the main program…” Matsuda said hauntingly as Junko clapped her hands in excitement. Matsuda looked back down at the paper bag on the table. “But… How does this tie in with your plans?” Junko stopped clapping abruptly, rolling her eyes.

“Well, the ideal outcome would’ve been convincing the council to use a reserve course student that we would be able to control… But since they’ve already chosen their candidate-“


“Some hopes-peak obsessed fanboy, Hajime Hinata. He’s supposedly in your year, so keeping an eye on him up until the surgery will be easy.” She explained, waving her hand boredly. “Now, as I was saying, since they’ve already chosen their candidate, were going to have to move on to the next phase of our plan…” Junko nodded towards the bag still in Matsuda’s hand, urging him to open it. He looked at her oddly before slowly reaching into the bag and pulling out a plastic container filled with liquid. In the moonlight, the liquid inside seemed to glow a gentle yellow, almost like the light a firefly would give off. Matsuda furrowed his brow, looking from the bottle back to Junko. A sly smile spread across her face as she began to explain. “Liquidized Rohypnol. While small doses can help insomnia victims fall asleep, for our purposes it serves as a knock-out chemical” Matsuda’s confused expression only worsened.

“I understand what the chemical does, though I don’t understand why you would-“

“You don’t need to worry your pretty little head about the specifics for now.” She said, cutting him off quickly “Until the surgery is complete, I only need two things from you. One. I need you to
formulate more of our little miracle drug right here” She said sweetly, batting her eyelashes. Matsuda nodded once in response, though Mukuro could see how much he hated the idea.

“It shouldn’t take too long to recreate, a week at most.”

“Alrighty! That’s the spirit! Now, for request number two. I need you to keep Mukuro from meddling with our plan.” Junko said, her tone serious and sharp, dropping the sweet act from moments before. Mukuro froze, like her heart and just suddenly stopped beating. Matsuda seemed to tense up at her request.

“W-Why? I thought you said she wouldn’t be a concer-“

“My dear sister is too distracted to be of any further use. She’s allowed her little emotions to get in the way of her thinking, and snapping her back into line just wouldn’t be worth the effort. So for now, we keep her out of our way until we can find a way to dispose of her.” Junko explained, like there was nothing she could do about it, like it was no big deal. Time seemed to freeze around Mukuro as her heart shattered. Silent tears began to roll down her cheeks, though she couldn’t bring herself to turn away from their conversation.

“Dispose of her? Junko, do you understand how crazy you’re sounding? She’s your sister. She practically idolizes you! A-and all you do is treat her like shit!” Mukuro was surprised at how upset Matsuda was acting over this. He almost never argued with Junko, certainly not with this much anger and fear. Junko giggled darkly at his words

“You think I sound crazy? Could it be that you hit your head somehow when we were walking here and forgot that my entire personality is like 99% crazy?” Matsuda’s anger softened, his eyes taking on something sad instead.

“But still… Don’t you love her?” His voice cracked slightly, and Mukuro could practically hear the words he didn’t say but still implied through the question. Don’t you love me? Junko’s eyes seemed to sparkle as she answered his question

“I do love her. But…Just imagine the despair I would feel from killing her… Upupupupupu…It’s simply unbearable!” The darkness in her eyes sent Mukuro staggering back, almost losing her balance and being caught. This couldn’t be real. Junko would never say these things. This was just another nightmare… It had to be… This couldn’t be real. Matsuda’s anger seemed to drain from him in an instant, his expression turning hollow and monotonic.

“Junko, could you please get me some sugar? I forgot to ask earlier, but you know I hate how bitter coffee can be.” He asked, his voice completely neutral. Junko managed to calm down her giggles enough to look him over carefully before standing up and turning towards the kitchen without a word. “Thank you.” He mumbled. That’s when Mukuro noticed Matsuda’s hand slide forward, reaching for the little yellow bottle and twisting off the cap in one fluid motion. Mukuro watching him through teary eyes, as he poured a few drops into Junko’s coffee mug, which was still sitting on the table. Every instinct inside her told her to run forward, to protect Junko but her wobbling legs couldn’t take a single step. She closed her eyes tightly and clenched her fists, her nails digging into her palms so hard she was afraid they’d draw blood. Just as she opened her eyes, she saw Matsuda turn towards her, his expression solemn. Upon seeing her tear-stained face, his eyes widened in surprise slightly, clearly not used to the sight of Mukuro in pain. He stared at her for a moment, before raising a finger to his mouth, signaling her to be quiet. She stood motionless, like a deer caught in headlights as Junko walked back to the table, placing a handful of sugar cubes on the table. Matsuda turned back towards Junko and muttered a thanks before dropping a couple cubes into his mug, and raising it towards Junko.
“To despair.” He said shakily, waiting for Junko to toast with him. Junko narrowed her eyes, but did the same, the two mugs clinking.

“You’re acting very strange Matsuda… Perhaps you’ve finally fallen into despair with me?” She smiled smugly before lifting the mug to her lips as Matsuda did the same. Mukuro watched, unable to move, as Junko’s eye lids began to flutter, her body tipping sideways in her chair as the drug’s effects began to take hold. Just as Junko was about to hit the ground, Mukuro moved forward at speeds that would be impossible to reach for a normal human, as she caught Junko in her shaking arms. Tears started running down her face faster now, though she still didn’t make a sound. The mug shattered unceremoniously as it fell from Junko’s hands and onto the floor, the shattered glass and coffee spreading across the tiled floor. Matsuda stood up from his chair, paying no mind to the mess on the ground.

“Mukuro… You have to leave…its not safe for you here anymore. Now that she’s gotten what she needs to continue her plans, Junko will only get worse. You have to go.” Matsuda stated firmly, his voice still slightly weak. Mukuro could only nod solemnly, still watching her sister as she laid peacefully in her arms.

“I… I don’t have anywhere else to go… I’ve only ever had Junko…” She muttered weakly. Matsuda walked to her, and lifted Junko carefully from Mukuro’s arms with surprising ease. He turned away from her.

“You have to go. Please. The amount I gave her should keep her knocked out for at least 2 hours. That should be enough time to grab your stuff and get away… far away from here” Leave? It wasn’t a bad idea, by itself. She had run away once before from her family, when she had first joined Fenrir. 3 years of isolation from the normal world. She could go back to them. In her heart Mukuro knew she couldn’t. By leaving, she would just be abandoning this world. She had to stop Junko. She had to give Junko the despair she had been yearning for her whole life. Mukuro was the only one who could truly do that for her sister. Snapping back into reality, Mukuro shook her head quickly, wiping away the tears from her face and standing up slowly.

“No. I have to stay…I have to attend Hope’s Peak…Maybe then I can stop her…” Matsuda sighed at Mukuro’s resistance before placing Junko down gently on the sofa and turning back towards her.

“You just might be as insane as she is. But fine. You want to put your life in danger? Be my guest. I’ve done all I can to help you Mukuro. But you’ll have to find another place to live. It’s too dangerous to even be in the same room as her. We can’t predict when she’ll snap and end up killing one of us.” Mukuro flinched at the last part of his words, though she knew he was right. She attempted to clear her throat before speaking.

“The first day is tomorrow. What do I say when she comes into class and sees me there?”

“Nothing. She sees you as a weak pawn. Don’t give her any reason to suspect you, and you’ll be fine.” Mukuro nodded weakly once more before turning back towards the hallway, walking towards her room to pack her things. “Oh and Mukuro?” Matsuda called out to her. She stopped walking, not turning to face him. “Try and make some friends okay? You may be really boring and plain, but you of all people deserve someone to care about you.” Mukuro felt tears threaten the corners of her eyes once more, though this time they were for a completely different reason.

“Thank you Yasuke...” She mumbled, trying to hide the smile tugging at her lips. She looked over her shoulder for only a moment, catching Matsuda smile weakly at the use of his first name, before she continued down the hall. Her whole being felt empty, like she was sleepwalking. Nevertheless, she finally felt something blossoming inside her. The vine of doubt that had once been winding around her throat, was now producing small blossoms of hope within her, giving her a reason to
smile after all she had just lost, all that she had just given up.

This is where our story changes. The very fabric of reality is shifting, all because one soldier has decided she’d much rather lead her own army, then let herself be another casualty in the war. The tale of a despair that turns into hope, begins here.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this longer chapter! (Wrote it instead of studying for my math exam so yay for procrastination!)
Welcome to the Battlefield

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Next.”

Mukuro stood in the main office of Hope’s Peak Academy, hundreds of students lined up behind her eagerly waiting for their turn to sign in and receive their official student ID. The stern looking woman sitting at the reception desk didn’t look up from her notepad, tapping her pen impatiently on the desk as Mukuro stepped forward.

“Name?” She asked quickly, her tone sharp and straight to the point. Mukuro almost didn’t catch the question over the sound of phones ringing and teachers walking hurriedly around the office, making last-minute preparations for the first day of classes.

“Mukuro Ikusaba” she responded blankly. She saw the woman’s face turn slightly pale at the mention of The Ultimate Soldiers name, clearly aware of Mukuro’s deadly abilities. The woman flipped through the pages of her notebook quickly, scanning the pages which were filled with thousands of student names before drawing a line through what Mukuro assumed was her own name. Mukuro leaned slightly forward over the counter, just enough so she could see the list better. Upon reading her sister’s name below her own, she was comforted to see Junko’s name hadn’t been crossed off yet. At least she would have some time to compose herself before her sister would arrive. The stern-looking woman cautiously looked up from her book, and once she saw Mukuro staring right at her, she jumped back a bit, letting out a small squeak of surprise. The woman swiveled her chair to face the stacks of clear plastic bins behind her before reaching through the folders they contained, pulling out one and hesitantly handing it to Mukuro. Mukuro sighed before taking it, annoyed by how afraid the secretary was acting.

“Next!” The woman called out, her voice a little more high-pitched. Mukuro turned sharply, ignoring the pointing and whispering of other students as she passed by and exited the office. She held her head up high, her confidence only further instilling fear into the rest of the students. In truth, she was extremely tired, only catching an hour or two of sleep after leaving the apartment. Her neck ached from having to sleep in an awkward position on the park bench she had used as a make-shift bed. It wasn’t the most ideal situation, though it would have to suffice until she could be registered for a dorm room in the academy. Even so, Mukuro refused to let any of the students see her as weak, especially as a first impression. Her pride simply wouldn’t allow it. As Mukuro walked quickly down the halls of Hope’s Peak, dodging students as she sped down towards her class room, she opened the folder, examining its contents.

Inside were 3 pieces of paper, each covered in tiny black lettering. From what Mukuro could see at a quick glance, the papers detailed the extensive rules of her new school life. She quickly noticed a little red star next to one of the rules that read “No weapons or dangerous items will be allowed on school ground at any time, unless specified otherwise by a staff member”. A smirk found its way onto Mukuro’s face, as she already had multiple knives and handguns with her hidden in her backpack and in other secret compartments within her clothing. Though she did feel a bit targeted by their extra precaution, she supposed it was necessary due to her breaking the rule before she was even aware of it. There were only 2 items left inside the folder, a small silver pin encased within a small plastic bag, and a laminated credit-card sized piece of plastic with her photo and information on it which would serve as her ID for the school year. Mukuro picked up the small pin, removing it from the bag and pinning it onto her uniform blazer. Now that she could see it closer, she noticed that
it was infact the hope’s peak academy crest detailed onto the pin, the silver glinting in the bright light of the hallway. Looking at the students around her, they all had the pin fastened already on their blazers, though she did notice a few whose pins were not the shining silver of Mukuro’s pin, but instead a soft coppery bronze. The only difference between those that wore the silver pins versus those who wore the bronze was only in the subtle expressions they wore, expressions that Mukuro could pick up easily thanks to her heightened analytical abilities. The students wearing the silver pins seemed more lively and carefree, talking and laughing loudly with one another. The students wearing the bronze were also talking with one another, though their smiles seemed somewhat forced. As if they were extremely stressed out and nervous, though it was only the first day of classes. Shouldn’t they be excited? They had just gotten accepted into the most prestigious school in the country, and yet they seemed so on edge. Before Mukuro could analyze them further, she had already arrived at her destination.

Mukuro stood motionless in front of the classroom door, still hesitant to enter. Written on a small plaque screwed into the vibrant blue steel door were the words ‘CLASS 1-A’, the same class name written on her newly given student ID. With a deep breath, Mukuro placed her hand on the cold metal door handle, cautiously turning it. Though she knew Junko hadn’t arrived yet (If she did, Mukuro felt sure she would’ve heard her sister talking loudly from miles away) Mukuro still felt nervous about facing her class, especially with the reputation she carried with her. Matsuda had told her to try and make friends, though she didn’t really know how. Even as a child, Mukuro had clung to Junko for support, since she was extremely shy. Though she could call Matsuda her friend, he was more loyal to Junko than anyone, so she wasn’t sure if she should count him. Even so, she wasn’t just coming to the academy to make friends. She had to stop whatever Junko’s plan was, and if friendship ever got in the way of her mission, then she wouldn’t hesitate to discard them. Mukuro had to give Junko the despair she wanted. With the little determination she could muster, Mukuro took a cautious step forward into the classroom.

“Hello?” She asked carefully to no one in particular, not expecting an answer. It seemed she arrived earlier than anticipated, as the dimly lit classroom was barren of students. Seeing as there were no instructions about a seating plan written on the large dark-green chalkboard positioned behind the teachers desk, Mukuro decided to pick a seat for herself. Navigating through the maze of waist-high wooden desks, Mukuro chose a spot that was directly beside a window near the back of the class. Quietly, she slid her belongings underneath the desk, and took a seat. Before she could even begin to collect her thoughts, she heard the door slowly creak open as the sound of two voices talking happily filled the empty room.

“Well it’s possible, since the academy has been running for a long ti-” A navy-blue haired girl said as she entered the classroom, though her response cut-off as she noticed Mukuro watching them with a blank expression. The girl’s face turned slightly pale under the Ultimate Soldier’s watch, and a confused Naegi followed the girl’s gaze to where Mukuro was sitting. Instantly he smiled at her without hesitation and began taking a few steps towards Mukuro, though before he could, the girl grabbed his wrist quickly; holding him back as she smiled gently at Mukuro. “I-I didn’t realize that anyone would be in here this early, I am s-sorry if we disturbed you at all” She muttered politely, though anyone with eyes could tell how fake her smile was. Mukuro didn’t reply, instead just staring at the two blankly. It wasn’t because Mukuro didn’t want to reply, or was trying to be rude to her new classmate, she simply didn’t know how to have a proper conversation. It especially didn’t help
when the person she wanted to talk to was scared of her. After a few moments of awkward silence, the girls polite expression dropped, clearly frustrated with Mukuro’s lack of response. Mukuro couldn’t help but think how out-of-place the girl’s sour expression seemed on her sweet doll-like face. She turned back to Naegi, pulling on his sleeve. “Makoto, maybe we should come back when the class isn’t so…empty. Might be safer don’t you agree?” She whispered, slowly pulling him towards the door. Naegi looked at the girl oddly, shaking his head and pulling himself gently out of her grasp.

“Don’t be silly Sayaka, there’s nothing to be afraid of.” He reassured the girl before turning to face Mukuro. “Mukuro, this is Sayaka Maizono, the Ultimate Idol. Her girl group is pretty popular, I’m sure you’ve heard of them?” Mukuro nodded once in response. Though Mukuro had virtually no interest in music herself, she had heard of her girl group on the news a couple times. The Ultimate Idol turned to look nervously at Naegi before smiling fakely at Mukuro.

“Please, feel free to call me Sayaka” She said cheerfully, though Mukuro could hear the hesitance underlying her words. Mukuro nodded once more, still not sure how to respond. Mukuro supposed she should feel slightly hurt at Sayaka’s fear, yet she simply felt indifferent. Years of verbal abuse from Junko had made her heart like stone, and though she was beginning to learn how to understand her own emotions, she was still a long way from normal. Naegi’s smile faltered slightly at seeing Mukuro’s lack of response. Nervously, he attempted to break the silence.

“Sayaka, I’m not sure if you know Mukuro but she-“

“I know who she is.” Sayaka said quickly, cutting Naegi off. Naegi opened his mouth to say something else, but before he could Mukuro stood up and began to walk towards them. Sayaka’s face turned pale as she flinched back at Mukuro’s sudden movement, but still didn’t try to step away. Mukuro stopped to stand right in front of the girl, staring straight at her, before extending her hand out towards her.

“M-my name is Mukuro Ikusaba, I h-hope we can get along.” Mukuro muttered shakily, her nerves still getting the best of her. Sayaka’s eyes widened slightly at the unexpected introduction, though at seeing Mukuro nervous her expression softened slightly, as she gave Mukuro a smile that was much more genuine.

“I hope so too.” She said before shaking Mukuro’s hand lightly. Not knowing what else to say, Mukuro turned away and began walking back to her seat. The two still stood in the doorway, looking at each other oddly before walking towards Mukuro. They both smiled at her and sat down in the desks directly beside her. Mukuro furrowed her brow and looked at them as they placed their bags underneath the wooden desks.

“Aren’t you going to choose seats with your friends?” She asked, confused. The two looked at each other once more before turning back to Mukuro.

“Well, you are our friend now. So we don’t mind sitting next to you. Right Sayaka?” Naegi asked, turning towards the girl. Sayaka nodded slowly, still hesitant to fully open up to Mukuro though she wasn’t as fearful. Mukuro froze. They had called her their friend. Was it really that simple? Surely it couldn’t be, after all, she had barely done anything. Was there something she was supposed to say? Was there some sort of ritual she had to partake in? Her hands began to shake slightly, panic setting in as she looked at her classmates. Mukuro had never had friends before. What if she did something wrong? What if Junko was right, what if she really was just a dull girl no one would like? Mukuro looked up to see Sayaka watching Mukuro. She frowned slightly at Mukuro, before reaching forward and taking Mukuro’s shaking hand in hers.

“Mukuro you don’t need to be nervous, being friends is easy.” She said kindly. Mukuro’s eyes
widened slightly.

“How did you know I was-“ Mukuro tried to question, though Sayaka cut her off quickly.

“I can read minds” She said, completely dead serious. Both Naegi and Mukuro stared at her in awe and confusion, before Sayaka began to giggle. “Relax, it’s a joke. I just have good intuition….Cuz I’m psychic!” Naegi’s jaw dropped open, still naïvely believing Sayaka, which only sent her into another fit of giggles. “Kidding! Kidding.” Both Naegi and Sayaka began to laugh even louder, and after a moment Mukuro joined in, trying to cover her smile with her hand as she did. Naegi must’ve heard the small giggles that escaped through her fingers because he stared at her, smiling warmly. Mukuro hadn’t felt this happy in a long time. Was this what it’s like to have friends?

After a few minutes of talking with Naegi and Sayaka, the rest of their classmates had begun flooding into the classroom. Though the classroom had become filled with just under a dozen students, Mukuro still felt slightly at ease with her new surroundings, partially thanks to Junko’s absence from the scene. Naegi had left Sayaka and Mukuro at their desks to go and chat with some of their other classmates, among which were the Ultimate Programmer, Chihiro Fujisaki and the Ultimate Baseball Player, Leon Kuwata. The three stood huddled around Chihiro’s laptop, where it seemed like Chihiro was explaining cheerfully to them what the programmer was working on.

Though Sayaka was still talking to her, Mukuro couldn’t help but stare at Naegi, watching him smile kindly as Chihiro spoke. The way he was just so completely genuine and kind to everyone, no matter who they are was amazing to Mukuro. She had lived most of her life through a pessimistic world view, and his optimism was truly incredible to her. A light tap on her shoulder snapped her back into focus, turning back to Sayaka, who was smiling sheepishly at her.

“Sorry…” Mukuro mumbled, trying to hide her blushing face, embarrassed after getting distracted and not paying attention to what Sayaka was saying to her. Sayaka only smiled brighter.

“It’s alright.” She insisted, turning to face the three students at the other side of the class. “Though, I do think you two would be good together.” She said, almost like an afterthought. Mukuro looked at her strangely, though before she could question her, their teacher stepped into the classroom, and all the rest of the students began to scurry towards their desks, Sayaka included. As the teacher began to wordlessly write on the chalkboard, Sayaka leaned towards Mukuro’s desk.

“I’ll be cheering for you two!” She whispered before winking at Mukuro, then turning back to face the front of the classroom. Still completely confused, Mukuro turned toward the front of the class just in time to see a familiar person step through the classroom doors, the whole class turning dead silent as she entered. Sayaka turned towards Mukuro slowly.

“Isn’t that your sister?” Mukuro nodded once, her eyes still trained on Junko as she strode confidently towards where Mukuro was sitting. Junko stopped to stand in front of Mukuro’s desk, placing her hand on Mukuro’s arm. To anyone else, it would seem like a friendly contact between two sisters, though Mukuro could feel the sharp sting of Junko’s nails pressing into her skin.

“Hiya sis. Enjoying our new class so far?” She smiled fakely, her eyes dark and intimidating. Mukuro nodded once in response. “How nice. You should enjoy it while you still can. Well, anyway, this morning I noticed that your room had been cleaned out, and oh dear, I can’t seem to remember seeing you leave… care to explain why that is?” She asked darkly, though before Mukuro could answer, the teacher spoke up.

“Ms. Enoshima, Do you think you can take your seat now?” She asked firmly. Junko turned her head to look at the stern woman, smiling brightly.
“Ah yes of course, sorry for disrupting. I was just catching up with my dear sister, y’know how siblings can be!” She replied sweetly, sending a kind smile to the teachers face, though her nails only pressed harder and harder into Mukuro’s arm.

“Don’t worry about it Ms. Enoshima, I have siblings of my own. Stubborn things they can be.” And in an instant, the teacher was already wrapped around Junko’s finger. Junko not only had a talent for fashion, but she specialized in manipulating and controlling others, a fact that was undeniable by watching her converse with their new teacher who moments before was ready to send her to detention.

“This is a battle you won’t win Mukuro. Make sure to stay out of my way” Junko whispered confidently before releasing her grip on Mukuro’s arm and walking towards the back of the class, taking a seat and watching Mukuro smugly. Looking down at her arm, she could see that Junko’s nails had broken the skin, 5 half-moon shaped cuts stung as small drops of blood began to pool from them.

As the teacher began to introduce herself to the rest of the class, Mukuro broke away from Junko’s glare and turned towards Naegi, who was watching her with concern. Mukuro shrugged slightly, lifting up her injured arm, showing the stinging cuts there. Much to Mukuro’s surprise, Naegi’s eyes widened and in an instant he jumped to his feet, interrupting the teacher.

“S-sorry Miss, but can I take Mukuro to the nurse’s office? I think she’s slightly injured…” The teacher eyed Naegi warily before looking distastefully towards Mukuro. Noticing the cuts, the teacher nodded once regretfully.

“Fine. But be quick.” At her permission Naegi rushed to Mukuro’s desk, grabbing her uninjured arm gently and guiding her out of the classroom. Mukuro turned back to see Sayaka watching them in dismay, while Junko was covering her mouth to stifle her laughter as she watched her sister be dragged out of the classroom.

As soon as they exited the classroom, Naegi began rushing Mukuro down the halls and towards the direction of where she assumed was the nurse’s office. She had never seen him so serious, and it was slightly unnerving.

“Naegi, I’m fine…” She said quietly, trying to ease the tension.

“No you’re not. You’re bleeding.” He said firmly as he guided her down the halls, which were now completely empty of students. “Oh and call me Makoto. We’re friends, so you don’t need to be so formal” He added, his voice still carrying the seriousness from before.

“Makoto…” She whispered quietly to herself. Mukuro could feel her face getting warmer, though she couldn’t tell why. Abruptly, Makoto pulled Mukuro into a white-tiled room, and released her arm before pulling a small first-aid kit from one of the many shelves lined against the cream-coloured walls. It seemed like the nurses were off duty today, since the entire room was completely empty except for the two students. Mukuro watched Makoto as he opened the first-aid kit and searched through it.

“How did you know exactly where everything is?” She asked cautiously. Makoto’s face turned slightly red at her question, still focusing on searching through the box.

“Well I uh have a habit of falling a lot, so one of the nursing students came around and showed me where everything is during orientation.” He mumbled sheepishly. Mukuro smiled gently at him.

“For someone who’s Ultimate Luck, you’d think you would be the one to be injured the least…”
She replied shyly. He smiled at her response.

“I guess you’re right. Though don’t go telling the teachers that, I wouldn’t want to lose my title after only a day of having it” Makoto laughed lightly, and after a moment Mukuro joined in. “Ah found them!” Makoto pulled a disinfectant spray from the box and a roll of cloth bandage, before turning and walking back to Mukuro. Upon seeing her wound once more his smile faded. Quickly, he got to work, gently cleaning and disinfecting Mukuro’s arm. Though she was sure he didn’t need to be so serious about such a small wound, she didn’t want to argue with him and let him carry on. “Junko is your sister right?” Taken aback by the unexpected question, Mukuro nodded hesitantly. “Then why did you let her hurt you like this?” He asked solemnly, still not looking up from his task. She paused before answering.

“That’s just how Junko is. I shouldn’t have upset her.” Makoto looked at Mukuro in disbelief.

“Mukuro, you don’t think this is your fault, do you?” Mukuro pressed her lips together, not willing to answer. His expression turned dark. “Has she hurt you like this before?” Mukuro looked away, but shook her head. She wasn’t lying, at least not completely. Junko never physically hurt Mukuro, though the years of insults had scarred her worse than any wound could have. Seeing Makoto’s expression, she decided that telling him this would only make him angrier.

“Makoto, can you promise me something?” She asked carefully as he begun to wrap the bandage around Mukuro’s arm. He paused for a second.

“Depends on what the promise is.” He mumbled. Mukuro sighed softly.

“Don’t get in Junko’s way. Don’t let her see you as a threat. Please.” She pleaded, her expression completely neutral. Makoto fastened the bandage in place and looked up at Mukuro, slightly confused by the question.

“Okay, but only if you promise me something.” Mukuro looked at him warily, but nodded.

“If you ever need help, or if you’re ever in danger, you come to me. I speak for both me and Sayaka when I say that I don’t want you to get hurt. You’re my friend and I care about you Mukuro.” He said sincerely. Mukuro froze, her heart beating faster. How could he trust her so easily? She had killed people before, and he must’ve heard of what she had done in past, so why was he so insistent on trusting her?

“But we barely know each other, and like Sayaka said earlier, I’m dangerous an-“

“Promise?” He cut off her rambling quickly with a single word. She nodded slowly.

“P-promise.” She muttered reluctantly. He smiled warmly at her, and in that moment she was acutely aware that he still had his hands on her arm, and that he was only a few inches away from her. She took the moment to really look at him, noticing the soft kindness in his eyes and how his smile seemed to light up the whole room. Mukuro didn’t know when she began to notice these things, though after a few more moments of silence she realized that the two hadn’t said a word and that he was staring at her. She broke away from his gaze, taking a step back to distance herself. Makoto looked at her strangely, before lifting his hand to her forehead. She flinched back at the touch, eyes widening.

“W-what was that for?” She stuttered, confused. He merely shrugged.

“Your face seemed really red earlier, I thought you caught a fever or something. Must’ve been my imagination” He explained simply before standing up and walking towards the door. She could
practically hear her heartbeat pounding in her ears. Had she been blushing this entire time? “Ready to
go? The teacher is gonna get worried if were out of class any longer” He called to her, breaking her
out of her daze. Mukuro nodded once in agreement before following him out the door. Though
Mukuro knew that stopping Junko wouldn’t be easy, she was comforted to know that she wouldn’t
be alone. For some reason, every time Mukuro looked at Makoto, she had a feeling that everything
would be okay. *Was that just wishful thinking?*

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the little hiatus, im back and it seems like my chapters are just getting longer
and longer ;-;
Hope you enjoyed!
Do we have a deal?

Chapter Notes

Im back! Summer School is finally over, so now im back and continuing this series!
Hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After being walked back to the classroom by a now reassured Makoto, Mukuro was able to return to her own thoughts as she sat at her desk, ignoring both their new teacher’s ramblings as well as Junko’s patronizing stare. Though Mukuro would much rather just sit and listen mindlessly to the new lesson her teacher was scribbling on the chalkboard, the threat of Junko’s plan coming to fruition was looming over her. She knew she had to figure out exactly what Junko was planning to do quickly, or else both her classmates and all of Hope’s peak will be in trouble. From what she learned eavesdropping to Junko and Matsuda’s conversation the prior night, Mukuro had to understand fully what Junko was planning to do before the reserve course student, Hajime Hinata’s, surgery. Makoto had said that she could come to him for help, that she didn’t have to do things alone, but looking at him smiling and laughing with his classmates, the innocence and joy he carried, that was something Mukuro had to protect. Even if it meant breaking her promise, she couldn’t bring herself to put him in danger.

The rest of the school day went without issue, though if Mukuro had to hear Kiyotaka Ishimaru say one more word to her about not violating the ‘No weapons rule’ she was pretty sure she’d break the rule just to shoot herself in the face. As the end of day bell rang, Mukuro rose from her seat along with the rest of the class, though before she could even take one step away from her desk, Junko was already positioned next to her, pouting mockingly. As if on reflex, Mukuro could feel herself tense up at her sister’s presence.

“Mukuro, it was brought to my attention by a certain someone that I may have hurt your feelings earlier! And of course, since you know how much of a loving and caring sister I am, I would never want you to feel sad! So, I came to say I’m sorry, and that I love you so, so, so much!” Junko exclaimed loudly, a clearly fake distraught expression on her face.

Anyone who knew Junko for more than five minutes could tell that she was clearly acting, if not making fun of Mukuro, but Mukuro didn’t have the energy to point out her sister’s act. Instead, she focused on a specific part of her sisters ‘apology’.

“A certain someone?...” Mukuro asked warily. At this, Junko’s expression quickly shifted to a smirk.

“Well your little boyfriend was so upset with how I was trea-“

“He’s not my boyfriend.” Mukuro interrupted boredly. Junko rolled her eyes and huffed in frustration.

“Fine. You’re little boy-toy was soooo upset with how I was treating you and decided that he should do something to help.” She exclaimed, smirking. Though Boy-toy was actually a worse term than boyfriend, Mukuro simply glared at Junko knowing that saying anymore would just make it worse.

“So, at lunch he confronted me and let me know just how inappropriate it is to speak to you that way. Isn’t that cute? Y’know, even though you’re a ruthless killer who has ended countless lives, like I’m talking thousands, he still thinks he should try and defend you! Well I guess that’s fitting, a
pathetic boy for a pathetic girl.” She laughed at her own joke, before looking back at Mukuro, a twisted expression settling on her face “I wonder if there’s a way I can work him into my plans…” Junko added, her eyes gleaming with cruelty as she stepped past a speechless Mukuro and out of the room.

Mukuro looked to the other side of the class to see Makoto looking at her with concern. Her own fear quickly turned into frustration as she broke eye contact with him, quickly picking up her bags and making her way out towards the door.

“Mukuro, wait!” He called out, and though Mukuro was tempted to continue out the door, she found herself unable to move further. He put his hand on her arm cautiously, Mukuro slightly flinching at the touch. “Are you alright? What did she say?” He asked, worried. Mukuro simply looked at him, expressionless.

“You promised you wouldn’t get involved.” She mumbled, toneless. His eyes widened slightly at her statement, taken aback.

“But… What she was doing wasn’t right, and I figured-“

“You figured you could stop her? Is that it? You promised you’d stay out of her way, just a few hours ago. Do you know what she thinks of you now?” Mukuro interrupted sharply, her expression dark, though she was frustrated her voice stayed low and calm, almost empty.

“You promised, I-“

“She sees you as a threat now. As someone who if left unchecked, could potentially cause a miscalculation in her plans. If you were going to go and do something stupid, the least you could’ve done was not make a fake promise about it.” Mukuro mumbled the last part, though the way he flinched showed that he heard it. Makoto seemed to be at a loss for words, and Mukuro could see him thinking hard to come up with a reply.

“A-all I did was try and help, besides, it’s not like she would really do anything bad, right? I mean, were just high school students, we’re all friends here… A-and I really did just want to help you…” He answered naively. Mukuro shook her head. He underestimated just how strong of a hold Junko had over people, how strong her influence was. If not for the innocent look on his face, she would’ve continued arguing, but that seemed to knock all the frustration right out of her.

“Let me handle this. Just… just stay out of her way. At least that way you won’t make things worse than they already are” She said, sighing. Makoto recoiled at her words and frowned slightly, before stepping back silently to let her pass. Mukuro stared at him for a moment, confused. Was he…hurt by her words? Shaking her head to clear the thought, she forced herself a small smile to reassure him before continuing out of the classroom, her belongings in tow.

The dim lighting of the dorm building was slightly eerie, though the laughter and chatter of other female students running about from each others room gave the halls a light atmosphere. Mukuro was lucky that the administration office had been open after school, otherwise she wouldn’t be able to register for a room and would have to find somewhere else to sleep that night. Just the thought of suffering through an uncomfortable rest on a park bench made her cringe. As she approached her assigned room, a wave of nervousness fell over Mukuro. Mukuro hadn’t thought much of the fact that she’d have to share her room with some stranger. The secretary hadn’t given Mukuro any idea of who it would be, and was instead snickering behind her desk. That fact alone added to Mukuro’s unease, though the freedom of being able to be somewhere that her sister couldn’t intrude on, gave her the determination she needed to open the door.
As she stepped into the room she was greeted by a pair of cold, lavender eyes watching her analytically from across the room. The girl, her new roommate, had long silverfish-purple hair, which at the moment was tied back as she removed contents from the cardboard box on top of one of the two beds in the small room. Instead of the Hope’s peak uniform that all the rest of the students wore, the girl instead wore a black sweatshirt with a pair of grey jean shorts, showing clearly that she had been in the room lounging for a while. Oddly enough, she wore black leather gloves on both hands, which seemed extremely out of place with her outfit. Upon seeing her, the girl stopped what she was doing, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Are you Mukuro Ikusaba?” The girl asked formally. Mukuro nodded once, and as she couldn’t help but notice how the girl frowned slightly. “My name is Kyouko Kirigiri. It seems we will be roommates for the time being, so please call me Kyouko.” She added as she crossed the room towards Mukuro and extended her hand out to her. Mukuro took the girls gloved hand and shook it lightly, still trying to figure out where she had heard that name before. Just as Kyouko returned to the bed and began to continue unpacking Mukuro spoke up.

“Kirigiri? As in Jin Kirigiri, the headmaster?” She asked cautiously. Kyouko seemed to be surprised by the question, but replied nevertheless.

“He is my father. Who else would they trust to room with a killer, if not the headmasters own daughter?” She answered, not looking up from her task. Mukuro’s grip tightened around her bag handles, quickly realizing Kyoukos position here.

“They assigned you to watch me, so I wouldn’t cause trouble, didn’t they?” Mukuro accused, her tone level. Kyouko paused for a moment, gloved hands hovering over the boxes contents.

“Did you expect them to let a well-known mercenary loose with no supervision? Or even force some poor frightened girl into sharing a room with a murderer?” Kyouko replied coldly. Clearly she wasn’t fond of Mukuro. Mukuro sighed before closing the door behind her, and placing her belongings onto the bed parallel to Kyoukos.

“I suppose not.” She mumbled, before opening her own bags and placing its contents in the nightstand beside the bed she had chosen. After a few minutes of silent unpacking, Mukuro had finally reached the bottom of the duffel bag, to where she kept her array of different knives and smaller handguns hidden. Deciding that it wasn’t the best idea to place them into her nightstand, an unlocked drawer that Kyouko could easily access if the need arose, Mukuro decided to keep the weapons stored inside the bag, and slid them underneath her bed.

“You must be close with your father, if you would room with me for his sake.” Mukuro mumbled, breaking the silence. Kyouko turned and glared at Mukuro.

“I didn’t do this for his sake. I did this because you are dangerous, and I’d rather not be investigating a murder in this room that could’ve been avoided.” Mukuro frowned slightly.

“So you would rather put yourself in danger?” Mukuro pointed out. Kyouko sighed before sitting on her bed and pulling a couple items from her own drawer.

“Are you admitting that you are dangerous then?” Kyouko reflected, ignoring Mukuro’s question. Figuring that arguing with Kyouko would just be a waste of time, Mukuro turned her attention to the room around her. Looking around the room, it wasn’t remarkable in any way, simple accommodations one would expect for a high school dorm. 2 beds, 2 nightstands, 2 desks, 1 closet (Mukuro intended on letting Kyouko have entire control over the space, since she was able to fit all of her measly belongings within her own nightstand and under her bed) 1 bathroom, and a rectangular mirror that was fixture on the back of the door. The mirror reminded her of the one she
had in her own room, back at Junko’s apartment.

The memories of her shared living with her sister made her feel slightly homesick, especially since her new accommodations weren’t exactly the most welcoming. Looking back at Kyouko, she could see that the girl was now concentrated on writing in a small black-leather notebook, her pen moving so quickly she was surprised that the girl in front of her wasn’t the Ultimate Novelist, though the title was already claimed by one of her classmates. Mukuro hesitated before breaking the silence.

“Are you in the main course?” She asked softly. Kyouko didn’t look up, still writing hastily on the small notebook.

“Yes, I’m in your class.” She replied quickly. Mukuro narrowed her eyes at her.

“Why weren’t you there today?” Mukuro questioned cautiously. Kyouko sighed before lifting her pen and snapping the book shut.

“I had business to take care of.”

“What kind of business?” Mukuro persisted. Kyouko seemed to be getting increasingly annoyed by Mukuro’s questioning but kept answering nonetheless.

“Investigation work” Before Mukuro could ask any further questions, Kyouko continued speaking. “A break-in at the Neurology lab. Two suspects confirmed. They attempted to clear the data from our servers, though the system backup was a success. Certain chemicals were taken out without clearance. Though I haven’t been granted permission to release this information, we have confirmed one of the intruders as your sister, Junko Enoshima. You wouldn’t happen to have any details you would like to disclose, would you?” Mukuro’s eyes widened as Kyouko watched her carefully, searching for any ticks that would give away Mukuro as lying. This must’ve been where Junko and Matsuda had run off to that night.

Though she didn’t know any specifics about what they did there, Mukuro knew that revealing anything to Kyouko now would only make the girl more suspicious of her. Instead, Mukuro stood there silently, keeping her expression blank. “Just as I thought.” She mumbled before standing up from her bed and walking towards the door. “I’ll be going out for a while. If you decide you would like to assist in my investigation at all, then please do. Otherwise, I’d rather not waste both of our time on pleasantries.” Kyouko stated before slamming the door shut, leaving Mukuro alone once more. Sighing and falling back onto her own bed, Mukuro stared at the unfamiliar ceiling and returned to her thoughts.

Though Kyouko wasn’t wrong to classify Mukuro as a killer, it still hurt to hear it straight to her face. Mukuro never missed the snide comments and wary looks her classmates threw at her, out of fear, or simply because of her reputation, though a small part of her wished things were different. The only reason she had run from her family and joined Fenrir, all those years before, was to escape. Though her parents treated Junko like an angel, loving her unconditionally, Mukuro was always lost in the background. Her words could never reach them, they never understood how it felt to be shut out in the dark. The times that Junko payed her any attention, was to belittle her and abuse her. After being constantly ignored, Mukuro realized something that was stronger than words.

Violence.

It began with small fights at school, calculated movements against bullies who were picking on the weak. Then after constant persuasion from Junko, she decided to further develop her deadly abilities. In truth, the reason why acted the way she did, why people were afraid of her, stemmed from her sister. Still, she loved Junko. Even as a child, she decided that she didn’t need others, as long as she
had attention from one person, one who would always have a connection to her. And now… Now she had broken that connection. And once more, she was alone, in the dark, with no light to guide her out.

Even Makoto, who she thought could be someone she could trust, went behind her back without so much as a second thought. Mukuro hadn’t even realized she began to cry until she felt the warm tears roll down her freckled cheeks. Deciding that pitying herself wouldn’t do any good, Mukuro sat up and made her way out of the dorm, ignoring the odd looks she got from the other girls mingling in the halls, clearly confused as to why the Ultimate Soldier was acting so strangely.

As she exited the building and began to wander along the gravel paths of Hopes peak’s courtyard, Mukuro looked around to see many other students, enjoying the evening under the soft orange glow of the sunset. 2 students in particular caught her eye, a boy and a girl sitting side by side beside a large ornate fountain. They both were playing some sort of video game and talking cheerily with one another, though looking at the boy made Mukuro feel a wave of unease. As she kept wandering mindlessly, Mukuro found herself standing in front of the boy’s dorm oratory. Before she could even wonder why she had brought herself here, the doors swung open, two figures walking out.

One, was a complete stranger, a boy with pale white hair and matching pale white skin, his grey-green eyes staring into Mukuro’s as he stopped abruptly. The figure beside him stopped as well, before immediately bursting into a fit of giggles, her manicured hands covering her mouth to stifle the outburst. Mukuro silently swore under her breath, running into her sister again was not a pleasant surprise. After all, she had registered for a dorm just to escape Junko.

“God you have the worst luck Mukuro. Or is it that you just can’t stand to be away from me?” Junko managed to utter through her laughter. The boy payed no attention to Junko’s giggles, and instead smiled brightly at Mukuro, thought she could sense something twisted behind his façade.

“Oh, you must be the sister Junko had been talking about. How lucky of me that we would be running into you!” He exclaimed brightly. Junko rolled her eyes, her giggles subsided after the boy spoke.

“Anywayyy whatcha doing here Mukuro?” Junko asked, smirking. Mukuro was not in the mood for her sisters games.

“I could ask the very same of you.” She replied coldly. The boy looked at Mukuro strangely.

“Have you been crying, Mukuro?” he asked innocently. His tone, though cheery, made Mukuro feel extremely uncomfortable, like something about him was off. The mere fact he could tell that someone he just met was crying made the feeling worsen. Before Mukuro could even reply, he shook his head. “Sorry, I shouldn’t be asking someone with such a high status as you such a personal question, after all, you are one of the symbols of hope, for someone as lowly as me to even intrude in your business is unacceptable!” He apologized, causing Junko to groan.

“Ugh all your lovey-dovey hope crap is giving me a migraine” She whined loudly. The two began to argue with one another, though it was mostly one-sided, with Junko throwing insults and swears constantly at the boy as he smiled, calmly replying to her. His behavior was rather unsettling, the way he referred to himself so horribly. Even though looking at the pin on his vest, Mukuro could see he was in the same program as her. Mukuro decided to interrupt their odd argument.

“Do you have a talent as well?” Mukuro asked, just loud enough to be heard over Junko’s high-pitched complaining. The two stopped speaking instantly, both turning back towards Mukuro in sync. The boy smiled sheepishly.
“Well, it is a worthless talent, but I have the title of Ultimate Luck. Of course, it is nothing compared to the amazing and wonder—”

“Yeah, yeah we get it you suck, we’re great, and hope is amazing! Can we move on?” Junko interrupted sarcastically. Mukuro found it odd that he had the same talent as Makoto, though she quickly remembered that Hope’s peak awarded the title to one student through a random lottery each year, meaning this boy had to be older than her and Junko if he and Makoto were to be in the school at the same time. The boy’s expression darkened at Junko’s interruption, as he turned to face Junko, still smiling though his eyes were cold and filled with hatred.

“Someone like you, Junko, shouldn’t be so rude. Especially in the presence of a symbol of hope” He added motioning to Mukuro, his voice dangerously low and dark. It felt incredibly awkward to watch the two argue, and just as Mukuro began to back away from the two, the boy turned his attention back on her. “My name is Nagito Komaeda by the way, though I suppose it would be alright if you forgot my name, since it is a pretty unremarkable one… Well, in a way, an unremarkable name for an unremarkable person is quite fitting, don’t you think, Junko?” He turned towards Junko happily, though the Ultimate Fashionista seemed just about ready to snap Nagito’s neck any moment now.

“Don’t go telling me I shouldn’t speak then go back to asking for my opinion!” She shouted, and the two began to argue again. Nagito seemed to really get under Junko’s skin, as she had never seen Junko lose her temper before. This only confirmed Mukuro’s suspicion that this boy was somewhat dangerous. Seeing that the two were busy shouting at each other and not paying attention to Mukuro, Mukuro saw this as her chance and slowly slipped away from the interaction.

The sun had already gone down by the time she arrived back to her dorm, the mingling students that once ran through the halls now slipping back inside their rooms. As Mukuro stepped inside her dorm and slipped off her shoes, she noticed that Kyouko was already back from wherever she had gone, focusing on a pile of papers scattered across her desk. Upon hearing Mukuro enter, Kyouko turned sharply, narrowing her eyes.

“Where were you about 30 minutes ago?” She asked quickly. Mukuro tilted her head in confusion before answering honestly.

“I went for a walk.” Kyouko didn’t seem to believe her so easily, still watching Mukuro warily.

“Is there anyone who can prove that?” She asked. Mukuro opened her mouth to say ‘Junko’, though the fact that she had been in communication with a suspect for Kyouko’s investigation was not something she should be releasing to the Ultimate Detective.

“Nagito Komaeda. I saw him outside the boy’s dorm, and we spoke for a bit.” Seeing as Mukuro didn’t lie, at least not completely, Kyouko was satisfied with the answer and turned back to the pile of papers. Mukuro stepped closer, peering over Kyouko’s shoulder to look at them. “Why do you ask?”

“There was a murder in the reserve course. Obviously you would be my first suspect.” Kyouko said, waving her hand in dismissal. As she did, Mukuro noticed there was several photos among the papers, one showing a young girl with blood stained blonde hair, slumped over. From the injury on her head, Mukuro could easily tell that this was an amateur who committed the crime, since the blow was fairly shallow. Kyouko noticed Mukuro watching and turned around to face her. “What?” Mukuro shook her head quickly.

“Nothing… I notice that the blow was most likely committed by someone with poor upper body strength. Since you suspected me, I assume you’ve already narrowed it down to a female student
who could’ve done it, correct?” Kyouko’s eyes widened as she watched Mukuro analytically

“How do you know?”

“I have… experience in this sort of thing.” Mukuro muttered sheepishly. Though by experience
Mukuro meant she was the one striking the blows, Kyouko practically jumped out of her seat, she
had never seen the quiet girl so enthusiastic before.

“Then you can help.” Kyouko stated simply. Now it was Mukuro’s turn to jump back.

“H-help? Why would I do that?” Mukuro stammered out. Kyouko crossed her arms, glaring at
Mukuro.

“Wouldn’t you rather use your talent to help people rather than kill them? Or would you prefer to
keep on being called a heartless killer for the rest of your life?” She asked callously. Though Mukuro
did want to be treated as a normal student, investigating a murder did not seem to be the best idea to
achieve that goal. “If you help me, and we solve the case, I’ll see what I can do about giving you a
bit more freedom with the weapons thing.” Kyouko offered, nodding towards Mukuro’s bed, where
she had the knives and guns hidden.

“How did you-“

“Do we have a deal or not?” Kyouko interrupted, extending her hand out to Mukuro. Perhaps it was
the idea of finally being able to do something good in her life for once, or even the freedom of being
able to carry her own weapons so she could protect her new friends, but without hesitation Mukuro
took Kyouko’s hand and shook it, uttering the word that she would come to regret soon enough.

“Deal”

Chapter End Notes

Just would like to apologize for the lack of updates, So as a reward we got to see a
couple new characters added to the story!
(Btw even I was a bit mad with Mukuro after the way she was talking to Makoto, the
poor little socially awkward bby)
Reconcile

Being at a crime scene was stranger than expected for Mukuro. It wasn’t the metallic scent of blood that filled the music room’s air that made it strange, or even the corpse that still hadn’t been moved, as those were all things that Mukuro was very familiar with. In fact, being in here made her feel more comfortable, after all, as strange as it was, she understood this environment better than any other social situation. But no, the thing that was strange to Mukuro was the fact that even though this was a part of Hope’s peak, the despair that lingered in the room like a dense fog was almost suffocating.

In an effort to ignore the feeling, Mukuro turned her attention to Kyouko, who was crouched beside what looked like a broken aquarium, picking up the pieces of scattered glass and gravel from the tiled floor and placing them into a small plastic bag. Mukuro yawned loudly, still tired from having to wake up early thanks to Kyouko. Kyouko had wanted to examine the crime scene before the other officers began their investigation, which unfortunately for Mukuro, meant waking up at 3am and breaking into a locked crime scene, while still in her pajamas, with only a woolen sweater to protect her from the autumn chill. Kyouko on the other hand, had quickly changed into her uniform before they snuck out. When Mukuro brought up her concerns of getting caught to Kyouko, she merely shrugged, saying that if her father really didn’t want her breaking the rules, he shouldn’t have made the building so easy to get into.

Mukuro didn’t even know why Kyouko had asked for her help in the first place, all she had done so far is pace back and forth around the room while Kyouko began removing evidence from the crime scene and dusting for finger prints. Kyouko suddenly stood up, placing the plastic evidence bags into her black leather satchel and turning to face Mukuro.

“I want you to examine the body. With your knowledge of weapons we might be able to narrow down what she could have been struck with” Kyouko ordered stiffly. Mukuro nodded reluctantly before crossing the room to where the victim was slumped against the wall, unmoving. Now that she was closer to the girl’s body, she was able to get a better look at the victim. Though her skull was bloody and beaten, her light-blonde hair and fair complexion contrasted against the strong aura of despair circling around her. Mukuro was surprised that no one had moved the body yet. It almost felt disrespectful to leave her there, in this state. Mukuro shook her head, clearing the thought. She had to do this. If Kyouko kept her promise, Mukuro would be able to use her weapons again, which would be a much needed asset in stopping Junko. Also Ishimaru wouldn’t be able to lecture her about the rules anymore, which was an added bonus.

With new resolve, Mukuro began to examine the wound more closely, thinking hard to match the gore in front of her to something she had witnessed in her past. The only thing that caught her eye was a couple of brightly-coloured pieces of gravel scattered in the girl’s hair. Once she had finished, she stood up, wiping her blood-stained hands on her pajama shorts absentmindedly, before turning to where Kyouko was standing across the room.

“She wasn’t hit with any weapons I am familiar with, though the weapon had to be able to carry some kind of momentum.” Mukuro reported, slightly disappointed she couldn’t pinpoint exactly what the girl was hit with. Kyouko furrowed her brow in confusion before examining the broken window across the room from the body. Gently she ran her gloved finger along the edge of the broken glass.

“Is that all you could figure out?” Kyouko asked, slightly distracted. Mukuro thought back to the body.

“Well there was some gravel around the wound area… though I’m pretty sure you can’t use gravel
as a weapon.” Mukuro added. Kyoukos eyes widened slightly, before reaching into her satchel and pulling out a plastic evidence bag filled with the same colorful gravel on the victim.

““This gravel?” Kyouko asked, crossing the room and handing the small bag to Mukuro. Mukuro took the bag, nodding as she did.

“Yes, but I don’t see how thi-“

“Mukuro, swing the bag of gravel and tell me if it would be able to make a wound similar to the one on the victim.” Kyouko ordered quickly, interrupting Mukuro’s uncertainty. Though she was still confused, Mukuro did as she was told, holding the plastic bag by the opening, ensuring no gravel would fall out as she swung, before taking a step back and swinging with deadly speed. Kyouko simply watched Mukuro attentively, focusing on the makeshift weapon in the soldier’s hand. Still confused as to what Kyouko was implying by making Mukuro do this, she nodded once in response.

“If someone with low to average strength swung it, I suppose it would be able to” Mukuro mumbled, handing the bag back to Kyouko. “But what would that have to do with-“

Mukuro stopped speaking abruptly, as the sound of heavy footsteps carried eerily down the hallway outside of the music room. As her soldier instincts kicked in, Mukuro quickly turned to a very confused and alert Kyouko, before practically shoving her towards the empty lockers lining the music room walls. As the sound of footsteps became louder and louder, Mukuro helped ease Kyouko into one of the empty lockers before crouching down and leaping onto the top of the lockers, slipping into the cover of the shadows like a house cat prepared to pounce.

A tall sour-faced man stepped into the doorway, his eyes scanning the seemingly empty crime scene. His eyes briefly looked towards the corpse, before looking away from it like it was simply another piece of furniture within the classroom. He sighed deeply before speaking out.

“I know you brats are in here. Standing beside a window visible from the whole damn courtyard isn’t a smart move you dumbasses. So unless you want to be in even more trouble for breaking into a locked down area, I suggest you come out now.” He threatened, his voice low and irritated. Reluctantly, Mukuro leaped down from her position as Kyouko stepped out from the locker. The man looked at Mukuro hesitantly before turning to Kyouko and glaring. “Should’ve known if there was gonna be trouble it’d be you causing it princess” He mumbled, his glare only worsening.

“And who’s this? You hire an assassin to be your body guard?” He added, nodding towards Mukuro. Kyouko simply stared silently at the man. Now that Mukuro was closer, she could read the small name tag fastened to his lapel.

‘Chief Head of Security Juzo Sakakura’.

He seemed young to have such a high position within the school, which only made the man more untrustworthy in Mukuro’s eyes. Seeing as Kyouko wasn’t going to answer to his bantering, he moved on. “What do you think you’re doing wandering around where you don’t belong kid? I don’t think your father would be very happy if he found out” He questioned, smirking. Kyoukos eyes became sharp as she crossed her arms

“I could ask the very same of you” She replied calmly, before walking past the man towards the doorway. The officer quickly turned, grabbing Kyouko’s shoulder roughly and stopping her.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He growled. Mukuro’s hand slowly slipped for the pocket knife she had tucked into her sweater pocket, though a quick warning look from Kyouko stopped her from making a move on the officer. Kyouko looked up at him.
“It means that your moves haven’t gone unnoticed. What would a chief security officer need with classified research files?” Kyouko replied. Officer Juzo swore under his breath before removing his hand from Kyouko, backing down.

“You’re playing a dangerous game kid. Just because your daddy gave you a spot in the academy doesn’t mean you get to act like the main bitch around here.” He added, as Kyouko continued walking past him and down the hall out of sight. He turned back to face Mukuro, who stood as still as a statue, staring blankly at him, still very much confused as to the words that were exchanged by Kyouko and Officer Juzo. His gaze shifted to her lightly blood-stained clothing and hands, his expression slightly revolted. “What, you got something to say? Or are you just gonna stay here and mess with dead bodies like a psycho?” He asked loudly. Mukuro quickly shook her head and jogged lightly past the man and after Kyouko. She showed no signs of slowing down, Kyouko’s expression focused as she crossed her arms across her chest. Mukuro quickly caught up to her, and after she fell in step with Kyouko, walking down the dark empty hallway for a few minutes, Mukuro spoke up.

“Do you think we will be able to get back there and investigate more?” Mukuro asked quietly, slightly defeated. Kyouko shook her head solemnly in reply, her stare still very hollow.

“Tomorrow, the crime scene will be swarmed with police investigators and Hopes Peak security. We won’t ever be able to do any more investigation. And if Juzo mentions anything about us to my father, I may not even be able to present our findings so far” Kyouko explained, clearly distraught.

“He doesn’t seem to like you very much.” Mukuro muttered. “Juzo, I mean.” She added hastily. Kyouko stayed silent for a few moments, keeping her gaze pointed in front of her

“He wouldn’t be the first. Not many people like me.” Kyouko answered finally, and from her tone it didn’t seem like she wanted to elaborate. Mukuro stared ahead blankly as they walked

“Not many people like me either.” Mukuro admitted. Kyouko looked at her for a moment, her expression softening before giving her a sad smile.

“I guess that’s one thing we have in common.” Mukuro turned to look at Kyouko, surprised. Mukuro felt like her and Kyouko understood each other for once, even if it was a little bit. It was… nice.

When they returned to their dorm, it was already 4am. Both the girls were exhausted, though from the sounds of Kyouko tossing and turning, it sounded like they both were having a tough time falling asleep. Once Mukuro finally did, her dreams were haunted with the dead girl’s image, the despair around her choking Mukuro within her nightmares.

Waking up the next morning for school wasn’t much easier either. As Mukuro struggled to pull herself from her bed, still weak from lack of sleep, she watched with un-focused vision as Kyouko shuffled around their room, already dressed in her school uniform.

“How long before class starts?” Mukuro asked sleepily, stifling a yawn. Kyouko looked at her passively for a moment before flipping her wrist to glance at the black-steel wristwatch fastened there.

“About half an hour” Kyouko mumbled, before continuing to place empty notebooks and binders into a dark-purple backpack. Knowing Mukuro would have to hurry and get ready unless she wanted to be late, she pulled herself out of bed and got ready for the day. In the middle of packing her school bag, Kyouko walked up to Mukuro abruptly, handing her a small credit-card sized piece of plastic. Mukuro looked up at Kyouko, confused.

“What is it?” After handing it to Mukuro, Kyouko walked over to the desk where her bag was sitting, and slung it over her shoulder gracefully.
“A promise is a promise. That will grant you license to carrying around weapons with you on school grounds. Though I do ask you refrain from waving them around unnecessarily. It may let you carry them, but scaring the other students might not help your reputation, or mine for giving you the card for that matter.” Kyouko explained. Mukuro furrowed her brow in confusion

“But… We didn’t solve the case” Mukuro argued, just as Kyouko opened the door to leave. She stopped in the doorway, looking over her shoulder slightly.

“I wouldn’t have been able to figure out what you did on my own. I think that’s worth something at the very least” She clarified. Mukuro felt a small smile tug at her lips.

“Thank you” Mukuro muttered, still very much in awe. Kyouko merely nodded, before walking out and closing the door behind her, joining the fray of girls headed out to their classes.

Once Mukuro finally arrived at her classroom, she still had a couple minutes to spare before class began. Most of her classmates had arrived, including Kyouko, who sat at the far back of the class, to the desk left of Celeste’s at the far corner. Mukuro noted the absence of her sister, which was unsurprising since Junko was never one for early arrival. As she scanned the classroom, watching as her classmates chatted with each other, she noted how one pair of eyes was watching her closely. She briefly turned to meet them, watching as Makoto stared at Mukuro, while Sayaka talked cheerily to him, unaware his attention was elsewhere. Mukuro wasn’t sure why he wasn’t coming over to talk to her, why his usually cheery face was all but blank. She called back to the previous day, thinking about the words she said to him. Had she really hurt him? Surely not, she was only trying to protect him. He couldn’t understand the real danger that was lurking within the classroom walls. Yet still, his hazel eyes looked into hers, refusing to look away.

Finally, the bell rang, forcing her to break eye contact with Makoto as she went to take her seat. She briefly looked over her shoulder to see Kyouko watching her intently, a slightly confused look on her face. Embarrassed, Mukuro turned quickly to face the chalkboard as her teacher walked in a greeted the class. After a boring couple hours of taking notes on a book she would probably never bother to read or think about again, it was lunch time. She was surprised to see Kyouko standing at Mukuro’s desk, with arms crossed.

“Follow me.” She instructed, before turning briskly and exiting the classroom. All eyes were on Mukuro as she rose from her seat, the other students slowly moving to each other’s desk and pulling out their lunches as they side-glanced at Mukuro curiously. She quickly followed after Kyouko, who only took a few steps down the hallway before stopping and turning to face a very confused Mukuro. “What was that?” She asked, eyebrow raised. Mukuro looked over her shoulder to make sure Kyouko was in fact talking to her.

“W-what was what?”

Kyouko sighed, nodding towards the classroom.

“You were staring at that boy for a good 10 minutes straight. And he was staring at you. It doesn’t take an ultimate detective to see that you two have some sort of issue going on.” Kyouko added, a no-nonsense tone about her. Mukuro looked back towards the classroom, only to see Sayaka peering out watching them. Upon seeing Mukuro, she let out a small squeal and darted back into the classroom. Sighing, Mukuro knew she wasn’t going to get out of here without explaining herself.

“He got involved in something he shouldn’t have. I told him to back down so he couldn’t make things worse. I’m trying to protect him.” Mukuro explained quickly. Kyouko’s eyes narrowed.
“Protect him from what?”

Mukuro froze. Now she had piqued the detective’s curiosity. No doubt she would be interrogated later about what she meant. Though for a brief moment, a thought passed through Mukuro’s mind that asking for Kyoukos help might be useful. She quickly swatted the thought away.

“It’s not important. What is important is that he shouldn’t have gotten involved.” Mukuro said finally, trying to end the conversation. Kyouko stayed silent for a moment.

“You said those exact words to him?”

Mukuro was confused, but nodded nonetheless.

“And people call me harsh…” Kyouko mumbled under her breath. “You probably hurt his feelings. Unless it was your intention on hurting him, in which case job well done. If not, then you should probably apologize.” Kyouko stated, before walking past Mukuro and towards the classroom.

“How?”

Kyouko stopped and looked back to Mukuro. “How what?”

Mukuro pressed her lips together, looking down at the ground. “I’ve never had to apologize before. How do I…what do I say?” Mukuro muttered sheepishly.

Kyouko looked at Mukuro with surprise and disbelief. “Really? Well... Just say what you did wrong and why and that you shouldn’t have done it” Kyouko said slowly. Mukuro nodded in response. With that, Kyouko walked back into the classroom. Taking a deep breath, Mukuro followed her in. Right as she walked into the class, she met eyes with Makoto, his expression still empty.

For as long as Mukuro could remember, it had always just been her and Junko. She only ever had to trust Junko, and do what she said whenever she said it.

Mukuro never had to think for herself.

She always had her sister to show her what to do. She worked for despair, though Mukuro never really believed in it. And now, she found herself working for hope, in the name of her sister’s despair. Even if Junko didn’t want her help, or thought of her as disposable, she would try to do anything she could.

Even if it meant working against her sister’s plan, she would do it. And then, there was Makoto. Mukuro couldn’t understand why, but somehow everything she did led back to him. She wanted to protect him, and shield him from her sister. She never wanted to see his light die out. Somehow she was caught in a tug-of-war between hope and despair... It felt… scary. Like her world was flipped upside down. Like butterflies were fluttering inside her throat struggling to burst out. Like she was crumbling from the inside out. Like… she was on the edge of a cliff, and every part of her was screaming to jump off. So she did.

“M-makoto… Can I talk to you outside?” She stuttered. Makoto looked at her oddly, a flash of eagerness wiping over him before settling back down. He slowly stood up and followed Mukuro out, leaving a very puzzled Sayaka sitting alone.

Mukuro didn’t want to really be alone anymore. Mukuro had been trying to deny it for this time, and though it had only been 2 days; she missed her sister. She missed Yasuke. She missed her old life, and only ever having to rely on one person. But if Mukuro really wanted to do something for her sister, and give her the despair she wants by stopping her plans, she will need help, as much as she hates to admit it.
Mukuro bowed quickly, clearly taking Makoto by surprise as he jumped slightly. “I-I shouldn’t have gotten upset with you. You were trying to help. A-and I just wanted to do this by myself. But I don’t know how. I need someone to help me. I’m not good at talking to people. I’m not good at being... friends. I realize now I can’t do this on my own. So... Will you forgive me?” She stuttered out, still bowed over and staring at the ground. As Mukuro rose from her bow, her eyes met with Makotos, which were smiling brightly at her.

“I will. On one condition.” Makoto said, smiling.

Mukuro nodded.

“After school, you tell me everything. I know I shouldn’t have gone against your wishes and talked to your sister, but if you really were this worried... then it must be something serious. So you have to let me help. Do we have a deal?” He asked cheerfully. Mukuro found it odd she was making a lot of deals lately, though the thought of finally having someone to work with against Junko was nice. She nodded in agreement.

“Deal.”

At that, Makoto let out a light laugh, and a small smile rested on Mukuro’s face. The two walked back into the classroom, Met with curious glances from Kyouko and Sayaka. Makoto gave them both a thumbs up, and the girls smiled hesitantly in response.

Just as Mukuro was about to take her seat once more and eat her lunch, she was startled by someone screaming her name.

“MUKURO!!!!!”

Mukuro spun to face the source of the noise, only to see the last person she hadn’t expected to see for a long time.

There, in the doorway he stood, hunched over and tired. His eyes were frantic, his breath heaving. His usually messy black hair was somehow ever messier. His eyes scanned the room quickly before meeting Mukuro’s. He took a deep breath, ignoring the confused looks thrown at him from everyone else in the classroom.

“We need t-to talk. Now”

There, in the doorway he stood.

Yasuke Matsuda.
Broken Toys

Chapter Notes

Hello! I hope you enjoy this chapter!

“We need t-to talk. Now.”

All eyes turned to Mukuro as they heard the desperation in Yasuke’s words. She stood for a moment, under the pressure of 16 pairs of eyes watching her intently. Confusion crashed over her, like waves on a sailboat.

“NOW” He yelled once more, which was just enough to jolt Mukuro back into reality. She quickly walked towards the doorway where he stood. Now that she was closer, she could see the dark circles under his eyes, the pale coloring in his face. What had happened to Yasuke to leave him in such a state? What happened to the calm, carefree boy she saw only 2 days prior? Mukuro opened her mouth to ask if he was okay, but before she could he grabbed her wrist tightly, so tightly it hurt and dragged her out the door. As she was pulled into the hallway, she was only able to catch a glimpse at her class, Makoto’s shocked expression stained in her mind like a snapshot.

His hand felt like steel handcuffs around her wrist, his fingers eerily cold, like a corpses. He seemed to be mumbling something to himself as he dragged her, down the hallway and through doors. Yasuke was almost unrecognizable. Barely anything could scare Mukuro, though somehow the boy in front of her sent chills down her spine, an unsettling feeling taking hold of her. Finally they reached the Neurology Lab, which Mukuro guessed was their destination, as Yasuke let go of Mukuro’s wrist and stumbled towards a desk with a large 3-monitored computer within the labs main floor. Mukuro absent mindedly rubbed her now slightly red wrist as she followed Yasuke to the desk, where he was furiously typing.

“Y-you have to see this. I-I don’t know what to do. All gone Mukuro. Just gone” Yasuke mumbled as he typed, his eyes frantically watching the screen.

“Yasuke…What’s happened to you? What’s gone?“ She asked, her voice more vulnerable than she could’ve thought. Yasuke shook his head erratically, still typing on the keyboard so hard Mukuro was afraid the keys would fly off.

“Her, Mukuro. Junko! She’s gone! Junko’s gone!” He screamed, the anger in his voice causing Mukuro to take a step back. Mukuro’s hands began to shake, her face turning pale.

“What do you mean she’s gone, Yasuke? I-I just saw her yesterday. S-she can’t be dead…” Mukuro mumbled out, her vision blurring as tears began to well. Yasuke quickly shook his head again, turning to Mukuro solemnly.

“No no no no, S-she’s not dead… It’s just… She’s disappeared. Like she’s never existed.” He must’ve saw the complete confusion on Mukuro’s face because he turned back to the computer and typed a couple more things in, before pointing to the screen. “J-just look.”

Mukuro did as he said, stepping forward to get a better look at the main monitor. At the top of the screen, the words ‘Hopes Peak Academy Student Roster’ was typed in large basic lettering. Below
No Results Found

“I-I tried everywhere Mukuro! Nothing! Government files, Student files, Goddamn Modeling pictures! It’s all gone! I’ve been searching for 16 hours straight, and there’s NOTHING! There’s no trace that she’s ever existed! No pictures, no text, no video! She’s completely disappeared!” Yasuke screamed. He turned quickly, gripping both of Mukuro’s arms. “She really did exist, right Mukuro? I-I don’t know what I’d do if she’s not…here” His eyes stared blankly at Mukuro. She simply nodded in response, and at that he let go of her, before turning back to the computer and running his hands through his black hair nervously. Something about this was way off. Junko had plans. Big plans. She had given no sign that she’d ever do something like…well like this. Mukuro searched her mind for answers, though the last time she had seen her was last evening.

“Yasuke… When did you see her last?” Mukuro asked softly. He raised his head from his hands, staring blankly in front of him.

“Yesterday, at around 8pm. S-she came to the lab, where I was working on the drug like she asked. She had a bunch of… files in her arms. Just, a huge stack of them. The boy following her was holding them too…” He trailed off. Mukuro narrowed her eyes.

“What did the boy look like?” She asked. Yasuke furrowed his brow in thought.

“Very pale and skinny… he looked kind of sick” He mumbled, still staring blankly at the screen. Mukuro’s eyes widened

“Did he have white hair?” Yasuke nodded in response before continuing

“He didn’t say anything. Just… stood there. Smiling…” He whispered the last word, turning towards Mukuro and staring hauntingly. “B-but she only stayed for an L-little while… said to keep the drug hidden… A-and she asked if I had any files with her information, so I g-gave her what I had… A-and then…then she said…” He began to shake, his eyes darting around the room, sending panic into Mukuro.

“What did she say Yasuke? What did she say?” Mukuro asked calmly, trying to relax him. His shaking only got more intensive, his pupils dilating.

“S-she said, t-that she’s gonna change her p-plans… t-that now she has l-luck on her side…s-she had some better ideas. She said t-to wait until the festival… T-to wait for Izuru Kamukura…A-and for now, to j-just relax… B-but how do I relax Mukuro? She’s gone…I need Junko… Junko is my only reason for living…” He stuttered, an eerie grin spreading across his face. Mukuro took a few more steps backward, her heart beginning to pound in fear. Yasuke hunched over suddenly, shaking violently as he laughed. “What am I doing here? I need to find Junko… I love Junko… If I can’t be with her now I should just die…Ah…Aha…” Mukuro began to panic, not knowing how to stop him. She just stood in front of him, watching in horror as he slowly turned towards her, madness in his eyes.

“Mukuro… I-is this despair?” He asked before laughing insanely, tears streaking down his pale face. The laughing became more violent, the tears streaming faster. Abruptly, the laughter stopped, though the shaking continued, as he tipped sideways off his chair, Mukuro lunging forward to catch him just before he hit the cold marble floor. He kept spasming in her arms, thrashing violently. Mukuro quickly pushed black locks of messy hair from his eyes, only to see they had rolled back in his head. It only took Mukuro a few moments to realize what was happening.
He wasn’t just shaking.

He was having a seizure.

Though she gained some medical knowledge while training with Fenrir, it wasn’t enough to help him fully. She knew that this wasn’t just some minor seizure, and that if she didn’t do something quickly he could possibly die. Looking around quickly, she could see that the metal door separating the lab from the rest of the facility was closed, so even if she could yell for help no one would be able to hear her, and if she didn’t want to leave Yasuke like this for even a moment... Quickly, she tilted his head back, making sure he had a clear airway, a point she remembered from her training. She could hear the wheezing of his breath as he inhaled, still shaking. Blood ran down the side of his mouth as he bit his tongue from all the shaking.

After a few moments, the tremors began to subside, as he only twitched gently while Mukuro held him, still gripped by the strong feeling of helplessness as she watched the unconscious Yasuke slowly settle down.

Quickly, Mukuro checked his pulse, pressing two fingers to his hauntingly cold neck, feeling a rush of relief as she felt the weak thumping of his heart beat. Not wasting any time, she got up on shaky legs, carrying the limp Yasuke in her arms as she walked quickly from the lab. Mukuro was still very much rattled by what had just happened, but the only thought on her mind was getting Yasuke to the nurse’s office, and to safety. As she rushed down the halls, her combat boots clacking against the tiled floor, she looked down softly at Yasuke. Did he really become like this just because Junko left? Had she broken him this much? Questions bounced through Mukuro’s head as she tried to explain the unstable boy in her arms.

As she entered the nurse’s office, she was immediately rushed by multiple nursing assistants, their shocked yet determined expressions led Mukuro to believe he would be okay as they cautiously took the unconscious and slightly bloody Yasuke from her arms. Mukuro noticed that one of the nurses hadn’t got up from her desk, sitting quietly and watching Mukuro with a slightly dark expression in her eyes. As Mukuro watched the nurse with more attention, she remembered her as the Ultimate Nurse, Mikan Tsumiki. The girl who had given Junko the knock-out drug when they visited the pharmacy a few days ago. As Mukuro stared at her, the girl smiled twistedly, her eyes were dark and swirled with shadows. It was an expression Mukuro recognized well.

Despair.

After the other assistants forced Mukuro to call her classroom teacher and report her absence, she was permitted to spend as long as she liked with Yasuke, within the observatory area for visitors. Unsurprisingly, the medicinal building of Hope’s peak was large, seeing as though it was part of a high school it was also one of the highest ranking medical institutions in the country. Mukuro stood outside the window separating the observatory from Yasuke’s assigned hospital room, concern and worry flooding through her mind as she recalled the information Yasuke had given her before he... snapped. The only thing he said that was really of any use was her orders. ‘Wait until the festival. Wait for Izuru Kamukura’. There was the upcoming culture festival, though Mukuro couldn’t recall the date. Was that the festival Junko was talking about? And if so, why did she say for him to wait for Izuru? How was Izuru tied to the festival? The surgery hadn’t taken place yet, Junko mentioned it would occur about 2 weeks after school began, so why wait when they could take action now? Why even change plans in the first place? As Mukuro worked through these questions, still not being able to come up with any definitive answers, she noticed Yasuke had slowly sat upwards in his hospital bed.

Quickly wiping away all her other thoughts, she stepped closer to the glass, pressing a cautious hand
against it as she watched Yasuke, and watching as the small mouse-like nursing assistant observing him jump slightly in surprise before rushing over to help him. He seemed confused, studying the multiple wires attached to him with curiosity. He looked around the room sleepily, paying no attention to the nursing student attempting to offer him a Styrofoam cup filled with water. After a few moments of looking around, he suddenly froze, his eyes widening, and Mukuro could just make out the 3 words he whispered to himself.

“Where is Junko?”

He slowly lowered his head into his hands as he repeated those 3 words multiple times. His shoulders began to shake as he sat hunched over, the nursing assistant stepping back in slight fear, though worry was still construed on her mousy face. As Mukuro watched, her heart sank as she realized why his shoulders were shaking. He was laughing. He threw his head back, clearing the black hair from his eyes, which were now dark and swirled, much like Nurse Tsumiki earlier, though much more unstable. He laughed uncontrollably, tears welling in his eyes. His hands grabbed the bed sheets around him as he slumped further and further into madness. Mukuro couldn’t bear to watch, turning away from the sight and walking solemnly towards the exit as three more nursing students rushed in Yasuke’s direction, to the aid of the smaller student stuck dealing with him alone. As she exited, she felt a huge wave of defeat. Yasuke was like an older brother to her. Sure he would tease her, but when Junko would get a bit harsher with her words, he would be the one to steer her away. This boy now, laughing and broken by the despair holding him, this boy was not the Yasuke she knew. He had said that his love for Junko would kill him. And as far as Mukuro could see, it had killed his mind. An odd feeling began to stir within Mukuro. A feeling she did not feel often, or at least she would keep suppressed.

Anger.

Rage bubbled inside her, making her thinking fuzzy. What could have done this to Yasuke? If Junko was really the source... how could she steep so low as to do this to him...? It made her feel sick. If this is the kind of thing Junko had in store for the world... she should’ve stopped her sooner. Maybe then Yasuke wouldn’t be so... Broken. Mukuro felt like breaking something, like punching her fist through a wall. If Junko wasn’t missing, she would have taken her anger out on her for once... though knowing Junko she would probably enjoy it. Something Yasuke had mentioned surfaced in Mukuro’s mind. Junko wasn’t alone when she visited Yasuke. She was with someone. Nagito Komaeda.

Mukuro’s pace quickened as she exited the hospital wing, her steps direct and determined. Her face was a blank slate, her mind a raging fire. Nagito Komaeda was the last person seen with Junko. If anyone were to have answers, it would be him. Mukuro knew it wouldn’t be easy to get him cornered. He was Ultimate Luck. From the whispers heard around the school, his luck was truly incredible. Even with Mukuro’s skill, he might be able to get away just by pure chance. Mukuro wasn’t prepared to take that risk. She would fight his luck the only way she knew how. She would fight fire with fire.

Her walk now turned into a run as she darted into the classroom. She had spent majority of her day watching Yasuke, missing most of her classes. The school day had come to an end, as many students were already walking in the opposite direction of Mukuro, towards the exit. As she entered the classroom, she noticed that many of her classmates had left already, and so had the teacher. As soon as she saw Makoto at his desk, still packing away his binder and things, she reached out for him, grabbing him a bit too harshly by the wrist. He jolted in surprise.

“M-Mukuro you’re back, where did yo-“
“I need your help now. You have to come with me.” Mukuro whispered, keeping a low tone so the others wouldn’t hear. He must’ve sensed the urgency in the voice because he got up right away, nodding once.

“Okay” Once Mukuro heard that, she quickly dragged him by his wrist from the classroom, Makoto almost stumbling as she moved quickly. Though her anger was still bubbling beneath her skin, Makoto’s presence helped calm her down slightly. She was surprised at his immediate compliance and trust, it seemed he was working really hard to help her in any way he could. “Mukuro are you okay?” His question pulled Mukuro from her thoughts. She took a moment to think before answering. “I will be. We just need to get to Nagito Komaeda.” She answered, still looking straight ahead and maneuvering through the crowds of students heading outside.

“Why Nagito Komaeda? Does this have to do with what you were going to tell me later?” He questioned softly, still letting Mukuro pull him by his wrist through the crowd. Mukuro nodded, hesitating before speaking.

“Junko’s missing. She... she did something horrible to someone I cared about. And I think Nagito had something to do with it” Mukuro explained quickly as they exited the building, the bright late-afternoon sun causing her eyes to take a moment to adjust. She turned back quickly to look at Makoto, noting the determined expression on his face.

“Let’s find him quickly then.” He said enthusiastically. Mukuro’s expression still stayed blank, anger beneath her mask of calmness. Makoto seemed to notice something was off, because he opened his mouth to say something. Before he could, Mukuro tugged him forward suddenly, causing him to stumble slightly, silencing him as they reached the entrance to the boy’s dorms. Mukuro stopped at the door, letting go of Makoto’s wrist.

“If we’re lucky, he’ll be in there. I don’t know my way around so you’ll have to lead the way. Let’s go.” Mukuro stated quickly. Makoto nodded hesitantly.

“O-Okay. But are you sure you’re oka-“ “Let’s go.” She repeated, firmer this time. Makoto frowned slightly at her tone, though didn’t say anything about it.

“Thank you... For asking, I mean” Mukuro mumbled quietly. Makoto’s expression seemed to brighten at that, and with new resolve he Makoto stepped forward to the entrance, holding open the door for Mukuro to enter. Mukuro found the gesture unnecessary, though the way Makoto blushed as she walked past confused her.

“So um girls aren’t really supposed to enter the boy’s dorm without an escort so make sure we stay near each other to prevent any confusion okay?”

Once Mukuro nodded, Makoto stepped forward, with her following not too far behind. The boy’s dorm wasn’t very remarkable, similar to the girl’s dorm in every way except for the fact it was much louder.

“The 2nd year’s student dorms are organized alphabetically, though they changed that when our grade arrived and made it random instead. Lucky for us though right? We’ll be able to find him no problem! We just need to get to K.” Makoto explained as they walked, and even though Makoto was supposed to be leading he was practically running to catch up with Mukuro’s long strides.

F...

G...
Mukuro read the dorm’s order as they passed by, eyes focused on the students nameplates, reading their names as they rushed by.

“Mukuro, what are you gonna do when we find him?” Makoto asked gently, almost as if he was afraid of her answer. Mukuro kept her eyes trained on the plates, distracted. Just as she opened her mouth to answer, Mukuro’s trained eyes noticed a flash of white hair, quickly silencing her as she rushed forward past Makoto.

Nagito turned just in time to see Mukuro shoving others out of her way as she approached him. He still held his keys as he was trying to unlock his dorm room. He smiled brightly as she rushed towards him.

“Mukuro! How lucky that we ran into each other~“

In the span of 3 seconds, Mukuro had Nagito pinned against the wall, knocking the air out of him as he collided with the plaster, her butterfly knife flicked out and pressed slightly to his neck. She could hear Makoto running not far after her, his frantic footsteps pounding against the carpeted hallway, though all she could focus on was her target, in front of her and oddly calm. He kept his eyes level with hers as he wheezed, trying to regain air into his lungs.

“Where. Is. She.” Mukuro growled through gritted teeth, all her pent up rage pouring out. She radiated anger and heat as she held her victim trapped and immobile. A small smirk played across Nagito’s lips, his eyes dark.

“Interesting how much anger 3 words can show” He answered mockingly, his smirk widening. Mukuro pulled him forward suddenly, before immediately slamming him back into the wall, harder this time, the sound of plaster cracking and Nagito’s breath once again wheezing out filling the small space.

“I asked you a question, bastard. Where is she?” Mukuro repeated, before pressing the cold steel of her knife closer to his neck. A small trickle of crimson rolled down Nagito’s neck, staining his school uniform as her blade cut him slightly. It wasn’t enough to do any real harm, though it would cement her message clearly. She felt Makoto’s hands pull gently on the arm that was holding Nagito against the wall.

“Mukuro please calm down, we can get answers by just talking, there’s no need for violence” Makoto pleaded, his words hitting Mukuro directly. Just as she began sincerely thinking about doing as Makoto said, she noticed a glint of metal raise from Nagito’s free hand. Mukuro’s mind switched into ‘Soldier Mode’, and time seemed to slow down. She quickly swept her left leg under Makoto, knocking him to the ground and out of the way of Nagito’s knife, before swiftly slamming the side of her fist squarely onto Nagito’s wrist as it raised, the cracking of both the wall and Nagito’s wrist bone echoing as the weapon in his hand dropped, landing on the ground. Nagito let out a muffled scream as she brought back her left leg to hit his ankle, before stepping back as he sank to the ground, clutching his broken wrist. He sat in front of her, immobile thanks to his now broken ankle. Mukuro leaned beside Nagito, staying silent as she picked up his weapon. It seemed he had a small knife attached to his keyring. Mukuro was slightly upset that she didn’t notice it earlier, though now that her target was subdued it didn’t matter. She then turned to Makoto, who sat on the ground, watching her in equal parts fear and awe, as she slipped out of soldier mode and back into reality.

“Whoa… So cool…” Makoto muttered under his breath, causing Mukuro to turn bright red as she helped him up and off the ground. As she did, she could hear an eerie laughter coming from Nagito. He sat hunched over, clutching his wrist to his chest.
"Aha… Your talent… Is incredible. Ah...Ahaha… Say, Mukuro… Which one is your hope? Him? Or Junko?" He questioned before laughing quietly to himself, looking up at Mukuro. His eyes were a swirling storm of both light and dark. Hope and Despair. Mukuro ignored his question, instead walking over to Nagito’s dorm door and using his keys to unlock it. She turned back to Makoto as she tucked the keys into her uniform’s pockets.

“Hold the door open for me, I’m gonna drag him in and tie him up… Then we can get some answers.” Mukuro ordered gently to Makoto. He looked at Mukuro with concern, before apprehensively trudging to the door and holding it ajar. He clearly was not happy with how Mukuro dealt with Nagito, though he was trying his best to help her nonetheless. He really was kind, if he could work with someone like herself. Her rage had already been released from her, all that was left was question. She intended to get answers. Nagito’s laughing had already subsided, as he sat passively and compliant, not struggling as Mukuro pulled him by the collar into the room with ease.

The room was just like any other dorm room, though it seemed Nagito was still in the middle of packing as his dorm was littered with cardboard boxes of all sizes. Mukuro let go of Nagito, before walking towards the simple wooden desk positioned against the wall. She pulled the chair away from the desk, placing it haphazardly in the middle of the room. Without wasting any time, she heaved Nagito up onto the chair. He stared at her blankly, still clutching at his wrist as he sat unmoving on the chair. After what he pulled with the weapon earlier, Mukuro did not want to want to risk him getting free and hurting Makoto. Quickly she noticed a scarf lying on his nightstand.

"Mukuro, should I lock the door? I don’t think this would be easy to explain if anyone were to drop by…” Makoto asked cautiously. Mukuro nodded in response.

“Good idea” With one hand still holding the scarf, she reached into her pocket and pulled out Nagito’s keys before handing them to Makoto. She then turned her attention back to Nagito. “You can either tell me where Junko is, and what she did to Yasuke, or I can find other methods to get answers” He stayed silent, watching Mukuro curiously. Mukuro sighed before walking behind Nagito. “Give me your wrists” Nagito did as told, placing his wrists behind his back and in front of Mukuro. Roughly, Mukuro wrapped the scarf around his wrists in a military-grade knot, making sure it was tight enough to cause immense pain to his broken wrist. She stood once more, stopping to stand in front of the chair and stare down at him. Before she could get out the first question, Makoto tugged gently on Mukuro’s hand.

“Um, Can I talk to you for a moment?” He asked softly. Mukuro furrowed her brow in slight confusion but still nodded and followed him to the corner farthest from Nagito. Mukuro stood with her arms crossed, looking at Makoto with all her attention. He seemed worried. "Mukuro… I don’t think this is healthy. Maybe we should call for help? I mean, he did try to attack me so that would explain his injuries, and maybe the headma-"

"Makoto." Mukuro interrupted.

"U-um yeah?" He stuttered out.

“You don’t understand, I need to do this. I have to find Junko.” Mukuro stated, determined. Makoto’s face flushed red, though it wasn’t the flush of embarrassment. It was frustration.

“Of course I don’t understand! How can I ever understand if you never tell me anything?!” Makoto shouted, slightly too loud, as she could hear Nagito snickering from his position on the chair. Mukuro quickly shot him a glare before turning back to Makoto. She’d never seen him upset before… it was a bit jarring. He gently reached for her hand, holding it in both of his “Mukuro I can tell something is really wrong… I’ve never seen you so… lost. And then you suddenly disappeared from class with that scary looking guy, and I was so worried I could barely think a-and all I want is..."
to help you Mukuro, because… I don’t want to watch helplessly as you destroy yourself. So please. You’ve got to tell me what’s going on.” He pleaded finally. Mukuro froze for a moment, a light blush creeping up onto her cheeks.

“O-okay… I will. But first…” Mukuro pulled her hand away from Makoto, stepping towards Nagito. She looked down at him with deadly calmness, his eyes widening slightly in anticipation and a hint of fear.

“First we get answers.”
The soft orange glow of the sunset filtered in through Nagito’s curtains, giving the room a comforting, warm aura, a stark contrast to the events being played out within the small dorm room.

Nagito watched Mukuro intently as she circled around the chair he was tied up to, double-checking that his restraints were adequate to hold him in place. Once she was satisfied, Mukuro stopped to stand in front of him. He seemed incredibly amused, though beads of sweat rolled down his forehead, no doubt a result of the immense pain his broken wrist and ankle were giving him. His breathing was rather erratic, as he held his stare with Mukuro.

“You know, this would be over a lot sooner if you co-operated.” Mukuro mumbled, as she glared at him. He let out a pained, wheeze of a laugh.

“B-but then… Where’s the fun in that?” He coughed out weakly, before shifting his stare to look behind Mukuro. Following his gaze, she saw that his eyes were watching Makoto with mild amusement. Makoto was wandering around the back of the room, looking around curiously. After a few seconds, he noticed the two were watching him. He jolted in surprise, before taking a step back… and tripping over the stack of boxes piled behind him. Mukuro couldn’t help the small snort of a laugh that escaped her, as Makoto pushed himself up slightly from the pile of cardboard boxes, his face red with embarrassment.

“S-sorry about that…I’ll uh… stay back here” He mumbled, before beginning to re-stack the boxes. A warm smile spread across her face as she watched him, though it quickly disappeared once she heard Nagito’s voice.

“Interesting” He whispered, just loud enough for Mukuro to hear. She spun quickly to face him, her expression hard and stoic once more. His eyes were wide, as he analyzed Mukuro with a mixture of awe and curiosity.

“What?” Mukuro muttered through gritted teeth, making sure to keep her tone low enough so Makoto couldn’t hear from his position at the back of the dorm. Nagito chuckled lightly, though his expression was still very much pained.

“When we had first met, I had called you a Symbol of hope” He began explaining, an oddly out-of-place smile resting on his face. “Junko later told me everything about you, telling me all the things you did for despair. All the people you killed. Though, perhaps we were both wrong” He said finally.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Mukuro asked, glaring. Nagito gave her a pained smile, sighing.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Mukuro asked, glaring. Nagito gave her a pained smile, sighing.

“Isn’t it obvious? You were raised in despair, and fought alongside it. Then suddenly, without warning, you abandon that life. You are neither hope, nor despair. Though that isn’t really what is so interesting about you, Mukuro.” His smile gave a hint of mockery about it, and if Makoto wasn’t only a few feet away, she would’ve been content to slap the smile off his face right there. Instead, she clenched her fists in an attempt to keep herself calm.

“Then, what’s so interesting?” She asked, her tone low and threatening. Nagito’s gaze shifted to Makoto who was still stacking the boxes, unaware of their conversation.
“You fell in love with hope itself” He answered, his smile shifting into a smirk as he watched Makoto at the back.

Mukuro instantly shot forward, one hand holding Nagito suspended in the air by his shirt collar, the other gripping Nagito’s face roughly, nails digging into his pale flesh causing tears to well in Nagito’s eyes, as he bit his lower lip in an attempt to stop himself from crying out in pain.

“That’s. Enough. You’re going to shut up now, and unless I ask you a question, you’ll stay silent. Or else you’ll be suffering from much more than a broken wrist. Got it?” She asked, her voice devoid of any emotion, dark and serious. His smile was completely wiped away, now replaced with fear. He didn’t say a word, and Mukuro took his silence as an answer, letting go of his collar, causing the chair to drop abruptly and almost tip over.

It seemed that Makoto had noticed the commotion, as he stepped towards Mukuro, placing a hand on her arm.

“Is everything alright?” He asked, concerned. Mukuro tried her best to think about anything other than how close he was to her.

“Y-yeah. I just need a bit longer. Do you think you could stand out in the hallway, to make sure no one tries to get in?” She asked, avoiding eye contact, as she stepped slightly away from him so that his hand would slip away from her. In her peripheral vision, she could see the slightly confused look Makoto gave her at her odd behavior.

“Uh…sure. Just make sure to be careful okay? If anything goes wrong, I’ll be right outside.” He said as he walked towards the door, unlocking it. Mukuro nodded in response, and as soon as she heard the click of the door closing, she turned her attention back to Nagito. He was smirking condescendingly at her, though he said nothing. Smart boy. Mukuro took a deep breath before beginning her ‘interrogation’, in an attempt to put her emotions behind her for the moment. She needed to focus.

“Alright, firstly. Where is she?” She asked, her face a blank slate. Nagito stayed still for a moment, thinking, before shrugging.

“Junko never told me where she was going.” He stated simply. On any other occasion, if this were any normal person, Mukuro would never have believed him. Though Nagito Komaeda was not a normal person. So far, everything he had said had been truth. A bit too truthful for Mukuro’s liking, though that was another problem entirely. For the time being, she would accept his answers. Besides, if it turned out he was lying, she could always come back to kill him.

“Then why were you with her yesterday? Even Yasuke said… Yasuke said he saw you the last time he saw Junko”

It was tough to stay calm and steady as the thoughts of Yasuke flooded in. Though Mukuro was good at controlling most of her emotions, anger was not one of them. It had only been a few hours since she saw him… break…and Mukuro quickly realized she was still very much shaken up over the events. She had to stop thinking about what had happened. Her feelings were not important right now. Mukuro wasn’t even sure if they were important at all. For now, she had to put them aside. She needed answers. Nagito nodded slightly at her question.

“She wanted to show me something. How could I pass up a chance on learning more about the Ultimate Despair’s plan?” He asked rhetorically. Mukuro repeated his sentence in her head, paying close attention to his words.
“How did you know she was Ultimate Despair?” Mukuro asked, Nagito Komaeda becoming more and more confusing by the minute. He smiled.

“I may be completely worthless, but even I can see despair when it’s right in front of me. And though she is careful, her actions have not gone unnoticed.” He explained. Mukuro noticed he seemed to be fidgeting, no doubt the pain caused by the rope was causing intense pain to his broken wrist.

“What did she want to show you?” Mukuro asked stiffly, ignoring his discomfort.

“She had heard of my talent. My luck. She said she could use it. She said that if I were to work with her, the hope that would come from her inevitable defeat would be greater than any before. Obviously I didn’t believe her at first. I didn’t think she was worthy to be a stepping stone for the Symbol of hopes. That’s where Yasuke Matsuda stepped in.” He explained, his smile still eerily cheery. Mukuro flinched at the mention of Yasuke. She could feel her rage begin to resurface.

“She used him… to show you how great her despair was? She did that…on purpose?...” Mukuro asked hesitantly. Nagito nodded, smile widening. Mukuro heard something like fabric snap, though chose to ignore it.

“Amazing! You’re smarter than I gave you credit for Mukuro!” He said enthusiastically. Even Nagito Komaeda was manipulated by her sister. And he couldn’t even tell that he was being played. Mukuro took a step back to steady herself, as her knees began to feel weaker.

“B-but then… How? How did sh-“

“No idea. I couldn’t hear what she said to him, though she did show him some sort of video. Though even I have to admit, it was extremely impressive.” He admitted reluctantly. Mukuro frowned.

“Why did she need your help in the first place?” Nagito chuckled at her slight bitterness.

“Jealous? Well, she didn’t have you to do her bidding so I suppose Ultimate Luck was the next best thing.” Mukuro remembered something Yasuke had mentioned.

“What about Hajime Hinata? And the festival? What does that have to do with her plans?” Mukuro asked quickly, words spilling out in desperation. Nagito stared at her blankly, smile dropping.

“As for Hajime Hinata, I have no idea who that person is. The festival however, is this Friday. I don’t see how those two are connected though, but do with that information what you will.” Nagito said passively. The questions bounced around Mukuro’s head, though now that she had a definitive date it would be much easier to find more information. It was odd that Nagito knew so much about Junko, yet nothing about Hajime Hinata, the very subject of the Hope cultivation plan. Mukuro’s mind worked in overtime, desperation fueling her. The clicking of the door broke her from her thoughts.

“Um sorry for interrupting but… I just saw a few security officers down the hall… I think they’re checking all the dorm rooms.” Makoto said worriedly as he peered into the room, purposely avoiding eye contact with Nagito. Mukuro nodded.

“We should get out soon then.” She said, still a bit occupied within her thoughts. What happened next shocked Mukuro into stillness.

“Well, if you’re done with the questioning…” Nagito said as he stood up casually from the chair, leaning a bit more on his right leg rather than his left, as his ankle was still broken. The ropes that were bound to him fell haphazardly to the ground, freeing him. He smiled nonchalantly as if he
hadn’t just freed himself from military-grade knots all while the Ultimate soldier supervised. “Do you suppose you could leave now? I do have a lot of unpacking to do… and also find some ice for my wrist.” He chuckled sheepishly. Mukuro watched Nagito in equal parts awe and fear. If Junko had Nagito Komaeda on her side, stopping her would not be as easy as she thought. Mukuro shot him a threatening look, before walking out of the room, Makoto following close behind.

The two stayed silent as they walked down the hallway, in the opposite direction of where Makoto had said he saw the security guards approaching. No doubt they were reinvestigating the murder of the girl Mukuro had seen with Kyouko, though they wouldn’t find the culprit in the boy’s dorm. When Kyouko and Mukuro had investigated the scene, Mukuro had figured out that the culprit had to be a girl. The fact that the guards were searching in the wrong place only proved to Mukuro that she was the only one who could stop Junko. Clearly the academy did not know of the threat they were facing, if they could not handle a simple murder case.

After a few more minutes of careful walking down the Boys’ dorm hallway, they finally reached the exit. Mukuro stopped walking just as they reached the door, before turning towards Makoto.

“I can handle the walk back to my dorm. Thank you for everything today.” Mukuro mumbled quietly, forcing a small smile even though her mind felt like it was crumbling from the inside out. Just as she was about to open the door, Makoto grabbed her wrist.

“Wait…” He said quickly. Mukuro turned back, slightly surprised as a hint of warmth surfaced on her cheeks. “You promised that you would tell me everything after school. I still don’t even know what went on in Nagito’s dorm…So if I’m gonna help you, you’ve got to tell me everything…Also I don’t want to be in my dorm when the officers come by… they seem kind of scary” He said, though the last part sort of ruined his determined statement. Mukuro pressed her lips in a firm line to hide her small smile.

“O-okay.” Mukuro said finally, before continuing to exit the dorm with a now content Makoto alongside her. It really wasn’t fair of her to keep him out of the loop. He has proven how kind and helpful he could be, so he at least deserved to know what he was fighting for.

Mukuro thought just for a moment, that maybe she was the lucky one for having such a trustworthy and calm person on her side. The thought made her blush even more, which made a small part of Mukuro question why she was blushing so often now because she was beginning to act like those heroine’s in Junko’s romance novels. As they opened the door and stepped out into the moonlight, the cool night air refreshing on her skin, Mukuro had one thought.

What is he thinking?

==MAKOTO POV==

I have no idea what I’m thinking right now

Chapter End Notes

Originally I was going to make this chapter one long one, though I decided that 2 shorter ones would work best!
Also the next part will be all in Makoto’s POV (The rest of the fic wont be like that, though I thought it would be fun to get Makoto’s perspective on the whole ordeal for once! =D) so be prepared for another chapter coming soon!
Thank you for reading, you guys are great!
==MAKOTO POV==

I have no idea what I’m thinking right now

Makoto walked alongside Mukuro as they headed towards the girl’s dorm. The soft crunching of gravel under their feet was the only sound filling the barren courtyard, the cool night breeze silently brushing against their skin.

Outside, as they walked the pathway, the night was calm.

Inside, within Makoto’s mind, he was freaking out.

He had just helped the Ultimate soldier, arguably the most dangerous person in the entire school, tie up an essential stranger because he may or may not have known where Mukuro’s evil twin sister had disappeared too.

What the hell have I gotten myself into?

Makoto took a deep breath to calm himself, and he must have breathed a bit too loudly because he caught Mukuro’s attention, snapping her from her thoughts. She turned to him, her expression blank.

“A-are you alright? I could help you sneak back into the dorms if you’d rather stay there…” She asked, though Makoto could’ve sworn he heard a bit of reluctance in her tone. Makoto quickly shook his head.

“No I’m fine! We made a promise, so I’ll definitely try my best to understand what’s going on. I want to help you, Okay?” He said, smiling. Makoto wondered when he became so determined. In the past, he had been a huge coward, though now he managed to stay by Mukuro’s side with only a minor panic attack. A success in his book.

Mukuro nodded in response, surprise breaking her expressionless demeanor, as she turned away and faced forward once more.

It may have just been the night and the moonlight playing tricks, though Makoto was almost sure he saw Mukuro’s cheeks turn a light red at his words.

As the two entered the girl’s dorm, Makoto tried his best to stay hidden behind Mukuro, making himself invisible. Luckily, there were only a few girls out of their dorms, though Makoto didn’t miss the odd looks he got from them. After a bit more walking, the two came to a stop in front of what Makoto assumed to be Mukuro’s dorm room.

As Mukuro searched for her keys to unlock the door, Makoto stood quietly close beside her, nervously looking around. He was still very much afraid of getting caught, and though he wasn’t the one to actually harm Nagito in anyway, he was scared that Mukuro would get in trouble. He felt like he should do what he could to protect her. As a result of his fear, when he heard his name called out from down the hallway, he was so frightened he actually jumped a bit off the ground.
“Makoto?!” Sayaka’s surprised voice was unmistakable, her sweet tone familiar. Makoto looked to where he heard her voice coming from, only to see the Ultimate Idol walking down the hall towards him, smiling. He noticed that when Mukuro turned towards the noise as well, Sayaka’s smile visibly faltered for a moment, though she regained composure quickly. Makoto returned her smile nervously.

“Oh oh hey Sayaka.” He mumbled quietly, though Sayaka’s outburst had caught the attention of multiple students who were standing around the hallway. She came to a stop close to Makoto, a confused look on her face.

“Makoto, what are you doing in the girl’s dorm? I never pegged you for a rule-breaker…” She whispered to him. Makoto chuckled nervously, trying to cover up his fear of getting caught.

“Oh well me and Mukuro were going to her room to talk for a bit, that’s all.” He said reassuringly. Sayaka stared at him blankly, blinking once. After a moment she seemed to have understood his words, making an O shape with her lips.

“Oh. I see…” Her smile turned mischievous. Makoto instantly tensed up. He knew that smile well. It was the smile Sayaka wore when she would try and set him up with other girls in his grade during middle school, even though she knew he had a crush on her. Though he didn’t anymore, and saw her more as a sister, it didn’t stop him from panicking slightly.

She giggled slightly before turning to Mukuro.

“Well then… I hope you two have fun… In Mukuro’s dorm room… Alone…Just the two of you…” Sayaka said jokingly, nudging Mukuro. Mukuro only stared at her with a completely lost expression on her face.

“Alright…Thanks I suppose?” Mukuro responded, confused. Sayaka gave Mukuro an enthusiastic thumbs up.

“I knew you could do it Mukuro!” Sayaka exclaimed, before turning sharply behind her. “AOI! I WON! YOU OWE ME $10!” She shouted down the hall, towards another girl Makoto recognized from his class as the Ultimate Swimmer, Aoi Asahina.

“Already?! How are you so good at making bets?” The swimmer groaned, before trudging into what Makoto assumed to be her and Sayaka’s shared dorm.

“I told you I’m psychic! ~” Sayaka called back, before waving to Mukuro and Makoto and running off towards where Aoi had gone to.

Makoto could only stand in stunned silence. What were they betting on?

“She’s very… odd” Mukuro mumbled as she finally unlocked the door. Makoto chuckled lightly as he followed Mukuro inside the dorm room.

“Yeah, I guess so. She’s always been like that though so I’m used to it.” He replied. Mukuro seemed distracted, nodding absentmindedly in response. Makoto looked around the room, noticing how the one on the left was made neatly, the desk beside it filled with organized stacks of folders and paper. The bed on the right however, was very messy, a single duffel bag peeking out from underneath it.

“Who does that side belong too?” Makoto asked, pointing towards the neat side. Mukuro glanced over.

“My roommate, Kyouko Kirigiri. She was assigned to watch me.” Mukuro said blankly. Makoto
paused for a moment.

“They assigned someone to watch you?” Makoto asked, frowning. Even though he didn’t know what kind of things Mukuro had done in her past, surely it wasn’t deserving of being treated like a criminal. Mukuro turned to him, a slightly solemn expression.

“They didn’t want to put an innocent girl in a room with someone like me.” Mukuro mumbled. Makoto furrowed his brow in confusion.

“Someone like you?” He repeated. Mukuro looked away, before taking a seat on the right bed.

“I suppose if you are going to understand anything about Junko and what is going on… I should tell you about my past.” Mukuro said, sighing. Cautiously, Makoto took a seat beside her, not missing the way her cheeks turned slightly red as he sat with his arm against her own.

“I want to know everything about you Mukuro… And I promise I’ll try my best to remember every detail, even though I only scored about average in History but I’m sure your life is much cooler than any of those old guys in the textbooks with the weird hats so…” He mumbled, his own cheeks turning red.

Holy crap did I really just say that? What the hell am I doing oh my god she probably thinks I’m a huge dork and-

Makoto stopped mid-thought as he heard Mukuro giggle.

She actually giggled.

Makoto could only stare in awe at her, as she tried her best to hide the small laughter, though that sound was permanently etched into his mind. He couldn’t help but notice how beautiful she was when she was laughing.

I want to see her laugh more often...

I want to make her laugh more often...

Makoto quickly wiped away those thoughts, saving them for later. He would have to sort through them another time, now he had to focus. He would learn the truth today. Mukuro finally calmed herself down.

“S-sorry… Ill begin talking now…”

And thus began Mukuro’s retelling of her life.

She began telling him the details of her and Junko’s childhood, though Makoto could tell she was leaving out some parts, as when she began to tell him about Junko’s abusive behavior, she would hesitate before continuing.

Some of her past surprised Makoto, especially the fact that she had been homeless with Junko for a time. Also the fact that she had written for Military magazines.

“You were a writer?” Makoto asked, surprised. Mukuro fiddled with the hem of her shirt, uncomfortable with the attention.

“Y-yeah… I was really interested in the military, and they liked my view on fighting…It seemed like a good outlet for my knack for violence…” Mukuro trailed off, pausing for a moment. “I guess that’s
also why I joined Fenrir.”

While Mukuro didn’t go into detail about her years with Fenrir, Makoto had heard enough from rumors to get an idea on what she did with them. She was a mercenary, and while Makoto didn’t feel comfortable talking about the killing she did to win wars and end unnecessary violence, he never expected how horrible he would feel when he told her about a part of her life he didn’t know existed.

Her time as Ultimate Despair.

He listened with horror as she retold all the horrible things she did for Junko. The torturing. The mass killings. The way she had to sweep all those events under the rug and pretend it never happened. The way she had to hide the memories from herself just to stay sane. How all the killing she had done made her numb and remorseless. Makoto could feel his hands trembling. After she had finished, Makoto was completely horrified. He looked to her, only to see she was completely silent, a blank and frozen expression on her face.

“I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have told you any of this… I know I’m a monster” She mumbled, expressionless. Makoto, stared at her in disbelief.

“T-this is all true? You really… You really did all this?” Makoto asked softly. Mukuro pressed her lips together in a firm line.

“I’m sorry…” She repeated in a whisper, still sitting unmoving like a statue.

“Mukuro… Have you ever told anyone this before?” He asked sadly. Mukuro shook her head.

“I-I had no one t-to tell it to…I didn’t think it was important to talk about anyway…” Mukuro mumbled, and the slight shake in her voice was all it took for Makoto to notice how badly her hands were shaking, even as she gripped the edges of her skirt so tightly that her knuckles had gone white.

_How could she live so long, hiding all her feelings? Why did she have to suffer this…?_

Makoto felt Mukuro tense up as he reached out for her hand, holding it in his.

_She’s so cold…_

He could still feel the slight shaking

“I don’t think you’re a monster, Mukuro. And it’s okay now… You don’t need to hide how you feel anymore, okay? We’re gonna stop Junko, together. I’ll make sure of it. I’ll always be there for you” He said honestly. Mukuro’s cheeks turned noticeably red.

“Nagito was right… You really are hope itself…” She mumbled. Makoto looked at her, confused.

“Oh right, you didn’t tell me what Nagito had told you. And who that guy was earlier.” Makoto asked quickly. He remembered clearly the expression on the students face. He was horrifying, with skin as sickly as a corpse’s and eyes that seemed blank and hollow. Mukuro had said he was someone she cared about.

That Junko had done something to him.

If he was important enough to Mukuro that she would be so consumed by rage like that, it had to be serious. Makoto could tell that even mentioning the student was striking a chord with her, as he could feel her hand twitch slightly as it still rested entwined with his.
“Yasuke Matsuda was his name… He is- or I suppose, was- Junko’s boyfriend. He was like a brother to me.” She said sadly. “I don’t know exactly what happened… Nagito didn’t know either. But she broke him, Makoto. He is completely consumed by despair…A-and I can’t help but wonder, if I had stayed with Junko, would I end up the same way?” She asked, distressed.

Makoto didn’t know how to reply. Her voice was so… helpless. It hurt him to hear her this way. To hear the Ultimate Soldier, the bravest person he knew, be afraid. Mukuro shook her head lightly before continuing.

“Before I took him to the hospital, Yasuke told me something. He said that Junko mentioned to wait for the festival and Izuru Kamukura. Nagito told me that the culture festival is this Friday. He knew nothing about Hajime Hinata, the one who would be participating and becoming Izuru Kamukura through surgery. I don’t know how the two are connected…” Mukuro said, eyes furrowed in thought. Makoto paused.

“When is the surgery going to happen?” He asked. Mukuro turned to him, tilting her head in confusion.

“Well, it’s supposed to happen two weeks after school begins…” She answered.

“Is it possible that the festival is some sort of deadline? Like, maybe Hajime Hinata can still back out, but only until the festival? I’m sure it’s wrong but I can’t think of anything else…” Makoto said sheepishly. Mukuro’s eyes widened.

“Makoto…” She whispered, which suddenly made him very nervous, as she held the hand that was resting in hers tighter.

“U-uh yeah?”

“I think… I think you’re right.” She whispered, causing Makoto to sigh in relief.

“Oh thank god, I didn’t want you to think I was a complete idiot, especially after tripping over the boxes earlier…” He said relieved. Mukuro giggled at the memory, her normally cold eyes lit up like stars.

I want to make her laugh more often…

“In that case… We need to find Hajime Hinata at the culture festival. The entire school will be there, so no doubt he will be too. Then, we’ll convince him to abandon the project, and stop Junko’s plans before they start.” Mukuro said, determined after her giggles subsided. Makoto nodded in agreement.

“And we’ll wear Yukatas! For blending with the crowd, of course…” Makoto added a bit too excitedly. He had always loved festivals, and as a child he would often go with his family. Though it was more of a mission, that didn’t mean he couldn’t have a bit of fun. Mukuro looked slightly confused.

“How would I get a Yukata?” She asked. Makoto thought for a moment.

“Sayaka helped me make one when I was in middle school! It turned out really well, I’m sure she could help” He said cheerily. Mukuro nodded slowly.

“One more question… What is a Yukata?” She asked softly. Makoto began explaining to her what they looked like, and how he once tried to made one with Komaru when they were children. Emphasis on the word tried. Mukuro found the stories he told funny, which only made him want to tell her more in an effort to keep her smiling.
Neither of them felt like leaving just yet, instead they stayed together for a while, his hand still resting in hers, as she shared some of the happier memories from her childhood. He began sharing too, and for a while they sat together talking and smiling.

By the time they noticed how late it was, the two were already sleepy. Makoto figured that the security guards should have left the boy’s dorm by now, and it was safe for him to return.

Neither of them realized that they had been holding onto each other’s hands the entire time they talked until they both stood up, blush dusting both their cheeks as they slowly separated their hands.

Makoto bid his goodbyes to Mukuro, making plans to meet up tomorrow after school to begin making their “disguises” for the cultural festival. As he exited Mukuro’s dorm, the door clicking shut behind him, he immediately crashed into a stranger.

“Watch where you’re going, bastard.” The stranger grumbled, his tone sour and threatening. Makoto looked at the boy, who had short blond hair and wore the academy’s uniform.

“S-sorry…” Makoto whispered sheepishly. The boy made a ‘tch’ sound as he continued down the hallway, glare on his face. Makoto began continuing towards the exit, the same way the student had continued towards. As he watched the boy in front of him turn a corner, Makoto caught a final glimpse of the boy, finding it odd he would be in the girl’s dorm alone as well.

**Makoto almost didn’t notice the blood covering the boy’s hands.**

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Thanks for reading, I hope you enjoyed!
I kinda liked writing in Makoto’s perspective for a chapter, it was fun!
If you think I should do more chapters later on in the story from his perspective again,
let me know! I’d love to see what you guys think =D
So not really a chapter, but i just wanted to notify you guys that I'll be putting this fic on hold for a little while.

I had another idea for a Mukuro-Centric fic and im very excited to introduce it soon! Thank you for your patience and just for being awesome guys!

See you all soon when i take this up again!
For now, i bid you adieu

EDIT: HI EVERYONE IM BACK!!!!!!! Due to the overwhelming support while I was away, I decided to return to this fic. So uh... yeah! Look forward to that! Hope you guys enjoy!
Chapter Notes

Hiya everyone! Its been a while, but im back and I really hope you enjoy!
This chapter is from Kyouko's point of view, and it was really fun to write! Though this will mostly be a fic from Mukuro's pov, it was interesting to see the Ultimate detective's take on the situation.
So without further ado, thank you so much for following this story and I hope you enjoy!

== KYOUKO POV ==

Kyouko Kirigiri was not the type to lose her temper.

Most of the time, Kyouko was the epitome of cool and collected, hiding her emotions behind her calm demeanor.

However, as she argued with the Hopes peak security guard standing in the doorway between her and the crime scene behind him, she was becoming ridiculously frustrated.

“If you could just let me examine the corpse, I’m sure you would find my deductions to be very useful, and I-“

The man rolled his eyes before quickly interrupting her. “Listen kid, how about you do us both a favour and stop wasting my time. Besides, I don’t think your daddy would be happy to hear you’ve been sneaking around without permission, now would he?” He said with a condescending chuckle. Kyouko suddenly lost all interest in being polite with the man.

“Officer, I’m sure with even a speck of my talent I could do more in five minutes than your whole team could in a week, so I think It would be best if you-“

Kyouko flinched back as he slammed the door in her face, effectively ending the conversation.

*Well that didn’t go as planned.*

She ran a hand through her lavender hair in an attempt to calm herself down, knowing her anger would get her nowhere. Although a small part of her still wanted to punch a hole straight through the door.

Though after a second thought, perhaps insulting the entire Hopes Peak Security staff wasn’t the best way to persuade someone, though honestly at this point Kyouko was too tired to care.

Knowing standing in the empty hallway and reflecting over things she couldn’t change would solve nothing, Kyouko turned away from the locked crime scene and walked further down the hall, returning to her thoughts to try and think of what she could do with the little information she had.

It had only been a day since her and Mukuro Ikusaba investigated the crime scene of Natsumi Kuzuryuu, yet somehow another murder had already occurred and it was extremely aggravating that she would never get the chance to solve the crime.
Coming from a long line of detectives, Kyouko had the talent for solving mysteries in her blood. Her grandfather had taught her all she knew, being a father to her when her actual one abandoned her. After Kyouko’s mother died, Jin Kirigiri had no interest in succeeding the family. He left a very young Kyouko with her grandfather, and after that she never saw him as family.

With this in mind, the fact that the staff and even some students though of her as a spoiled daddy’s girl was infuriating, since her father had no part in her success and talent. Of course, even if she told anyone this they would never believe her.

People tend to believe what is ideal, not what is truth.

Kyouko knew that there was something fishy happening around the academy. Two murders in a little over twenty-four hours is unheard of. No doubt the board of directors would try to cover this up to protect the academy’s name, which is why it bothered Kyouko so much that she would never get to the truth before it is turned into a lie.

As she mulled over this thought, she was suddenly brought back to reality by the sound of a somewhat familiar voice.

“Please, you’re misunderstanding, I’m not the one you should be looking for! I was on my way out, I swear!” The voice plead.

A deeper voice replied to the first one, clearly someone older. “Doesn’t matter what you say to me, I know what I saw. Save it for the Chief, kid.”

As Kyouko turned the corner towards the source of the voice, she collided suddenly with a large figure, causing her to stumble back, though luckily she was able to keep her balance.

“Hey, watch where you’re going.”

As she looked up at who she had just bumped into, she was face-to-face with a rather upset security guard. What she didn’t notice right away, was that he was not alone. He held Makoto Naegi by his arm rather roughly, Makoto’s eyes wide and panicked. He seemed miniscule compared to the large man, the fear clearly visible on his face making him seem somehow even smaller. He sparked up when he saw Kyouko, most likely recognizing her from their class together.

He turned to the guard, using his free hand to point at Kyouko. “Sir, if you don’t believe me, ask her! She’s Kyouko Kirigiri!” He exclaimed before turning to face Kyouko “You’re a detective right? So you can tell when someone’s lying right?”

Though Kyouko was completely confused as to what she had walked in on, she nodded in response to his question nonetheless.

“Then you can prove I’m telling the truth!” He said, exasperated. Kyouko hesitated for a moment, turning towards the guard.

“I cannot help unless I know the details of the situation. So, why are you taking a minor into custody?” She asked, not willing to get involved in a situation she knows nothing about the guard frowned at her.

“I don’t need a kid telling me how to run an investigation.”

Kyouko narrowed her eyes. “Even when that ‘kid’ is the ultimate detective?”

The guard raised an eyebrow in suspicion, clearly not faithful in her talents.
“Wait, Kirigiri? You’re the headmaster’s daughter, right?” He asked, remembering how Makoto addressed her, and Kyouko had to actively suppress her sigh.

“Yes, I am, and I’d like to know what is going on here.” Kyouko replied firmly. She had used up all of her patience with the man from earlier, so she wasn’t exactly inclined to be polite to this man, especially with how roughly he was holding one of her classmates.

The guard glared at her but answered anyway. “A corpse has been found. We’re supposed to bring any suspicious people to the Chief Guard, Juzo.” Kyouko felt herself grimace at his name, though the guard didn’t notice. “I caught this one leaving rather suspiciously, and when I saw the bloodstains on ‘em I had no choice but to arrest him.” He grumbled, tugging Makoto slightly forward so sharply he stumbled slightly, just so he was close enough that Kyouko could see the hand-shaped blood print on his uniform.

As Kyouko examined the print closely, committing to memory as many details as she could, Makoto tried to explain himself. “I really don’t know where the bloodstain came from, but I’ve been with Mukuro Ikusaba this whole time, and we haven’t left the dorm room so if you ask her I’m sure—”

“No need to.” Kyouko cut him off before turning to the guard. “Officer, have you come in contact with the corpse?”

The guard seemed confused but shook his head in response. “They stationed me at the door as soon as we got the news. But what do I have to do with anything? Don’t tell me you think I’m the killer?! I swear if you—” He shouted at her, his face beet-red with anger.

“You seem to make a great deal of assumptions, don’t you officer?” She interrupted boredly. The officer’s glare worsened.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” He asked, furious. Makoto cringed as the guard’s grip on his arm worsened, though he stayed quiet as the two interacted.

“A great deal of assumptions, but not many observations.” Kyouko stated, before reaching towards Makoto, running a gloved hand over the bloodstain. He flinched back, though watched cautiously as Kyouko examined the tips of her glove. “If you had stopped to look at the stain, you would notice it hadn’t seeped through his clothing. Meaning he didn’t come in direct contact with any blood.” Kyouko stated her observations to an awe-struck Makoto.

“That proves I’m innocent, right?!” Makoto said desperately. The guard didn’t seem so moved.

“Then where the hell did the blood come from then?” He grumbled.

Kyouko turned back to Makoto. “Have you been around someone who’s been injured? Or bumped into anyone recently?”

Makoto nodded “When I was leaving the dorm room, I bumped into another student. I don’t remember what he looked like really…”

Kyouko’s expression settled into a small smile. “More likely than not, you bumped into this student, they got some of their or someone else’s blood onto you—”

“Wait, what do you mean by someone else’s?” Makoto asked, wide-eyed.

“And you happened to be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. A simple misunderstanding.” Kyouko finished, knowing answering Makoto’s question would only lead to more questions.
The guard frowned at her. “And I’m just supposed to trust you and your little talent? How am I supposed to know that you two aren’t working together?”

Kyouko contemplated giving more factual evidence, though she quickly realized facts were not what she needed to convince this man of the truth.

“Fine then. Don’t trust me.” She stated blankly. Makoto seemed incredibly panicked by this, and opened his mouth to reply though before he could Kyouko continued. “However, when he is proven as innocent, how do you think my father will react to hearing how the Hope’s peak security treated one of his poor, poor Ultimate’s?” Kyouko threatened with fake confidence. Inside she was trembling, hating confrontation, however it seemed to have worked as the man’s face turned a dark red, embarrassment and fury swirled in his eyes.

He glared at Kyouko for a moment that felt like an eternity.

When he let go of Makoto’s arm, Kyouko let out a sigh of relief, tenseness that she didn’t know was there suddenly disappearing.

“Fine. He can go. But you better leave soon kid, before they put the building on lockdown.” The guard grumbled before turning to walk back to his post by the exit.

Makoto frowned slightly at this, before sighing and turning back to Kyouko. “Well then…Thanks for the help Kyouko. Sorry to have dragged you into this… But your talent is really incredible! It was amazing how you figured that out so quickly.” He said, smiling in relief.

Kyouko nodded in response. “Don’t worry about it, I’m glad I could be of assistance. However I’m going to have to ask for a favor in return for my help.”

Makoto, though slightly wary, nodded. “Sure, what do you need?”

Kyouko paused for a moment, glancing around the corner, glancing at the door to the crime scene. “First, we need to get out of here. It will be safer to talk outside. There’s too many risks with the guards around.”

Before Makoto even had a chance to agree or disagree, Kyouko had already turned on her heels and begun walking towards the exit.

“W-wait!” He called out. After a moment she could hear Makoto’s slightly hurried footsteps following not far behind her.

As they walked, Kyouko took a moment to organize her thoughts. If Kyouko was ever going to solve the schools mysteries, she couldn’t do it by herself. That’s where Makoto Naegi comes into her plans. If she plays her cards right, he just might be the tipping point for Mukuro Ikusaba to share some of what she knows.

Especially in regards to Junko Enoshima.

Kyouko wasn’t exactly sure how Junko played into all of this. She had never formally met the Ultimate Fashionista, only reading the little information in her case file. Yet somehow, she is capable of something bad enough to make Mukuro Ikusaba, a trained killer, afraid. And for that, Kyouko was intrigued.

Though she couldn’t trust Mukuro fully yet, the two girls have sort of an understanding. Kyouko wouldn’t call them friends, but she didn’t think she was completely dangerous. If Kyouko were to get to the bottom of this, she would need Mukuro’s help. Even though the girl was undoubtedly a
hazard.

As for Makoto Naegi…. Kyouko had no idea why he was here.

“Your Mukuro’s roommate right?” He asked, trailing behind her as she walked briskly down the empty hall. Kyouko nodded.

“I assume Mukuro told you?” She said without turning around.

“She told me you were assigned to watch her…” Makoto mumbled, and Kyouko didn’t miss the slight bitterness in his tone. He seemed like a reasonable person, why didn’t he understand that she can’t be fully trusted?

“Would you rather have someone with her abilities, her undoubtedly dangerous abilities, go without supervision?” Kyouko asked softly.

“But she’s not dangerous! If you took the time to really understand her you’d see that! She’s just shy…” He trailed off sheepishly.

Kyouko paused before speaking, choosing her words carefully. “Makoto, I am not saying she’s dangerous. She is capable of being dangerous, and for that we need to keep an eye on her.” She said firmly.

“I know…” He murmured, and Kyouko heard something almost sad and reminiscent about the way he said those two words. Like he has seen what she means firsthand. Kyouko made a mental note to herself to mention that to him when they got outside.

After a few more moments of walking in silence, they finally reached the exit. Kyouko looked back over her shoulder, past Makoto, just to ensure they were not being followed. Makoto did the same as Kyouko pushed open the door, stepping out into the moonlight.

After taking a few more steps to distance themselves a bit from the door, Makoto re-addressed Kyouko’s earlier words.

“So, what favour did you need?” He asked cautiously.

Kyouko looked at him seriously. “I need you to tell me all you know of what is going on. With Mukuro, with the Ultimate Neurologist, and above all, Junko Enoshima.” She said firmly.

Makoto’s face visibly paled instantly. He looked around nervously “Um I-I’m not sure if I’m allowed to tell you about that…Its kind of Mukuro’s b-business to tell, y’know…” He chuckled nervously. Kyouko sighed, quickly realizing she wouldn’t be able to get much more out of him without a lot more persuasion. Persuasion she was too tired to exert.

“Fine. If you won’t tell me, I will just have to get more information straight from the source.” She affirmed slightly annoyed, before turning to walk away.

What she did not expect, was that Makoto would grab her arm and stop her from moving away.

“Wait!” he shouted.

Kyouko’s eyes widened. “Let go of me.”

Makoto’s face turned red with embarrassment, though he didn’t release her. “J-just listen, okay?”
Kyouko stayed silent, waiting for him to continue.

His eyes had something sad about them as he spoke. “Mukuro has gone through a lot. She told me everything about her past, and I could tell it took a lot for her to trust someone like that.” He smiled sadly. “But the thing is, after she finished telling me… she seemed so happy. She was… relieved.”

He took a deep breath, suddenly very serious. “Let her be happy for a while. That’s all I ask. I understand you want to help, but… just give her a day or something, okay? Just one day.”

Kyouko paused for a moment, the sincerity of his words a bit shocking. “I don’t think you understand the severity of the situation. But… You have my word. I won’t mention anything.”

Makoto sighed in relief, letting go of her arm. “She gets one day. I can’t promise anything after that.”

Makoto nodded sheepishly. “Thank you, really.”

“I don’t have much of a choice anyway, do I? Anyway, good night, Makoto. Be careful out there.” She added before turning away and entering the dorm once more.

“Good night, Kyouko” He said as the door closed behind her.

Though she didn’t get the information she would have liked, she did finally find out how Makoto Naegi was involved in all of this. He cared about Mukuro, and while that could be dangerous by itself, it would mean that Mukuro had a reason to not go ‘evil’, she supposed.

As Kyouko entered her shared dorm room, she was surprised to see Mukuro sitting at her desk, scrolling through her computer. Mukuro glanced over when she heard Kyouko enter.

“Oh… Welcome back.” Mukuro mumbled, before turning her attention back to the computer.

Kyouko noticed that while Makoto was right about Mukuro being ‘happier’, there were still dark circles around the Ultimate Soldier’s eyes.

“You should get some rest Mukuro. It’s been a long couple of days for the both of us, and- wait, are you looking at yukata photos?” Kyouko asked, suppressing a laugh as she saw that the other girl was on Google images looking at fancy patterns. She didn’t expect Mukuro to be the type to wear that sort of thing.

Mukuro blushed, embarrassed. “Well Makoto and I are going to the culture festival on Friday and we were gonna try to make one… I thought it would help if I did some research…”

Kyouko smirked knowingly. “I see. So, you’re doing research for your date?”

Mukuro’s eyes went wide. “N-no that’s not it!...”

Kyouko giggled slightly, the absurdity of the conversation getting to her sleep-deprived mind. “Well if you’re looking for patterns, there’s this shop I used to go to. I’m sure you could get some nice fabric there…” Kyouko trailed off.

“Really?” Mukuro asked, curious.

Kyouko hesitated before saying her next words. “How about we go together tomorrow?”

Mukuro’s eyes widened in surprise. “You want to?... But… Why are you being nice to me? I thought you hated me?”

Kyouko frowned slightly. “I hate enough people, I don’t need to add another to the list. Besides,
even though you’re dangerous… I don’t think you’re that bad.”

Mukuro hesitantly smiled at her, and Kyouko had to hold back her laughter because it was clear Mukuro wasn’t sure how to smile.

“But for now, let’s go to sleep.” Kyouko added.

Mukuro nodded in agreement. “O-okay. Good night, Kyouko”

Kyouko woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of Mukuro speaking.

Staying silent so she wouldn’t alert the other girl, Kyouko strained her eyes to look in the dark, seeing Mukuro sitting with a concerned expression, holding her cellphone to her ear.

“How long has he been awake?... Has he been saying anything other than Junko’s name?...” Mukuro must’ve heard an answer she didn’t like because her shoulders dropped slightly. “Oh… I see… has he hurt himself or anyone at all?” She said hesitantly. Mukuro smiled gently at the answer. “That’s good, at least. Please call me if his behavior changes at all. Yasuke is like a brother to me.” She said firmly.

Kyouko watched as she hung up the phone, only to hold it closely to her. “I’m gonna find her, Yasuke. I promise. I’ll stop her, so that she can feel the despair she wants. And then everything will be okay.” She reassured to herself.

Kyouko was surprised. Though she felt slightly guilty about eavesdropping, it was nice to know a bit more about Mukuro’s intentions. Now Kyouko had a lead.

Kyouko was going to solve this mystery, and it was nice to know she had someone to trust.

A friend.
The Glass Shatters

Chapter Summary

Hey Guys! Hope you enjoy this, this chapter is sort of a two-parter so the next one will be coming very soon!!!!

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Hope you guys enjoy this, this chapter is sort of a two-parter so the next one will be coming very soon!
If you have any comments or thoughts id love to hear them in the comments! And as always, thanks for reading!

=+ MUKURO POV +=

The two sat on a field of soft bright green grass, the sun warm on their skin. Makoto held Mukuro’s hand, content to sit beside her. She felt a sense of calmness, for once letting her guard down. In this moment she was not a soldier, but just a girl. A girl sitting with someone she cared about.

“I forgot what peace looked like.” She said lightly, looking over the field. She closed her eyes after a moment, just feeling the soothing air around her. Suddenly she felt Makoto let go of her hand, and an odd pang of loss hit her.

“Mukuro, are you alright?” Makoto asked, as he leaned slightly away from Mukuro. Somehow the odd light-heartedness of his voice felt disturbing to her.

“Of course, why wouldn’t I be?” Mukuro asked as she glanced over at him. He was still smiling, though his eyes were not. They were not sad either. Simply an emptiness that send chills down her spine.

“You’re screaming” He said, his smile eerily unwavering. What did he mean by--?

Just as Mukuro turned to face him fully, she was shocked to find he had vanished.

“What…? What is this…?” Mukuro frantically looked around, though even the warmth of the sun had disappeared from her. The beautiful scene she was sitting in just a moment was gone as well, replaced with a sky that was now a sea of grey; a ground beneath her that was now hard, unforgiving concrete.

“You really think you deserve him?”

Mukuro turned her head so quickly towards the voice that her neck could have snapped.

Junko stood only a few steps away, looking down at the disoriented Mukuro with a smirk. An odd feeling surged inside Mukuro, a feeling of both sheer terror and relief that made her want to gag.
“What makes you think you deserve a happy ending?” Junko asked, her tone snarky and condescending.

In her hand she held three leather ropes, and when Mukuro’s eyes followed them she saw that they were connected to two figures, both faceless, though Mukuro could still tell who they were.

Kyouko and Yasuke stood at the end of the ropes, though Mukuro quickly realized they were not ropes, but leashes, attached to collars around both their throats. Mukuro couldn’t help but stare at them, staring at the blankness where eyes and faces should be, but weren’t.

Momentarily ignoring the missing third leash in Junko’s hand. Mukuro pleaded to her sister. “Junko, I promise, I’ll stop you… I’ll give you the despair you want. I just need—“

“Time?” Junko interrupted with a giggle. “Ugh you’re so boring Mukuro. I guess some things stay unbearably predictable…” She whined with a flick of her wrist.

The small movement pulled forward on all three leashes, revealing Makoto standing at the end of the third. His face was also missing, and though he was completely unhuman Mukuro still felt the urge to run forward and protect him.

“You can play house all you want—“ Junko tugged on Makoto’s leash harder, bringing him closer to her. She smirked as she began running her hand through his hair. “—and though this fool is weak enough to accept you, you’ll always be a monster. A killer.” Junko spat.

Mukuro tried to move forward, though much to her horror she was tied down to the ground by heavy metal chains, clamped around her wrists and ankles. She thrashed against them, fury overwhelming her.

“T-that’s wrong! Don’t touch him! I-I’m gonna stop you! Let them go! Let me give you the despair you want, but don’t touch him!” Mukuro shrieked, fruitlessly pulling at the restraints.

“I am in control.” Junko’s voice echoed from every direction. “And if you try to stop me, everyone will burn because of you. And it will be all your fault.”

Junko disappeared, the leashes falling from where her hands used to be, only to land within arm’s reach of Mukuro. Without a second thought, Mukuro’s hand darted forward to pick up the three leashes, the chains around her wrists just long enough to let her grab them.

Just as she did, she felt a sudden warmth against the leashes, though the warmth quickly turned into a burning heat that forced Mukuro to flinch back and let go of the leashes, her skin already blistering.

Right where she touched the three leashes, tongues of fire began to run up them, licking and devouring the leather, and much to Mukuro’s horror they were getting closer and closer to the three unmoving people attached at the end of them.

“No…” Mukuro could barely get the word out, her lungs suddenly empty of air as she watched the fire climb closer and closer. She was frozen with terror. “W-why…”

She pulled frantically against the chains, desperate to put out the fire before it reached them, though no matter how much she tried to reach, she couldn’t get any closer.

But then, it was too late.

As soon as the fire made contact, the three went up in flames like flash paper. Piercing screams
made Mukuro’s ears bleed, trickles of crimson that ran down the side of her face, though she quickly realized that the screams were coming from her. The faceless victims were silent as the fire made their skin sear and bubble, ugly blisters that quickly turned into charred black patches of skin.

“No... Stop it please... Makoto... I’m so sorry” The smell of burning flesh was unbearable. Her voice was raw from the screaming though she still had enough in her to let out choked sobs, weakly pulling at the chains.

Don’t leave me...

Please...

I couldn’t protect you...

I promised...

I’m sorry...

Forgive me...

Forgive me...

Forgive me...

Forgive me...

An image flickered, just before the darkness consumed her.

The image of a ghost from her childhood.

The image of a little red-haired girl.

Smiling.

.

.

.

.

“Mukuro! STOP!”

The sound of her name being called is what finally wretched Mukuro free from her nightmare, gasping for breath as she opened her eyes. Though her vision was still blurry, she could make out Kyouko standing over her, the girl’s face twisted with pain; lavender eyes laced with terror.

“Let me GO!” She shouted again, and Mukuro was only confused for a moment before she realized the source of Kyouko’s pain was her. Mukuro’s hand was clasped around Kyouko’s wrist, blunt nails digging into her skin. Kyouko’s free hand was clawing and trying to wedge her wrist free, leaving red scratches along both her and Mukuro’s arm.

Horrified, Mukuro immediately released Kyouko’s wrist, causing the other girl to stumble back slightly, still staring with wide-eyes at Mukuro as she sat on the edge of her own bed.

Still freshly panicked and disoriented from her nightmare, Mukuro’s eyes frantically scanned around her surroundings, the orange glow of the sunrise too similar to the glow of the fire. She was still half-expecting to see the burning, melting corpses standing somewhere in her room.
She took a second to close her eyes, though the images in her nightmares seemed to be creeping at the edges of the darkness, which made her force her eyes to stay open once more.

“You were screaming in your sleep…” Kyouko said carefully, still keeping her distance. Mukuro turned her head slightly, still breathing erratically as her eyes scanned over Kyouko, studying her facial features to make sure she wasn’t the burning, faceless thing she witnessed.

Kyouko frowned and looked away. “I tried to wake you up, but before I could your hand grabbed my wrist and started twisting…I couldn’t move.” She said a bit reluctantly, looking back up at Mukuro.

Upon seeing Mukuro’s horrified expression, Kyouko’s eyes widened slightly, concerned. “B-But you were just sleeping. So you don’t need to feel bad about it.” She reassured, the most sympathetic Mukuro had ever seen her. It seems she isn’t used to seeing Mukuro so vulnerable. “It’s not like you were in control of yourself… right?”

The last part stung a bit, though Mukuro nodded in agreement anyway, which seemed to ease Kyouko slightly. “See? It’s alright. Just instinct. It could happen to anyone.”

Instinct. Junko was right, she was a monster, a killer. How could she ever think she could stop Junko when she was so ruined? Making friends will never change that. After all, she had just hurt her roommate purely on instinct. Why did her first instinct have to be hurting people? Her heart was pounding, and her chest felt like a cage around her lungs, she couldn’t make a sound, she couldn’t breathe--

“Do you want me to get you some water?” Kyouko asked gently as she rubbed her hurt wrist absentmindedly, noticing Mukuro’s struggle. Mukuro shut her eyes tightly, nodding. She kept her eyes closed, listening as Kyouko’s footsteps hurried towards the sink.

Mukuro sat up in her bed, trying to still her breathing as much as she could. She placed a hand to her chest, only to feel her heart beating extremely fast. After what she had just witnessed, she wasn’t surprised.

Wait, no. Witnessed isn’t the right word. That wasn’t real. That was just her subconscious playing tricks on her. That was just a nightmare. She knew it, but the shakiness she feels, and the tears running down her face, the tears caused by watching them die, those are real. The guilt and vomiting sensation she feels from hurting Kyouko, those are also real. Too real.

Before Mukuro could mull over this even further, Kyouko came back, a small plastic cup in her hand. Hesitantly she handed it over to Mukuro, who took it with shaky hands.

“Do you have nightmares often?” Kyouko asked calmly, sitting on the edge of her own bed as Mukuro took a sip from the cup.

“Yes.” Mukuro paused “When I was younger... But until recently, they’ve never been this…real.” Mukuro muttered, keeping her voice low to prevent any further strain. The image of the red-haired girl flashed in her mind.

“Mukuro, may I ask you a question?” Kyouko asked cautiously. Mukuro shrunk back slightly, preparing for the worst. Kyouko kept her expression firm as she carried on. “I know you’ve had a rough past. And that you might not want to talk about it.” Mukuro broke eye contact with her at that point, staring at the water in her cup instead. She heard Kyouko let out a slightly exasperated breath “However, it doesn’t take a detective to see the things that have been going on around the school. People are going missing. Information is being swept under the rug. And I have the feeling this is the
beginning of the worst. The calm before the storm, in other words.”

Mukuro somehow managed to shrink back even further. “That doesn’t mean I have anything to do with it.” She mumbled shakily.

“Two girls are dead Mukuro. Students are preparing to riot. Do you really think this is the time to hide things? I don’t know if you have anything to do with it, but I really don’t, but I find it a bit too convenient that your sister goes missing in the middle of this mess.”

Mukuro’s head snapped up “How did you know she went missing? Did—“

“Makoto didn’t tell me, if that’s what you were thinking. I went to visit Yasuke Matsuda at the hospital last night. The nurses let me ask him a few questions, and though he was delirious and insane, he did tell me enough to get me started. He reacted…strongly…when I mentioned Junko’s name. I can only assume she was the trigger, and—“

“What?” Mukuro cut Kyouko off there, barely able to even get the single word out. That name struck her like an arrow. Yasuke.

Kyouko’s firm expression cracked, revealing a twinge of fear. “I understand you feel upset that I didn’t speak to you about this, but Makoto asked me to not harbor you with questions—“

“You…You don’t even know what you did. Don’t you dare blame your…your stupidity on him. He is the only one who knows how to act like a fucking human being, because clearly neither of us do.” Mukuro’s voice was shaky, hardly intimidating, though it was still enough to cause Kyouko to flinch.

She could feel the fear and panic inside her twisting her mind, forming into irrational fury. She shouldn’t be angry, she really shouldn’t. Kyouko has been kind enough to help her. To let her carry weapons when she never should’ve been allowed near them in the first place. But Mukuro couldn’t forgive this. And the worst part is, Kyouko didn’t even know what could have happened.

“Mukuro, you have to understand. I gave you your space, but that doesn’t mean I could just sit by and do nothing. If I couldn’t talk to you, he was the next best thing.”

“He is barely recovering from a seizure and God knows what else, and you decided to fucking interrogate him? Do you know what could have happened? Do you know the fucking disaster you could have caused?” Mukuro’s hand begun to shake from both fear and fury. Out of habit she dug her nails into her palms, the pain keeping her from exploding out at Kyouko.

Kyouko watched hesitantly as tears began to roll down Mukuro’s cheeks, her breathing becoming erratic once more. “Mukuro. You need to calm down—“

“Don’t tell me to fucking calm down” She growled back.

The other girl glossed over Mukuro’s retort, continuing on. “You need to explain to me what you mean, or else I won’t be able to understand.”

Mukuro clenched her fists harder, until she could feel the familiar warmth of blood pooling at her finger tips. “She destroys people like you so quickly you w-wouldn’t even see it coming. S-She poisoned him, and I couldn’t even stop it! I couldn’t even protect him!” She shouted through heaving sobs.

Again, Kyouko didn’t fight back. Though Mukuro wasn’t even sure she wanted Kyouko to argue anyway. It became clear that this wasn’t just about Kyouko’s actions anymore.
Mukuro’s sobs became heavier, she had to take gasping breaths just to continue shouting. “Do y-you even know what could have happened? You could have been broken too! He could have spiraled even f-further away! I-I’m trying to protect you all but I can’t, I just can’t, and it’s my fault… he… has gone because of me…because all I-I am is a monster”

Mukuro’s knees gave out as she dropped to the ground sobbing and shaking. She wasn’t even sure when she had stood up from the bed. Her fingers kept scratching the insides of her palms, nails causing piercing pain as she tore the skin.

“He’s gone…because I couldn’t protect him… a-and you and Makoto could have been broken too… y-you both should just stay away from me…I don’t want to hurt you anymore…” She must look so pathetic now. The soldier, the killer, crying on the ground like a child. Throwing a tantrum because things aren’t going her way. The urge to shut both of them out was overwhelming. To just run away. But she just couldn’t, the chains around her were wrapped too tight. Like the metal chains from her nightmare, everything was holding her down. A weight she could never hope to lift.

Though muffled by the ugly, wretched sounds she made as she cried, the sound of Kyouko’s footsteps managed to reach her ears. Followed by the slamming of a door.

Of course Kyouko left her. Why should Kyouko stand by and be yelled at? Why should she be stand by and listen to someone like Mukuro? She doesn’t have any right to act like this. She doesn’t have any right to cry. She is a killer. A murderer. She betrayed Junko. She shouldn’t have left Junko. If she stayed, none of this would have happened. She should have just died for her sister. She should have just stayed quiet and obedient until her sister inevitably killed her.

That’s all she’s useful for. Killing people until someone eventually kills her. Junko knew it. The academy knew it. It seemed everyone did, except for her. A stubborn thought played in her mind.

You don’t deserve the right to feel sad for yourself

Quickly she shoved those thoughts away, because that couldn’t be right. Otherwise, all she had given up would have been for nothing. She couldn’t believe that. Otherwise, she would have brought everyone into the line of fire only to hide behind the gun.

She didn’t deserve the right to quit. She didn’t deserve the right to be sad.

Slowly, she pushed herself up off the floor on gentle, wobbly movements. She climbed back into her bed, hiding from her fears in the warmth of her blankets. She was too tired to cry anymore. Too tired to do anything but sleep. As she begun to do just that, a dim wish sounded in her mind.

I hope I never wake up.
For once, her sleep was nightmare-free.

Then again, she didn’t dream either.

Just a blank, blackness of time she had no way of accounting for.

The first thing she noticed when her eyes opened weakly was the bright yellow glow of the afternoon filling the dorm room. Thankfully, it was completely different from the orange glow of a flaming corpse. For that at least, she was grateful.

The next thing she felt was a sharp, deep pain in the palms of her hands. It was a familiar pain at least. What she didn’t expect to see though, was white bandages tied taut around her palms. The centers were already stained crimson from where she dug her nails in, when she was attempting to hold herself back from lashing out physically at Kyouko.

She stared at the carefully wrapped bandages, confused only for a moment before the creaking of the door caused her eyes to snap up.

Makoto stood in the doorway, watching her carefully. Even though it was in the middle of a school day, he wore a faded navy-blue hoodie and washed-out jeans rather than the uniform. Though she wasn’t really focused on his clothes, but instead his face. He opened his mouth to say something, though hesitated when he saw Mukuro’s expression.

To him, she must look horrified, as her eyes scanned franticly over his face. Though in reality, she was trying to reassure herself that he wasn’t the Makoto from her nightmare, not fully convinced that he was real and right there in front of her. Her fingers began twitching, fighting the urge to dig her nails into her palm again. Quickly she closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. She needed to calm down. She didn’t want to lash out at him like she had at Kyouko.

As her heartbeat slowed and she felt a bit calmer, she opened her eyes again. She watched as Makoto slowly closed the door behind him, smiling softly as he stepped into the room.

“Sorry if I woke you.” He said lightly. In his arms he held a couple more rolls of bandages. Ah. So he was the one who wrapped her hands. She looked back down at them, feeling slightly guilty that he had been the one to clean up her mess.

He followed her gaze down, his smile dropping slightly. “I treated them as best as I could. At least it’s enough to prevent an infection.” He added optimistically as he placed the rolls onto the nightstand beside her. He kept his eyes on her palms. “They were badly damaged and wouldn’t stop bleeding...there was just...so much blood...” He mumbled the last part, his expression turning slightly distant. He quickly shook the expression away, before taking a seat in the desk chair that had been pulled up beside her.

As he sat down, he gingerly took one of her hands into his. She suppressed the urge to pull away. “I’m gonna have to change the bandages...So it might hurt a bit.” He said apologetically.

“It’s okay. I’m used to pain.” She meant it to reassure him, though it seemed to have the opposite effect.
His smile cracked slightly, turning into a frown for only a fraction of a second before he corrected himself. “Well, either way, I’m glad you were asleep when I was disinfecting them, it probably would have hurt a lot worse if you were awake. I’m surprised you could even sleep through that.” He joked lightly, letting out a small laugh. It died when she didn’t join in. Instead, she was watching him carefully. He seemed slightly…off.

He turned his focus back on her hands, gently unwrapping them. She let out a hiss of pain as the bandage peeled of her skin, bringing fresh pain to her palms. He winced the entire time as he undid the bandages and re-wrapped them, as if he were the one in pain instead of her.

Each time he would slip up, or pull any noises of pain from Mukuro, he would snap his eyes up to her face, slightly afraid. And each time she would look back at him with confusion, he would respond with a gentle smile, as if trying to sate her.

He was treating her like she was made of glass, as if one wrong movement could shatter her.

It was infuriating.

“Stop doing that.” She mumbled as he wrapped new bandages around her palm. He froze for a moment, hesitating before continuing wrapping.

“What?” He replied, giving her a nervous smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

“That. You won’t stop smiling. And I can clearly tell you’re forcing it.”

“Sorry. It’s just…” He paused, slightly flustered. “You don’t need someone to be upset with you right now.” He finally dropped the fake smile.

Mukuro turned away. “Kyouko told you what happened, didn’t she?” She could see him nod once in the corner of her eye.

“She came to my dorm this morning, asking me to come and help. I don’t think she knew about your hands though. She stayed for a while when you were asleep and helped clean up the blood, but her father called her, saying he needed something. Apparently he’s gonna speak at some sort of assembly today.”

Mukuro looked over the bed she was lying on, seeing that even though the rest of the room was spotless, the pale grey sheets had blotches of reddish-brown blood stains. Another mess of hers someone else was forced to clean up.

“W-was she okay?” Her voice faltered slightly, giving away the guilt that as gnawing at her.

“Yeah, she was fine. She didn’t seem angry or upset. She was more worried than anything.”

Mukuro began fiddling with the end of one of her bandages. “Was you?”

“Was I what? Was I angry or was I worried?” He said as he gently pushed her hand away, stopping her from messing with the bandages he just wrapped.

She shrugged. “Both.”

“Of course I was worried. But no, I wasn’t angry. You’ve been through a lot, and it’s understandable that you’d have a breakdown like that at one point. But I would have preferred it if you didn’t hurt yourself in the process.” He said, glancing back down to her hands.
Other girls bite their nails or twirl their hair when they get nervous. Mukuro tore her palms to shreds. “It’s a bad habit. I...I used to do it when I was with Fenrir, and then when I was living with Junko. It was a scar I could hide easily. Those were the only scars I’ve ever had.” She felt a mix of pride and disgust with those scars, because they represented both her weakness and her strength.

Makoto frowned but didn’t argue with her.

“Anyway…if you know what happened, aren’t you scared?”

He tilted his head in confusion. “Scared of what?”

“Of me…you heard how I yelled at Kyouko…how I hurt her.”

“It was an accident” He argued.

“Accident or not I still hurt her. Aren’t you afraid that I might...that I might hurt you too?”

She expected him to agree with her. She expected him to run and stay far away from her. She expected almost every single reaction she could think of. Except for amusement.

He smiled, one eyebrow raised skeptically. “Mukuro, I’ve seen you break Nagito’s wrist in one movement. Even a few days ago you almost sliced my throat open. I’m pretty sure that if I was scared of you, I wouldn’t be sitting here and helping you, now would I?”

He did make a point. Then again, he might just be bad at keeping out of trouble. “I’m starting to think you might be a magnet for danger.”

“Oh come on, you’re the one walking straight into trouble every chance you get.” Someone else might have taken it as an insult, though Makoto was too kind to ever be cynical. Which is exactly why that comment pulled a smile from Mukuro.

“At least I can walk in a straight line without tripping over boxes.” She replied, smirking.

Makoto made a sound that was a mixture of a gasp and a laugh. “Oh my, did Mukuro just make a joke?” He mused sarcastically, a smile spreading across his face.

She pressed her lips together to hide her own smile. “Better not get used to it, it takes time to think of those.”

That final comment sent them both into a fit of laughter, for once the walls of the dorm room didn’t feel like a cage. Makoto was the only one who could sit and laugh with her like this, to laugh alongside a killer without being afraid. He was all things good, and she was everything wrong with the world. Where she was a coward, he was brave. Where she was cold and unfeeling, he was kind and thoughtful.

He was always finding a way to make her laugh, even when she was afraid and broken. He made her feel normal, even when she was anything but. He was hope.

Which is exactly why she needed to protect him.

After the laughter died down, his expression turned a bit more serious. “I hate to bring this up now but... we need to talk about it. I know you feel bad about what happened...and I’m not going to act like what happened was okay. Because it wasn’t.” He sighed, running a hand through his light-brown hair. Mukuro shrunk back again slightly, fighting the urge to fiddle with her bandages again as a distraction. “Even though you were too harsh on Kyouko, It doesn’t make what Kyouko did
okay, because she should have come to you before she talked to him. I take part of the blame for that.” She raised her eyes to his, shooting him a confused look.

He sighed again. “Well, last night I ran into Kyouko… apparently there was a murder in one of the girl’s dorm rooms. An officer thought I was guilty and Kyouko helped prove I’m innocent. In return, she wanted a favor from me. She wanted me to tell her what’s been going on with Ju--” He stopped himself, choosing his words carefully. “With your sister.”

Mukuro felt a slight panic shoot through her. But then she remembered Kyouko’s words.

‘Makoto didn’t tell me, if that’s what you’re thinking.’

Funny how even when Mukuro thought she was shielding Makoto and protecting him, he was doing the same for her.

“I told her I wouldn’t, that it was your business, because it was. She told me she would just go straight to you instead, but I asked her not to. You had just gone through a lot…and you seemed really relieved to get it all off your chest. I forced her into a situation where she could do nothing else but go behind your back.”

He really was trying to protect her.

He dipped his head down “I’m sorry Mukuro. I just…I wanted you to be happy for a little longer.”

He raised his head, only for his eyes to widen. Tears had begun to run clearly down Mukuro’s cheeks. “Oh god I made you cry, I’m so, so, so sorry I didn’t mean to-“

Mukuro shook her head, laughing slightly as she wiped away her tears. “No, please. Please don’t apologize. These are…happy tears. You were just…You were trying to protect me. Unsurprisingly, that doesn’t happen very often. Thank you.”

Hesitantly, his concerned expression melted into a smile as a slight blush rose to his cheeks. “That’s a relief…I don’t think I’d ever forgive myself if I made a girl cry.”

Mukuro’s smirk resurfaced. “Bullying girls? Not cool Makoto”

His smile widened. “Wow, two jokes in one day? Be careful not to overwork yourself.”

Mukuro sighed. “If I keep this up, my reputation as a terrifying soldier will be ruined.”

They both broke into laughter once more. After talking with Makoto, she felt a lot better. In fact, she couldn’t remember how long it had been since she was able to laugh and joke around like this. Contrary to what most think of her, Mukuro actually had a sense of humor. She never got to use it that often though. War had no room for laughter. Though now, as she watched Makoto’s eyes brighten every time she would giggle or laugh or even smile, it was a pretty good incentive to keep telling jokes.

Suddenly, like a slap in the face, she remembered the last thought she had before she fell asleep.

I hope I never wake up

Guilt returned like a dense fog, making her feel sick and her laughter feel forced. The moment seemed to last forever as she glanced over at Makoto, his face crumpled in a bright smile, one that made her heart skip a beat and break at the same time. She didn’t dare think about the effect her death would have on Makoto; both out of guilt and fear that the answer won’t be what she selfishly
wished it would.

The sound of the door creaking open shut them both up quickly, frightened eyes turning to the source.

Kyouko closed the door as she stepped in. Her lavender hair was pulled back into a single braid. Instead of the school’s light-brown blazer and white collared shirt, she wore her own blazer, one that was a deep shade of plum, along with a pleated black skirt.

“I could hear you two laughing from all the way down the hall.” She sighed, pointing an accusatory stare at Makoto. “For someone who’s only five two you’d think your voice would be a bit quieter.”

Makoto blushed, sputtering “W-what? I’m not that short…”

Kyouko raised an eyebrow. “Oh really? Is that why you wear platform sneakers?”

Mukuro’s face turned bright red. “I’m at least five three!” He argued, sounding very much like a child.

A small giggle escaped from Mukuro. Kyouko looked away from Makoto, settling her attention on Mukuro. She didn’t miss how Kyouko hesitated before speaking. “Glad to see you’re awake.”

Mukuro’s smile was instantly wiped from her face. “T-thanks…” she paused, trying to think of how she should apologize, yet she could feel her guilt and fear like a vice around her throat. “Kyouko, I-“

“You don’t need to say anything.” Kyouko said firmly as her expression instantly hardened. “We both did things that we shouldn’t have done. We’re even now. Simple as that. We have more pressing matters to worry about.”

Mukuro let out a breath she didn’t know she was holding. Kyouko’s simplicity was incredibly relieving, no hint of manipulation or smugness in her tone. She was so used to people holding things over her, using her guilt against her. She allowed herself a small smile, and for a moment, she could have sworn Kyouko smiled back.

Makoto was still focused on Kyouko’s words. “What do you mean by pressing matters?”

Mukuro didn’t notice up until now, but Kyouko seemed incredibly anxious. Her entire body was tensed, her arms crossed over her chest as if she was subconsciously guarding herself.

Kyouko remained firm as she spoke. “My father is holding an assembly in a few minutes. He is going to address the entire staff and student body about what has been going on, especially regarding the murders of the two students.”

Mukuro’s eyes widened. “Makoto mentioned there was another murder last night…But how could they find the killers so quickly?”

Kyouko frowned, looking away from Mukuro and instead towards the window, eyes unfocused. “They didn’t.”

After taking a minute for Mukuro to get dressed, the three left together to the assembly. Kyouko led Mukuro and Makoto out of the building, seemingly lost in thought as she walked ahead of them, at an unforgivingly fast pace. “It’s not like they will wait for us to arrive. We need to hurry.” Kyouko
had said when Makoto first protested against running. Mukuro had no problem keeping pace, her long legs easily taking big strides, though Makoto did have to jog a little just to keep up.

He glanced over at Mukuro, his chest rising and falling with every deep breath he took. “Interesting…choice of outfit…” he murmured, smirking slightly.

Mukuro could feel heat rising to her cheeks. “I didn’t have much time to pack before I ran away…” She instantly felt self-conscious.

Most of her clothing was black (and by most, she meant all of her clothing), though this specific t-shirt was special. There was a logo of a monochrome bear on it, one Mukuro and Junko had designed together when they started as Ultimate Despair. The bear’s face was split into two parts. Hope and Despair. Mukuro had drawn the white half of the bear, Junko the black half; including the sinister red lightning bolt the bear had for instead of a normal eye.

It was their logo, their symbol. Mukuro always hated that stupid bear. It was creepy, and too cutesy to represent so much malice and death. Even so, some part of her couldn’t bring herself to throw away the shirt.

“Speaking of clothing…I hope…the assembly doesn’t last…too long….We still need to get our…Yukatas for tomorrow.” Makoto reminded her, struggling to catch his breath in between words.

Mukuro had completely forgotten about the festival. The familiar feeling of panic began to set in. “After everything that’s happened, what if they don’t go through with it?”

A flicker of panic crossed over Makoto’s face, though he quickly wiped it away. “Even if they don’t…we can find Hajime Hinata…another way. Like…maybe we might spot him…in the crowd today.” He huffed.

Mukuro stuck out her arm a little towards him. “Here. We can’t talk if you’re oxygen deprived.”

Mukuro couldn’t tell if his face was red from blush, or just from the exertion. “T-thanks…” He stammered, tentatively wrapping his hand around her lower arm so she could help drag him along.

“Anyway, that would be a good idea…if we knew what he looked like.”

Makoto’s face fell a little. “Oh. Then…we’ll just have to research him later. Do you know anyone who has access to the school’s main server?”

Mukuro hesitated before nodding. “Yasuke does. He gave me access to his lab a while ago…I don’t remember if I took the key with me when I left Junko’s apartment. I could check my bag later, and if it’s there we’ll head straight to the lab.”

He smiled sheepishly. “It’s about time we had some sort of plan.”

Mukuro was about to reply with some sort of joke as they stepped out to the courtyard, though once her eyes fell on the scene in front of her, everything in her froze and her breath hitched in her throat.

The sun that was only a few hours ago shining through Mukuro’s window was now gone, hidden from view by clouds that twisted through the sky like tendrils of grey smoke. She felt like that smoke was choking her as she looked over the crowd of people, all facing towards a wooden stage that was noticeably built last-minute.

The crowd was split down the middle, split evenly into two rectangles of students. One look at the stiff and weary expressions of one side, versus the carefree yet still clearly confused expressions of
the other side, Mukuro quickly realized the separation was between main course students and reserve course students.

And they were expected to join their side of the crowd.

Mukuro couldn’t even think about how wrong it was, to split students based on their talents, she was too busy panicking because she needs to stand with them. Surrounded by people who are afraid of her, who don’t know her like Makoto or Kyouko do. People who will whisper and murmur about her, people who will stand way, way, way too close, their eyes pressing into her back like daggers, and they’ll see Makoto, and see Kyouko, and think poorly of them because they are standing with her, all because she’s the freak, the monster, the-

“Mukuro? Is everything alright…?” Makoto asked softly, as he tried to nudge her down the steps and towards the crowd.

She contemplated saying yes, saying that she’s fine but she was too busy focusing on not digging her nails into her palms. “No…I just…It’s…It’s too many people…” Her chest rose and fell with her panicked breaths.

Makoto’s eyes widened slightly. “You’re…afraid?”

Mukuro didn’t get a chance to respond before Kyouko noticed the two had stopped, turning to face them. She narrowed her eyes slightly, noticing Mukuro’s panic. “What’s wrong?” At Mukuro’s lack of response, she turned to Makoto “Is she having another panic attack? Because if so, you could take her back to the dorm and I’ll tell you what happened later-”

Mukuro shook her head frantically “N-no I want to stay…It’s just…”

“She’s uncomfortable with large crowds. Would it be alright to stay over here?” Makoto interrupted, understanding her words before she could even say them. Mukuro silently thanked Makoto for saying uncomfortable instead of afraid. She hated that word. It implied weakness.

Kyouko nodded hesitantly. “Of course. We can listen from here.” She said before slowly taking a seat onto the marble steps and looking towards the stage, quickly returning back to her thoughts.

Makoto tugged on Mukuro’s arm, bringing her down slowly to sit beside him. “You can calm down now Mukuro. It’s okay. Just take slow, steady breaths.”

She did as he said, focusing on the feeling of the cool marble on her legs. Feeling her panic seep away. “You’re…You’re good at this. Calming people down, I mean.” She added the last part hastily, stammering.

He shrugged, half-smiling. “I had really bad social anxiety in middle school. I used to have panic attacks all the time, so I know how to deal wi-“

The sound of microphone static cut his words short, all three of them turning their eyes towards the stage. There were now three men standing on the platform, and even from the distance she could see the tense expression all of them wore.

One of the men took a step closer to the front, a microphone in hand. “Good afternoon staff and students.”

Mukuro quickly recognized the man as Kyouko’s father, the headmaster, Jin Kirigiri. He didn’t bear much resemblance to Kyouko, except for his eyes, which were the same shade of purple as Kyouko’s.
“We are thrilled to see everyone gathered here as one community, especially after the troubled times we have been facing.” He stated the words firmly, locking eyes with the news reporters scattered at the back of the crowd. Suddenly a student began to push through the crowd, shoving closer to the stage.

“Is this how you show community?! Separating us because we are different?!” The student yelled from the main course side of the crowd, a girl with short, vibrant red hair. All eyes turned to her, though no one else tried to speak up, no one dared say a word.

One of the men who stood beside Kyouko’s father, a man in a fedora with shoulder-length blond hair, stepped forward. “There’s no need to cause a fuss. Unless you would rather be escorted out, Ms.Koizumi?” He narrowed his eyes at the girl, daring her to speak up again.

The girl opened and closed her mouth, struggling for words. “B-But-!” She managed to stammer, her face red with both anger and from the looks of it, embarrassment. A girl in a kimono moved towards the red-haired girl, resting a hand on her shoulder, reeling her back to her spot in the crowd.

“I feel bad for her…maybe she knew one of the victims?” Makoto whispered to Mukuro, keeping his voice low. Mukuro didn’t respond, instead keeping her attention on the stage. A bad feeling was stirring in her heart, sensing that something here was clearly wrong.

The headmaster continued with his speech, albeit shakier than before. “We know you are all mourning the great loss we have faced, the loss of two students who took their own lives, lives with such a bright future ahead of them.”

Mukuro felt an icy chill run down her spine. Took their own lives?

“We may never know why these two young girls committed suicide, though let us treasure their contributions to our community, and treasure the memories that they left behind for us.”

Instantly, murmurs began to run through the crowd, everyone shocked with the news. Mukuro snapped her head towards Kyouko, looking for some kind of answer, because surely they had made a mistake.

“Kyouko, what are they talking about? Those weren’t suicides, w-we saw them, that girl in the music room was clearly murdered.” She could feel Makoto place an arm on her shoulder, though she ignored the gesture, shrugging him off. “Why are they saying they were suicides?” She persisted.

Kyouko turned her head to meet Mukuro’s eyes slowly. The other girl’s expression was firm as she shook her head, the small movement somehow bringing pain to Kyouko’s eyes. The message she was silently conveying was clear. I had no part in this.

The headmaster continued on, raising his voice a little louder to talk over the crowd. “We extend our deepest sympathies to the families of these girls.” The headmaster hesitated before continuing. “To the Kuzuryuu clan, we offer our most sincere condolences for the loss of your daughter, and we lend our support in the challenging days ahead.”

“Thank you, headmaster Kirigiri.” A stern man in a dark suit responded gruffly from his spot at the side of the crowd. Mukuro’s skin turned pale, her blood running cold, as she recognized the man from her time as a mercenary.

She had taken down a few members of the Kuzuryuu clan before, and though it wasn’t exactly difficult, they did not go down without a fight. They carried strength in numbers, with extremely perfected tactics and strategy. They were intimidating, powerful, but above all, deadly. Seeing their
leader here was incredibly unsettling.

Beside her, she heard Makoto inhale sharply. “Oh my god…” the shake in his voice instantly set Mukuro on edge. Suddenly, He lurched over Mukuro’s lap, reaching to tug on Kyouko’s sleeve. “That’s him! That’s the boy I bumped into, the one with the blood on his hands!” He said in a harsh whisper. Kyouko’s eyes widened in response as he pointed towards a boy standing beside the Kuzuryuu clan leader.

Kyouko looked towards the boy. “That’s Fuyuhiko Kuzuryuu, the heir to the Kuzuryuu clan…My father never told me that he was involved in this…” She said, shaking her head.

Even with the pin-striped suit and buzz cut, the boy looked nothing like a gang heir. His face was round and filled in at the cheeks, making him look more like a chubby child than someone who should be feared or respected.

"I mean, I knew Natsumi Kuzuryuu was the first victim, but…” Kyouko trailed off as the boy nodded in acknowledgement to the headmaster’s words, a grimace set on his face. “If he was the killer in one of these cases…”

“Then there isn’t anything we can do.” Mukuro finished for her, realizing the truth behind the situation. Kyouko looked away, frowning. “If the academy continued the investigation and found Fuyuhiko guilty, it would start a war. The clan value pride and honour above all, and if the academy challenged that, it would not end peacefully.”

Kyouko nodded solemnly in agreeance. “My father warned me that he was going to lie to the press…I suppose it really was their only option. Even if it meant letting a murderer get away.”

Makoto’s shoulders sank as he sighed. “Even though he did kill someone…he lost his little sister. If I were in his place, and it was Komaru who was murdered…I don’t know how I would react.”

Mukuro felt a pang of pain at his words, the image of the little red-haired girl from her nightmare resurfacing. She shouldn’t be focusing on that girl, that girl is long dead. Yet some part of Mukuro just can’t let go of that girl. The girl who wasn’t bored with life, who hadn’t discovered despair, who hadn’t bleached her hair bright pink. The sister Junko used to be.

The headmaster spoke up again, breaking Mukuro away from her thoughts. “Sadly, Ms.Sato’s family could not attend, though we extend our support to them as well.” The headmaster cleared his throat, looking over the crowd nervously. “We need to be strong in these times of sorrow, and continue to push forward to a bright future. Which brings us to our second topic of discussion, the cultural festival.”

Suddenly the entire crowd was on edge, bracing for the answer. Mukuro found herself on the edge of her seat as well. The culture festival could mean success or failure in terms of their plan. The entire school would attend, which was the only guaranteed way they could find Hajime Hinata. The only way they could stop the Izuru Kamukura project before it was set in motion.

“The council and I have talked about this topic extensively, and after long hours of deliberation, we have come to a decision. In moments like these, we need to stay as a community. And there is no better way to do that then to continue on with the festival, and prove that we are as strong as ever.”

The crowd exploded at his words, shouts of anger, joy, and sadness morphing into waves of screaming, the flashing of cameras stinging Mukuro’s eyes. Security guards began to push forward, attempting to settle the crowd, though nothing could calm the screams of the students.
“You’re all monsters!”

“The headmaster’s right!

“Let’s celebrate!”

“Stop complaining, we have work to do!”

“This isn’t respectful to those girl’s memories!"

“We need to stay strong!”

“They don’t even care that students are dead!”

“Just because they’re dead, doesn’t mean we need to act dead too!”

This wasn’t right, Mukuro knew that, though for her to stop Hajime Hinata this needed to happen. The shouts began to fade away, becoming static in the back of Mukuro’s mind as she turned to meet Makoto’s eyes. They were wide, bright, hopeful; blurring out the background until all she could see, all she could hear was him.

He smiled, thrilled at the news. “The plan is going to work. You can do this.”

She shook her head softly. “We can do this.”

Chapter End Notes

Wow updates that aren’t a month apart? Shocking
Anyway, hope you guys enjoy! If you have anything to say, feel free to comment! I'd love to hear your feedback!
Happy Easter! (is today even easter idk)
As soon as the assembly ended, the entire academy was spurred into action. The headmaster had announced that all classes were cancelled for the rest of the week, so that the entire school could have time to prepare for the festival tomorrow night.

Instantly students scrambled to find their friends; making plans and arranging activities. Some still protested, feeling guilty about having fun right after such a tragedy, though were quickly swept into the same excitement as everyone else. The two girls who had been brutally murdered were quickly forgotten. The memories the headmaster vowed to cherish were already fading away.

Mukuro and Makoto were struck by the same adrenaline that the other students were, though for an entirely different reason. The two had work to do. They decided to head back to Mukuro and Kyouko’s dorm to decide what to do next.

“Once I find the key, we should head to Yasuke’s lab. It shouldn’t take long, so we might have time to get our Yukatas afterwards.” Mukuro told Makoto from her spot on the ground beside her bed. She had her duffel bag pulled out, the one she had taken from her and Junko’s apartment, and was searching through it haphazardly.

“T’s a little late to hand-sew our own Yukata’s now...Especially with only two people.” Makoto sighed as he hopped up onto Mukuro’s desk, swinging his legs as he sat on the ledge.

She paused from searching to glance at her alarm clock. It was already four in the afternoon. Even an Ultimate Seamstress couldn’t make a Yukata from scratch alone in that little time. Mukuro wasn’t even sure there was an Ultimate Seamstress, though she liked to think that there was just so she could prove her point.

“We can go to one of those specialty shops downtown tomorrow. Maybe if we’re lucky they’ll have some pre-made ones.” She suggested, though inside she knew that they would be sold out, especially since the festival was one of the biggest celebrations across the city. “Or we can just not go at all if you’re just going to pout about it.” She countered, noting Makoto’s disappointed expression.

A light blush rose to Makoto’s cheeks. “W-well you’ve never gone to a cultural festival before, so I wanted to make sure you’d have fun, even if it’s sort of like a mission and—Hey are you alright?” He cut himself off, noticing that Mukuro’s head snapped up suddenly in the middle of him speaking.

“Y-yeah.” Her eyes were unfocused, as she remained completely motionless, listening to the sound of footsteps, mixed with some sort of metallic twinkling sound somewhere in the distance. She focused on the pacing of the footsteps: firm, quick, straight to the point. “I think Kyouko is back.”

She mumbled before turning back to searching her bag. Quickly, she spotted the glint of metal inside her duffel bag, grabbing it and slipping it into her pocket. Exactly what she needed. The key for Yasuke’s lab.

Just then, Kyouko opened the door and sauntered into the room, a set of her own keys dangling between her fingers. Makoto shot Mukuro a look of surprise. “I’m both impressed and slightly creeped out.”

“How’d talking with your father go?” Mukuro asked Kyouko carefully, ignoring Makoto for the
moment as she shoved the duffel bag back under her bed.

The other girl shrugged as she stepped in, not bothering to take off her shoes. “He was swarmed by the press, though when I got him cornered he didn’t tell me anything we didn’t already know. He knew the girls were murdered, but couldn’t anger the Kuzuryuu clan. They’ve already cleared all the evidence. Including the bodies.” Kyouko mumbled as she walked to her desk, picking up her purse and swinging over her shoulder.

“You guys did everything you could. At least no one else was hurt.” Makoto supplied optimistically. Though Mukuro appreciated the effort, it didn’t help to ease the guilt.

“Now that that’s settled,” Kyouko spun around to face both of them, meeting Mukuro’s eyes. “If you’re still up for it, we could head to the fabric store now.”

Mukuro blinked. “You still want to go? After…after everything that’s happened?”

“I told you we’ve already moved on from that. The store closes at five, so we need to hurry and leave now if you want enough time to make the Yukatas.” Kyouko explained in a no-nonsense tone of voice.

Mukuro was stunned silent for a moment. Though she had accepted Kyouko’s forgiveness earlier, it was still hard for her to believe. Should it really be this easy? Did she even deserve it? Kyouko seemed to have misinterpreted Mukuro’s silence as apprehension rather than shock.

“Makoto can tag along too. I assume he has to pick out fabric for himself.” Kyouko turned her eyes towards him, only for her expression to settle in a glare. “But only if he stops sitting on the desk.”

Makoto paused for a moment, before leaning forward to rest his head in his hands. “Why? This is Mukuro’s desk.”

“You’re still not using it for its intended purpose.” She said as she narrowed her eyes at him.

He did the same back, as if challenging her. His eyes then flitted down to Mukuro. “Hey Mukuro, can I sit on your desk?”

She looked between Kyouko and Makoto, suppressing a smile. “You have my permission.”

Makoto leaned back, pulling his legs up to crisscross them. “Sorry Kyouko, her authority trumps yours. Besides, like you said we’re leaving soon anyway.” He said before untangling his legs and actually lying down across the length of the desk, crossing one leg over the other. By that point Mukuro had to actively suppress her laughter.

Kyouko merely rolled her eyes. “I’m going to get my car from the lot and pull it to the front of the campus”

“You can drive?” Mukuro asked, impressed. She knew how to drive as well, though she didn’t have a license or anything. No time to take lessons when you need to maneuver a tank through a warzone.

“Yes. And if you keep letting him sit on desks inappropriately I’m never driving either of you again.”

Makoto raised his head slightly from the desk. “I don’t know Kyouko, maybe you’ve just never experienced the joy of not being, pardon my language, a hardass”

Kyouko’s glare harshened. “Meet me outside the campus in five minutes.” She said before stalking out grumpily and closing the door just a slightly harder than normal.
As soon as the door shut Makoto and Mukuro broke into laughter. “Why are you taunting her like that? I didn’t think you were the type to do things out of spite…”

“I’m not.” Makoto sat up, returning to his original position and dangling his legs. “But that said, when someone makes fun of how short I am, they’re asking for a fight.”

A laugh that sounded more like a snort escaped Mukuro, which only made them laugh harder, until tears were stinging both of their eyes.

After calming down a bit, Makoto hopped off the desk, walking over to Mukuro and extending his hand out to her.

“C’mon. If we leave her waiting she’ll hate me even more.”

She took his hand even though she really didn’t need any help getting up. Even though her hands stung when they made contact, she didn’t want to let go.

“Is it alright that we stop by the neurology lab on our way back? I need to pick up a few things” Mukuro asked Kyouko from her seat at the back of the car. She purposefully kept her words vague her tone clear, all in hopes of keeping away any questions.

Makoto had called shotgun and was sitting at the front. He kept fiddling with the radio controls because, in his words, Kyouko’s ‘music taste is “depressing crap and makes me think you probably had an emo phase in middle school”. Mukuro decided not to mention that she actually enjoyed that ‘depressing crap’. He slowly turned down the volume just to hear Kyouko’s response.

Without taking her eyes off the road, Kyouko mumbled a “That’s fine.” The other two let out a breath of relief, only for it to be immediately retracted. “Though we do have some time before we get to the shop, so I’d like to ask you a few questions.”

Makoto leant back in his seat, leaving the radio alone for the moment. His expression turned slightly serious. “What kind of questions?”

Kyouko remained firm, tightening her grip on the steering wheel. “I want to help you two. There isn’t much I can do to help the school alone. It doesn’t matter which of you does, just someone tell me what’s been going on.”

Both Mukuro and Makoto’s skin turned pale, apprehension sending panic through both of them.

Of course Kyouko would ask this when they were trapped inside a car, where the only way to get out was jumping through the window into oncoming traffic.

Mukuro briefly considered doing just that.

“I understand that it may be hard to talk about, but I already know about your time as a soldier and what happened to your parents from your case file, so you can skip over all of it—“

“What happened to her parents?” Makoto repeated, craning his head to look at Mukuro who was doing everything she could to shrink into the corner of her seat. “You never told me anything about your parents…” Makoto mumbled, slightly confused.

She just shook her head because she really didn’t want to talk about it, didn’t want to bring back the
memory. She had buried it a long time ago, along with the memory of the red-haired girl who she couldn’t bring herself to associate with Junko anymore, because those were bad bad bad memories, ones she never ever ever ever wanted to think about again.

Makoto was quickly picking up on the signs of Mukuro’s panic, seeing how her fingers kept flexing with the urge to scratch her palms, seeing her pupils dilate with the primal instinct to escape. He quickly turned back to face forward.

“I’ll tell you Kyouko. It might be easier if it comes from me.” He said, all too quickly. Makoto made eye contact with Mukuro through the driver’s mirror, eyebrows turned up apologetically.

She gave him a small nod, giving him her permission silently. She really didn’t want to go through explaining anything right now. Especially since she couldn’t shake the slightly hurt expression Makoto wore when he learned that she hadn’t told him about her parents.

“I-is it alright if I take off my seatbelt? My h-head hurts and I n-need to lie down…” She mumbled, dark spots dancing at the corners of her vision.

It clearly wasn’t alright by the way Kyouko frowned, though she quickly suppressed it. “Just be careful not to roll forward if we hit a bump.”

Mukuro didn’t respond, curling up into a ball as she lied on her side, focusing her eyes on the back of the car seat just so she could block out their voices.

The volume of the radio turned up just as Mukuro’s eyes closed, the sound of the music weaving its way into her mind.

She recognized the song.

It was one she used to listen to constantly only a couple months ago.

A memory of her sitting in Junko’s room, her younger twin teacher her how to paint her nails without getting any along the sides of her fingers, danced in the darkness of her eyelids. Music was blaring out of Mukuro’s flip phone, it was one of the few times Junko let Mukuro pick the song.

That was one of the good days. One of the days where Junko hadn’t screamed bloody murder at her, hadn’t thrown things or set fire to Mukuro’s room just to see if she could get out in time. The song was slow but comforting, and even though her sister kept speaking over it, Mukuro could only focus on the lyrics.

*Calling your name in the midnight hour*

*Reaching for you from the endless dream*

*So many miles between us now*

*But you are always here with me.*

Ah.

There was the image of the red-haired girl again.

Mukuro wasn’t surprised that she had fallen asleep. Slowly she opened her eyes, noting that they
were still driving to the store. She couldn’t have been out for long, since Kyouko mentioned it was only a half-hour drive to get to the shop.

She didn’t make any movements to announce that she was awake, instead watching as Kyouko swatted Makoto’s hand away from the radio, leaving one hand to grip the steering wheel.

“If you touch that dial one more time I’m forcing you to sit in the back with Mukuro. Trust my word as her roommate when I say she kicks in her sleep.” Kyouko said firmly, only half-joking.

Even though Mukuro couldn’t see it, she could tell Makoto was smiling. “Well maybe it was your boring music that put her to sleep in the first place.” He said as he leaned his head against the window.

Kyouko promptly swerved the car to jostle it, causing Makoto to hit his head against the glass.

Makoto made a sound that was a mix between a groan and a laugh as he rubbed the spot where he slammed into the window. “That was a little harsh, don’t you think?” He chuckled.

“It’s my car. I think it’s justified.” Kyouko said flatly.

Makoto paused before speaking again. “Thank you for driving us. And…I’m sorry for annoying you.” He mumbled the last part like he was forcing himself to say it.

“It’s fine. I can tell you’re just doing it to lighten the mood. I think we all need some of that. And as for driving you, it’s no problem. We all need some kind of distraction from the weight of everything lately.” Kyouko answered plainly as she turned the car onto a road lined with thin, claw-like branches.

“Tomorrow night won’t be easy, for any of us. It’s better that we have some fun before everything goes serious again.” Makoto said as he slumped a bit further down into his seat.

“Why are you doing all of this? You don’t seem like the type of person who would team up with a known murderer and put yourself in danger.” Though her words seemed harsh she held no malice in her tone, just pure curiosity. She really wanted to know.

“I could ask the same thing to you.” He deflected.

The air suddenly turned tense, the temperature in the car dropping. Makoto’s voice was sharp, a bit too defensive for the simple question Kyouko had asked. It wasn’t as if Kyouko had over-stepped her boundaries there, she clearly didn’t mean anything harsh by her words. Why was he being so defensive?

“Fine.” Kyouko turned just enough so he could see her glare at him. “The first thing a detective needs to learn when trying to solve a case is motive.” She explained clearly. “Without motive, the case is meaningless. My motives are clear. I want to protect the academy my father is doing his best to run. I didn’t work this hard to get my talent just so I could stay on the sidelines.”

She then gave him a look that clearly meant ‘your turn’.

Mukuro shouldn’t be listening. She should let them know that she is awake and can see them, but then again they aren’t technically talking about her so it wasn’t like she was being creepy, which is what she told herself to justify not moving at all.

It was silent for a few seconds. Mukuro didn’t think he was going to respond. But then he did.
He sighed deeply before speaking. “I first met Mukuro at orientation. I remember seeing her, and I smiled at her because…because I don’t know, I saw her sitting alone in the back of the room, and I smile at everyone but I felt the need to smile at her. She seemed so surprised. It was like, she didn’t think it was meant for her. She didn’t think anyone would notice her. It was like she thought she didn’t deserve a smile.”

Mukuro remembered that day too, remembered just why she reacted the way she did.

He was the first person to ever smile at her. To really smile at her. Not condescendingly or twisted, like Junko did; not with the hollow emptiness of a ‘yes that’s nice dear, now go back to your room’ like her parents used to. A real smile.

“That’s isn’t an answer to my question.” Kyouko pointed out dryly.

Makoto turned to cast a glare at her. “I wasn’t finished. Look, I’m not a very remarkable person. I don’t have much of a talent, not like the rest of our class. I know what it’s like to feel worthless. I know what it’s like to feel like no one would notice me. I guess I saw a bit of myself in her.”

Mukuro could feel her heart beating so loudly she was worried that Makoto and Kyouko would be able to hear it.

He somehow shrunk deeper into his seat. “The difference between us is that…no one has ever told me that I’m worthless, or that I’m nothing. But I feel it, and sure there’s this little voice in my head that tells me but it’s not really there. Just knowing that she lived hearing that, every single day, by her own twin sister is just…” Makoto huffed angrily. “I mean, she was abused, and manipulated, and twisted until the only thing she is confident about doing is killing people. Even through all of that, she still smiles sometimes. She makes jokes. She’s determined, and selfless.” His head whipped around to face Kyouko. “And I’m not going to sit by and let people keep calling her a killer. Or a murderer. Because she’s more than that. Even if she’s doing this for Junko, to stop her…she isn’t doing it for some selfish reason. I want to prove to her that she’s more than what her sister made her.”

There was a pain in her chest, one that made breathing difficult, though somehow she still felt a smile on her lips. It was as if he had looked at everything she hated about herself and laid it all bare for her to see, only to tell her she was so much better than all of that. It hurt, to hear all her insecurities spoken out loud, yet at the same time her head felt clearer than ever before. He saw the good in her. She didn’t even know good existed in her. It hurt, but in the best way possible.

Kyouko stayed silent for a moment. “So, in a way, your motive is her?”

He half-smiled. “I guess so.”

Mukuro didn’t get up after that. She decided to just stay silent and lie down, waiting until the car was parked and she could get out. A part of her almost didn’t want to move. Didn’t want to leave this moment, where she was close enough to hear Makoto hum along to some over-played pop song on the radio. Where she felt her heart beating a mile a minute, where all that existed was her and two people who didn’t fear her. But by then, the car had turned into a u-shaped driveway surrounded by an array of brick buildings, each one with pin-striped awnings over the entrance, the edges of the fabric fluttering gently in the wind.

The three walked through the parking lot and entered one of the stores, one with a small wooden sign hanging on the door that read ‘Samidare Fabrics’.

Mukuro was about to ask Kyouko if she knew the owner but when they entered the store, she was
struck speechless.

It was unlike anything she had ever seen.

The entire store was lined with shelves filled to the brim with rolls of cloth, each unique and vibrant in their own way. A center table was draped in fabric that was studded with rhinestones and miniscule crystals, glimmering under the glow of the sunset filtering in from behind delicate tulle curtains, casting speckles of light across the room. Intricate tapestries were hung from the walls, images of animals and landscapes strewn together with thread. It was an entirely different type of fashion. It was meant to bring out certain thoughts, certain feelings, something that any meaningful piece of artwork should do. It was lovely.

Junko would have adored this place.

She felt a pang of guilt in her heart though chose to ignore it, losing herself in the magic of the store. Kyouko was busy chatting with the cashier who she appeared to know quite familiarly. Makoto followed close behind Mukuro as she hesitantly stepped closer to the fabrics, walking beside the shelves. She paused to run her hand over a cream-coloured fabric that was peppered with shimmering gold and copper leaves. It reminded her of an autumn day.

“That one’s my favourite.” The cashier chirped as she walked towards them, Kyouko by her side. Out of habit, Mukuro immediately stepped back to hide herself slightly behind Makoto, which earned her a confused look from Kyouko, one that lasted barely a moment.

Kyouko’s smile resurfaced as she extended a hand, gesturing to the girl. “This is Yui Samidare. We used to do detective work together back when I was still in middle school. She runs this shop with her family.”

Mukuro looked at Yui from over Makoto’s head. She had short brown hair with a few blonde streaks running through it. She seemed a bit older than them, and even though she had never met Mukuro before she smiled like they were old friends. “It’s nice to meet you! Honestly, I’m kind of surprised Kyouko made any friends. Even though she’s still as adorable as she was when she was younger.” She joked lightly, which caused Kyouko’s face to turn red with embarrassment.

At a glance, seemed airy and light-hearted, though her eyes were a completely different story. Behind thick-framed red glasses were harsh, attentive green eyes that Mukuro could feel watching her every move, the kind of eyes that could see right through you. Detective’s eyes.

“Im Makoto and this is Mukuro. It’s nice to meet you too” He responded for her. She gave Mukuro an odd look, narrowing her eyes, though before Mukuro could think too much about it Yui quickly smiled and turned back to Kyouko.

“Is there something specific you guys need? I was just about to close up the shop but if you’d like, I could show you some of my more high-quality fabrics, depending on what you need it for.” Yui suggested helpfully.

Kyouko went on to explain to her how pressed for time they were, asking if she had any pre-made Yukatas they could buy or even rent, explaining how they only had one day before the festival.

“Sorry to tell you, but we’re all sold out of pre-made Yukatas…” She sighed, as if she were the one running out of time instead of them. “Y’know, we aren’t really supposed to be open for much longer today, but if you come back earlier tomorrow, I’d be glad to help you sew ones from scratch.” Yui said, clapping her hands together.
Kyouko’s eyes went wide, already raising a hand in protest. “Yui, that’s really alright, I mean you have a lot of work on your hands already and—“

“You three probably don’t even have any sewing materials, do you?” She deadpanned, looking over the three.

None of them spoke up; they hadn’t even thought about how they would sew the fabric.

“Then it’s settled. Be back here by noon tomorrow, and we’ll start working on them.” She said firmly, implying no room for argument.

Kyouko sighed, putting as much exhaustion into her tone as possible. “Thank you for the help Yui.” She turned to look at Mukuro and Makoto. “She’s not going to change her mind, so you two should just look around for a while, I have some things to discuss with Yui.” She managed to get out right before Yui grabbed her by the wrist, dragging her to the back counter and laying out some of her favourite fabrics to show Kyouko.

Makoto turned around to face Mukuro. “Would you like to lead the way? You seem much more interested with the fabrics than I do.” He smiled.

Mukuro felt her cheeks redden. “S-sure…This store is really pretty…” She mumbled as she began walking alongside the shelves, Makoto following close behind. “Most fabrics for clothing and stuff like that are made by machines...but these are all hand sewn…”

“I didn’t know you were interested in fashion”

“Well, my twin is the Ultimate Fashionista.” She said lightly, looking at Makoto over her shoulder. The smile that followed those words came out a little too forced, a little too pained.

“S-sorry, I didn’t mean—“

“It’s fine. She would have loved this place. I hope one day she gets to see it.” Mukuro mumbled, just quiet enough to make it seem like she meant it only for herself to hear.

“I hope so too.” He said back, just as quiet.

Those four words meant more to her than he could ever imagine.

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone! Hope you enjoyed this chapter, I decided something a bit lighter would be fun to read.
Also if you’re interested, the song mentioned earlier is called Here with me by Susie Suh x Robot Koch.
(Emo!Kyouko is best Kyouko)
A link to the song is here: https://youtu.be/a5sux0Ap-FI
Hello everyone! It's nice to be back! I'll give some more details about the future of this fic and my plans for it down in the bottom, but it's been long enough and I think you guys deserve to jump right back into the story! Let's kick this off with a rather...revealing chapter, shall we? ;)

As promised, the three came back the next day at noon to sew their yukatas at Yui's fabric store. They all loaded into Kyouko's car, with Mukuro and Makoto sitting in the back.

Kyouko forced Makoto to sit in the back, claiming that she needed the front seat open to keep their fabrics safe, though Mukuro was pretty sure she just didn't want him to touch the music anymore.

"Yui closed down the store so we could work with her, so let's be sure to finish quickly. We don't want to take advantage of her kindness," Kyouko said, speaking extra loud so she could be heard over the punk-rock song currently being blasted over her stereo.

"I've sewed plenty of times before, this will be a piece of cake," Makoto answered confidently, equally as loud. Kyouko merely gave him a small unimpressed look through the reflection of her rear-view mirror.

"You'd think with all that sewing experience you could make something better to wear other than that musty old hoodie," Kyouko shot back dryly, turning her attention back to the road. She missed Makoto bring a clearly fake shocked expression to his face with a loud gasp.

"Excuse you, my hoodie is great!" He shouted back, crossing his arms with a fake pout. "And it is very fashionable." He added, almost as an afterthought, his pout morphing into a joking smirk that played across his lips.

Mukuro didn't miss how his eyes briefly flitted to her as if to gauge a reaction, though his smirk dropped when he saw her blank and slightly distracted expression.

"Is everything okay, Mukuro?" He asked in a hushed voice, just quiet enough to be drowned out by the music, but loud enough for only Mukuro to hear.

She quickly snapped out of her daze, forcing a tight-lipped smile to her face. "Y-yeah. I'm fine. Just excited to sew, and stuff," She lied shakily.

Her mind was running a million miles a minute, anxieties and thoughts bouncing around her mind like bullets ricocheting off a concrete wall. There was so much to think about. She could feel her nervousness like it was a tangible thing, like this powerful electricity running through her veins, making her feel irrationally jumpy. So much counted on tonight.

She had to find Hajime Hinata.

She had to convince him to not join the Izuru Kamukura project.
She had to find Junko.

She had to stop her.

What really made her panic, was the fact that she didn’t really know how to stop Junko. What if they stop the Izuru Kamukura project, and it solved nothing? What if Junko just looked at them like it didn’t matter, and had been sending them on this wild goose chase to stop a project that didn’t exist? Junko is a master at manipulation, so really anything is possible.

She might even show up to the festival.

That thought alone struck a deep, cold, and primal fear through her. What would she even say to Junko, if she saw her tonight? There were so many things she wanted to ask her. She wanted to yell at her. She wanted to make her feel just as bad as she made Yasuke feel. She wanted to break her in all the ways she broke him. In all the ways she broke Mukuro. But could she? Mukuro felt her uncertainties settle like a heavy weight in her chest, so much that it felt almost hard to breathe.

Suddenly, she felt a hand lie over her own hands, which were currently digging into the leather seat of the car. She looked up from them to see Makoto staring at her with a gentle, fond smile. “You’re a terrible liar, you know that right?”

Even though that calmed her enough to release her grip on the car seat, somehow his smile only made her heart beat even faster. “S-sorry.” She managed to sputter out.

He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. “Don’t worry so much. Everything’s gonna be fine.”

Mukuro shot back a lopsided sort of smile. “You really think so?” She asked sheepishly.

“I know so,” He said with a smile that was far to bright for the dim light in the car, squeezing her hand one more time before letting go.

And there, right there, was another reason she felt so nervous.

Heart, you stupid, stupid thing. Mukuro thought silently to herself.

The store looked very different during the day time.

Instead of the soft orange glow of the sunset she had seen before, a bright yellow light lit up the room. It made everything feel so alive; it made the fabrics flash with a whole new level of beauty. Mukuro couldn’t help but wonder how the store would look like when it was busy and filled to the brim with people. For a second time, the small shop had rendered her speechless.

Yui sat behind the front counter, a laptop placed on the surface in front of her. She wore a serious and harsh expression that felt somehow out-of-place on the sweet girl, lit up by the artificial light of the laptop screen.

When she noticed them walk in, she raised her head, a smile instantly overtaking her face, leaving no trace of the harshness she wore before.

“Welcome back, you guys! Right on time!” She chirped before snapping the laptop shut and getting up to greet them.

Maybe the others didn’t notice, or maybe Mukuro just imagined that odd moment, because Kyouko
smiled before stepping forward to give her friend a quick hug like nothing happened. “Nice to see you again, Yui. We really can’t thank you enough for the help,” Kyouko said gratefully.

Yui waved her hand in dismissal, a cheery smile on her face. “I’m happy to help. Anything to get you to visit more often.”

Makoto stepped forward, holding the bundles of fabric they had bought yesterday in his arms. “Where should we put this? We should get to work right away,” He said hurriedly. He was right; they were pressed for time and every minute counted.

Yui clapped her hands together happily. “Straight to business! I like the enthusiasm,” She said with a little wink. Kyouko rolled her eyes jokingly in response, which only made Yui smile brighter. “I’ve set up the sewing machines and templates out in the back of the store. You and Kyouko could go ahead and get ready, I just need Mukuro’s help for a moment.”

Makoto and Kyouko did as she said, stepping around the counter and into a room in the far back. Makoto looked back over his shoulder to give Mukuro a small, reassuring smile before the door closed behind him. It made something flutter in her chest, small and fleeting, but nevertheless there.

As soon as the door shut, Yui’s smile dropped from her face.

“Okay, so I lied about needing help,” She said bluntly and quickly, her voice carefully low. “But I needed to ask you a few questions.”

Her words didn’t catch Mukuro by surprise. She remembered how Yui was looking at her the first time they met. Back then, she looked at Mukuro like she was a criminal. Something to be wary of. Mukuro was used to this look, but coming from someone as kind as Yui… it must be something serious, to warrant such an expression. She felt her hands itching towards the daggers she has tucked away, but quickly forced herself to keep them at her side.

This is Kyouko’s friend. She’s not in danger here. She could handle a few questions.

*I’m not in danger here.*

Yui’s eyes searched Mukuro’s face intently before continuing. “Anyway, I’m not sure how close you are with Kyouko or…” She paused, her face scrunching up in thought.

“Makoto,” Mukuro offered.

Yui smiled guiltily. “Right. Makoto. So just to be safe I didn’t want to show you this with them around,” She said, before walking quickly towards the counter where her laptop sat closed.

Mukuro hesitated to step towards her, Yui’s serious expression throwing her off. “Show me what…?”

Instead of reaching towards the laptop like Mukuro expected, Yui reached under the counter, pulling out a pink box wrapped in a frilly cliché red bow. “This was mailed to me yesterday, only a couple hours after you guys left,” She explained, slowly removing the ribbon from the box. “There was a note attached. There’s no return address on the package, so I opened it…”

Mukuro stepped closer to the counter, watching cautiously as Yui lifted the cover of the box. Inside, laying in pale pink tissue paper, was a neatly folded bundle of silver, dark blue, and black fabric. On top of the fabric, was a small envelope, with her name scrawled on the front in delicate cursive writing.
Mukuro recognized that handwriting.

Yui reached into the box, pulling out the envelope and extending her hand out to Mukuro. “Here. I’ve already read what’s inside it, so you can take a look. After all, it is addressed to you…” She trailed off as Mukuro slowly reached forward to grab the envelope.

Inside was a letter, hand-written on black-and-white spotted stationary. Mukuro recognized that stationary. Her hands began to shake as she read the letter. It wasn’t very long, but all the same Mukuro felt that everything was moving in slow motion.

Dear Mukuro,

I’m sorry I couldn’t give this to you myself, but I suppose some things can’t be helped. I really wish you’d come and visit me more often, sweetheart.

Anyway, about the package. The cultural festival is coming up, and I was sure you would have made plans to go. Was I right in my guess? ;)

You used to love the fireworks. Perhaps we could watch them together.

Inside the box you’ll find a yukata. I made it myself. It would make me so happy if you would wear it. I thought I could save you some time, so that you wouldn’t have to make one yourself.

I know how little time you have these days. Well, you’ve always been such a busybody Mukuro, you should really take some time off! Find peace in the fact that some things are out of your control.

I made sure the yukata is nice and warm, to make sure you won’t get sick like Yasuke. Speaking of Yasuke, give him my regards, but make sure to keep your distance. We wouldn’t want you to catch his illness.

I hope to see you soon. Enjoy the package. We’re going to have such a fun time together! :)

Love,

Ryouko Otonashi

In the time that Mukuro had read the letter, Yui had pulled out the yukata from the box, holding it up and examining it.

“It’s very well made. High-quality fabric. But its very thick, even for a yukata…” Yui began mumbling to herself, critiquing the quality and craftsmanship of the yukata to herself under her breath.

Mukuro, on the other hand, was breathless. She could see dark spots creeping into the corner of her eyes, her heart beating a mile a minute. How was this possible? It had to be a lie, these words…they aren’t real. They can’t be. Mukuro’s head was pounding, her vision swirling.

Everything seemed to center back to that name, to those two words written in swirly, mocking, delicate cursive.

Ryouko Otonashi.

Junko’s real name.
The person Junko used to be.

The person who had come back to haunt her.

“Mukuro?” Yui said hesitantly, her hands empty. *When did she drop the yukata?* Mukuro’s eyes darted to the box, where the yukata was folded neatly. *How long have I been standing here, like this?*

She looked down to the letter in her hand, which had become increasingly crumpled at the sheer force Mukuro was clinging to it. Yui slowly reached for it, though Mukuro yanked her hands back instinctively. When Yui tried again, Mukuro quickly let go and gave it to her, before stepping away from the box to pace around the room.

She couldn’t look at it, her head hurt too much, it was all just *too much.*

*Breathe, Mukuro. Just breathe. Calm down.*

She tried to take a deep breath in, and while the first attempt was shaky and left her even more breathless, the next few attempts were better. She was slowly, very slowly, able to bring her heart rate down enough to hear Yui’s words.

“Ryouko Otonashi, have you met her in person?” She asked, and though Mukuro was still pacing around the room, not looking at her, Mukuro could feel Yui’s eyes following her every movement.

“I…I don’t see h-how this is necessary,” Mukuro didn’t mean to come off as harsh, though her tone had a certain bite to it that she didn’t intend.

Yui’s determination didn’t waver at all. “Answer my questions, and you can leave. Don’t answer them, and I’ll write you down as resisting cooperation with an investigation.”

Mukuro’s head whipped towards Yui. Mukuro searched her face, for any hint of gentleness. There was none. Behind the girl’s thick, red glasses, Yui’s eyes were deadly serious. Mukuro took another shaky breath. “Investigation?”

Yui hesitated, looking over Mukuro once more. “Yes. When I was still starting out as a detective, I was assigned to a rather gruesome case. We never ended up solving it. That case was the murders of Ayako and Takeshi Otonashi.”

Mukuro stopped pacing, her entire body freezing in place. “W-why would I know anything about them?” She asked, her voice weak and squeaky.

Looking at Yui, Mukuro knew she was just playing dumb. No doubt she had already researched heavily into Mukuro’s past, and into Ryouko’s past. These questions were just to see how much Mukuro was willing to reveal. To see what kind of mistakes Mukuro would make.

If anything she said didn’t match up with what Yui had already researched, she might end up arrested. Mukuro really didn’t want to have to hurt Yui, but if the situation rose, she had to do whatever she could to get out.

“At the time of the murders, the couple was on vacation in Europe, with their two daughters. Twins, actually,” Yui continued, eyes still pinned on Mukuro. Her mood had shifted significantly, turning cold yet still holding an intensity that was hard to look at.

Mukuro didn’t move. She didn’t say anything. She knew this story well.
“The family had been in their hotel room, the two girls with them. Hotel staff didn’t hear any screaming, didn’t see anyone strange entering the building. They didn’t know they were dead until a week after the murder, when other guests started to complain about a strange smell.”

Mukuro didn’t know that last detail. It stabbed her heart in a million different ways, leaving her head spinning once more.

“The twins were seen entering the room with their parents, but were missing after the murder. Police assumed they escaped out the window, perhaps evading the killer. Or they were kidnapped.”

Mukuro kept silent.

“They were never found. Neither was the killer. Both vanished without a trace.” Yui finished, her voice even and carefully blank.

Against her better judgement, Mukuro spoke up. “H-How—” The words got caught in her throat. She tried again. “How did they die?” She asked, even though she really didn’t want to know the answer.

Yui seemed to be debating whether or not to tell her, visibly weighing her options, in the slight tilt of her head. After a moment, she sighed. “Blood loss. There were gashes across their legs, and along their arms. The killer clearly made sure they couldn’t run away. The fatal wound was an identical cut along both their throats. The cuts weren’t deep, but they were precise. The killer knew what they were doing.”

Mukuro nodded, as if none of this surprised her. It didn’t, not really. Tears were blurring the corner of her vision, though she hesitated to wipe them away. “Why tell me all of this? What questions do you need to ask me? You run a fabric store, why waste your time with a case that’s been unsolvable for years?” Mukuro spat out, her voice a little louder than intended.

Yui didn’t speak for a moment, looking over Mukuro. “I run the fabric store to help out my mother, but my detective work is still my number one priority. Listen, I’m sorry, Mukuro. I know this is… difficult, but it’s important. This case has been open for almost nine years. This is the first lead to Ryouko Otonashi I’ve ever gotten, and I know you’d want to protect your sister but—”

“Stop,” Mukuro said, quickly and harshly.

Yui’s jaw audibly clamped shut.

“I’ll tell you what I know, but I’d like Kyouko and Makoto to be here,” Mukuro said weakly.

Yui nodded. “Alright. It wouldn’t hurt to have another detective helping out. I’ll go get them,” Yui said before quickly turning and heading into the back room.

Mukuro stood in the front of the store, alone for a while. Yui must be telling them everything she knows. While the girl may be blunt, she is smart and sympathetic. It didn’t make any of this easier.

She hadn’t thought of her parents in years. She hadn’t thought of that day, either. She tried not to think of Ryouko.

Even so, Mukuro always had a weak spot.

Ryouko was the weakest spot she had.
OOooookay. So. Lets get this out of the way.
It's been quite some time since I've written about Mukuro. (Obviously)
I ran into a writers block a few months ago, and lost the motivation to keep going. I felt blank. I tried to write, but i couldn't. Everything i tried to write just wasn't good enough. Months passed. And then school started up again.
If you were to thank anyone for this fics revival, it would be my Grade 12 English teacher. She's the reason i found motivation. She helped me so much with my writing, its unreal you guys.
Another group of people to thank: All of you who have been leaving comments in the past few months i've been away. It warmed my heart to see people enjoying this story, even while i was away.
Expect a lot more from this story. We've only just begun. And I'm excited to continue, and bring this story of despair that turns to hope to a grand finale!
Yui still hadn’t come back.

With every minute that Mukuro stood alone in the front of the store, she could feel herself withering under the pressure of the situation just a little more. Piece by piece, the wall she had built to protect herself from that part of her life was falling down.

Mukuro had cornered herself into a situation where she could no longer hide anything. She had to tell Yui everything about her past. When Kyouko mentioned her parents…about how she knew what happened to them, Mukuro felt her heart break into a million pieces. A deep, primal instinct to hide was still running through her veins.

She didn’t want to talk about her past. She told Makoto about almost everything else in her life, but that part, those few early years…she never wanted to speak of them again. Having him with her might make it a bit easier, but not by much. She had bottled up her emotions for so long that it would be excruciatingly painful to say everything now.

Her hands were twitching, fighting the urge to dig her fingernails into her palms. She struggled against the urge, millions of strings inside her heart pulling and tugging against each other. She felt like a puppet, cut down from its chords. Forced to face the reality that she can’t do anything on her own.

*Stay calm, Mukuro.*

All she could do was wait.

She walked over to one of the fabric shelves, putting as much distance between her and that yukata as she could. She looked at one of the more soft-toned fabrics, running her hand over its gentle surface to calm herself. But she couldn’t. Too many thoughts were bouncing around her head. Dangerous thoughts. Dangerous memories.

She had opened a box, a box of memories so deep on her mind she was sure she lost it. But no, it was still there. It was weathered with time, its sting just a little weaker, but it was still all too vivid.

She saw the faces of her parents flash through her mind, so quick and fleeting she had to grip both sides of her head just to make it stop.

She hadn’t thought of them in years. Of their death. On the other hand, she thought of their killer quite often.
Too often.
The worst part of her life was flashing through her mind.
And all she could do was wait.

... ... ...

NINE YEARS AGO

The worst part of the trip was the train ride.
It was loud, crowded, and constantly bucking from side to side.

Mukuro did as much as she could to sit deeper into her seat, just so she would not disturb Ryouko, who was sitting beside her. Her sister had a small compact mirror in her hand, the one Mukuro had bought for her a few years ago on her birthday. It was bright-pink and studded with rhinestones, as bright and bubbly as she was. She had a fluffy brush in her other hand, working with precision to dust her cheeks with a light peach colour. The brush probably had some complicated and fancy name, but Mukuro didn’t have a clue. Not that it mattered, anyway. The thought of painting her face with makeup, caked in layers of artificial colour, made her cringe.

Suddenly, the train hit a rather large bump, and Mukuro was jostled so hard she slammed against Ryouko’s elbow, causing the brush to lurch and dust a faint peach streak across her forehead.

Instantly, Mukuro scrambled back into her seat, leaning away from Ryouko. She felt the eyes of other train patrons digging into her back, and it made her hands shake. “S-sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

Ryouko rolled her eyes and sighed, causing Mukuro to only shrink down more. “You’re such a clutz, Mukuro. It’s disappointing.”

Mukuro was struck speechless for a moment. She glanced over to her parents, sitting on the row across from them. They were both caught up in a conversation with each other, bright smiles on their faces. They didn’t seem to notice. “I’m sorry…” She repeated shakily to Ryouko, her hands folded in her lap timidly.

Ryouko closed the compact with a quick snap. “I suppose I shouldn’t expect anything else, really. Predictable. Whatever.” She grumbled before tucking the compact into her purse. She reached inside, pulling out a small cloth and wrapping the brush before tucking it into the purse with the compact.

“I really didn’t mean to bother you, I—”

Ryouko silenced Mukuro with a wave of her hand. “Yeah, yeah, I get it already. Just don’t do it again.” She said tiredly before turning away from Mukuro, resting her head on her hand and looking out the window.

Mukuro was confused. She looked over Ryouko oddly. What was wrong with her today? She was
never this grumpy.

If Mukuro tripped or fell or bumped into her, usually she’d just laugh it off and joke with Mukuro, never really getting angry with her or being mean. Was she even angry? She didn’t say she was mad. She said she was disappointed.

Mukuro looked her over one more time. Ryouko had lifted one of her hands to her forehead, rubbing lightly. When the peach colour came off visible on the tips of her fingers, she made a *tsk* sound and turned back to the window.

She didn’t seem angry, or upset.

She looked…bored.

The hotel room was nicer than Mukuro expected, though they wouldn’t be in it long. Their parents had told them all the details of their trip, how in the next couple of weeks they’d be jumping from country to country, travelling all across Europe. It sounded like fun. But sightseeing wasn’t the only reason Mukuro was excited to be travelling.

The famous mercenary group Fenrir had bases all across the Middle East, which was only a few miles away from where they were staying this week, and Mukuro wanted nothing more than to meet them.

She knew her parents would never let her join them, of course. They were even against Mukuro researching the group in the first place. They were a bit more accepting of her interests once her Fenrir articles were published by some of the more popular military magazines, but actually *joining* a mercenary group? Never going to happen.

That was fine with Mukuro, she didn’t want to leave Ryouko on her own anyway. Who knew how long she’d be away, and what if she wasn’t cut out for the group in the first place? Sure, she had extensive knowledge about weaponry and battle strategies, but deep down she knew reading about them and how they work is way different than actually using them in a real combat situation. Adding her clumsiness to her lack of experience, and it was a recipe for disaster.

So, she wouldn’t join them. That was fine. But if she could just meet them, and maybe even have the chance to see them in person and tell them just how much she was amazed by what they do, that would be enough.

She let that dream settle into her heart, giving her the determination she needed to put on a smile.

When Mukuro stepped into the room, she immediately took off her shoes, stepping onto the pristine white carpet. It felt nice and fluffy between her toes, and just as she was about to turn and tell this detail to Ryouko, she was silenced by her twin quickly pushing past her, bumping their shoulders together harshly as she did.

“Ryouko…” Mukuro mumbled under her breath as the red-haired girl kicked off her shoes and jumped onto one of the two queen-sized beds, lying on it with a *whoomph*.

She was about to ask Ryouko if she was okay, but then her mother came over and ruffled Mukuro’s hair lightly. “Nice room, right sweetie?” She said with a distracted smile, not really looking at Mukuro.
“Oh…Um, yeah,” Mukuro said hesitantly, still watching as Ryouko stared vacantly at the ceiling.

“How about you two set up your things while we wait for your father to finish checking us in?” Her mother said, not really paying attention to the fact that Ryouko wasn’t listening to her anyway.

Mukuro didn’t really see the point in getting all cozy and comfortable in a room they’d only be in for one night. However, Mukuro knew arguing this fact with her mother was a waste of time, so instead she gave her a timid smile. “Yeah. Okay,” She said quietly. Her mother nodded.

“Here,” She said, passing Mukuro her little camouflage patterned suitcase. Mukuro took it, wobbling a little at the weight of it, before looking back up to her mother. She had already turned away, stepping back into the hall to grab the rest of their things.

Mukuro dragged her suitcase to the left side of the bed, laying it against the nightstand. Just as she was about to slide her suitcase under the bed, she felt a tap on her head.

She turned to look up at Ryouko, who had crawled over to her, balancing on the edge of the bed, her legs folded underneath her. She was staring at Mukuro with narrowed eyes.

“Are you setting up your things here?” She asked dimly.

Mukuro looked at Ryouko, then at her suitcase, then back to Ryouko. “Is something wrong with that…?” Mukuro asked slowly.

Ryouko made a bitter looking face. “I want to sleep on the left side.”

Mukuro blinked at her. “But…you always sleep on the right side.”

Ryouko rolled her eyes. “And now I want to sleep on the left side. Move your things.”

“Why? Is something wrong with the right side?” Mukuro asked, glancing over to the side in question.

Ryouko huffed. “Nothing’s wrong with it, I just want the left side, alright? Its not that big of a deal. Move.”

Mukuro hesitated. “Is something wrong, Ryouko?”

Ryouko teetered a bit, tilting her head side to side. “Not really. Just wanted to…switch things up for once,” She reached down and tapped Mukuro’s head one more time. “Now move.”

Mukuro paused before nodding and picking up her suitcase and dragging it over.

For the first time in seven years, Mukuro slept on the right side of the bed. It wasn’t any different from the left side, but for some reason she felt things were changing somehow.

She wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

Without much more trouble, Mukuro had fallen into a deep, calm sleep. It was the kind of sleep where you didn’t dream, but you didn’t need to. You felt at peace. Mukuro didn’t have nightmares often, but having her twin beside her always helped soothe her into this particular kind of sleep.

That night, it didn’t last long.
She was startled awake by the feeling of hands shaking her arm roughly. Mukuro instantly scrambled up and away from the arms, almost falling off the bed in the process.

She was about to cry out for her mother, when one of these hands slapped over her mouth, effectively silencing her. Mukuro’s eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, just enough to make out Ryouko’s bright-red hair and bright-red eyes staring at her.

She tried to speak, but she couldn’t with Ryouko’s hand in the way. So, she did what any seven-year-old would do in her situation. She stuck out her tongue, licking Ryouko’s hand.

Ryouko instantly pulled her hand back as if Mukuro had burned her, quickly wiping it on the bed. “Ew, what the hell was that for?!” She hissed.

Mukuro rubbed her eyes tiredly, yawning. “Couldn’t breathe. Why did you wake me up? Is something wrong?” she asked as Ryouko continued to wipe her hand on the bedsheet, which Mukuro thought was a little over dramatic, because she didn’t lick her that much.

Ryouko sighed, tilting her head from side to side, as if debating something in her mind. “Well, I wasn’t tired.”

Mukuro stared at her twin blankly before rubbing her eyes again wearily. “I told you that you wouldn’t be able to fall asleep on the left side—”

Ryouko made a whining sort of sound, placing both her hands on Mukuro’s shoulders. “Ugh, it’s not the bed, okay? I fell asleep, but then I woke up.”

Mukuro carefully reached up to peel her sister’s hands off her. “And you decided to wake me up because…?”

Ryouko took a deep breath before continuing. “Because I’m not tired, and I wanted to go outside, so I thought, hey, maybe Mukuro wanted to come with me, because she’s such a pitiful child who can’t talk to people in public, but its nighttime so everyone’s sleeping so maybe we can go out in public without her crying like a baby and stuttering, but then I thought that maybe the night wouldn’t change anything, but then I thought après moi, le deluge, so I woke you up anyway, but if you want to just stay here and be lame then that’s fine with—”

“Ryouko, Mom and Dad said to stop talking in French, you know I don’t know what you’re saying,” Mukuro sighed tiredly, cutting her off. “Also, it’s way too dark to be outside, and we’re not old enough to go alone—”

Mukuro stopped when Ryouko quickly moved away from her, quickly hopping off the bed and onto the ground. The sound of her bare feet hitting the floor was luckily muffled by the plush carpet. Mukuro looked across the room, to where her parents lay peacefully asleep. Mukuro wished she was doing the same thing as them right now.

“Come on,” Ryouko whispered with a little wave of her hand, before running towards the door.

“Ryouko, wait,” Mukuro whispered back, struggling with her blankets for a moment before hopping off the bed and following after her sister. As soon as she stepped onto the carpet, she tripped over her own feet, landing face-first to the ground. “Mmph—” Mukuro groaned into the fluffy surface, because even though the carpet was soft, falling was never a pleasant experience.

“Mukuro, stop messing around and help me unlock the door. I can’t reach it on my own,” Ryouko sighed impatiently, used to Mukuro’s clumsiness by now.
Mukuro wearily raised her head from the floor, neck craning to watch as Ryouko kept jumping up and down in front of the door, arms in the air. Mukuro sighed and hung her head. “Ryouko, what are you doing?”

Ryouko stopped jumping and turned around, hands on her hips. “I’m trying to open the door, duh. Now help me. The lock is too high,” She said matter-of-factly before going back to jumping.

Mukuro pushed herself up off the ground, but didn’t walk towards Ryouko.

Ryouko noticed. “Uh, hellowooo. Did you not hear me? Come and help.”

Mukuro didn’t move. “I don’t think we should be doing this… We’d get in trouble if the hotel staff saw us running around—”

Ryouko suddenly clapped her hands together in delight, softly enough to not wake up their parents. “Good idea! We just need another way out then. One where not many people would see us,” She hummed before stepping away from the door, pushing past Mukuro to look around the room.

Mukuro sighed in frustration. “That’s not the problem here, Ryouko.”

“Are we on the first floor?” Her twin asked, completely ignoring Mukuro’s protests.

Mukuro eyed her hesitantly. “Yes, but I’m not sure how that is important right now…”

Ryouko’s smile widened as she stepped across the room, towards the large window across from them. With flourish, Ryouko drew apart the big, billowing blue curtains, and placed her small hands against the glass. Mukuro immediately caught on, running forward to stop Ryouko just as her hand reached for the latch.

Mukuro’s hand reached for Ryouko’s wrist, gripping it tight. “Ryouko, stop, you’re not thinking straight, we should be sleeping, not—”

Mukuro was silenced by the feeling of Ryouko’s free hand striking her across the face. Pain blossomed across her cheek, and tears immediately welled in Mukuro’s eyes, but both girls were silent.

Ryouko had never hit Mukuro before.

Ryouko looked just as surprised as Mukuro was, her eyes as wide as saucers. Ryouko’s eyes flitted from the red spot on Mukuro’s cheek down to the hand that had struck her, curling her hand into a fist and then releasing it, repeating the motion over and over again.

“Ryouko…” Mukuro said shakily, her lip trembling.

Ryouko didn’t look away from her hand. “Did that hurt?” She asked softly.

Mukuro looked at her oddly for a moment, before nodding slowly. “Yes.”

“How did it make you feel?” She asked, just as soft as her first question.

Mukuro didn’t know how to respond. So, she said “It made me feel sad.”

Ryouko nodded too, as if Mukuro had asked her a question instead. “I didn’t mean to do that… isn’t that weird? I didn’t… predict that. I hurt my sister and I didn’t know what I was doing. It surprised me.”
When Ryouko looked back up to Mukuro, she was smiling. A bright, and crazed smile. “It surprised me,” She repeated.

Those words made Mukuro feel an emotion she had never felt from Ryouko before.

Fear.

With those words, Ryouko reached back around and closed the curtains, before pushing past Mukuro and hopping back onto their bed. She tucked herself into the right side, and turned her body to face the wall, leaving Mukuro standing alone and afraid in the middle of the room.

Mukuro didn’t get much sleep that night.

The next morning, Ryouko acted like nothing had happened. She was acting completely normal, so much so that Mukuro briefly wondered if she had dreamed up everything that happened that night.

But sure enough, when Mukuro sat in front of the bathroom mirror, brushing through her short and tangled black hair, she saw the clear hand-shaped red mark on her cheek.

A bit of that fear from last night rippled back through her. The smile on Ryouko’s face flashed through her mind and made her cringe.

Mukuro loved her sister more than anything in the world. Her sister was her role model, and she would do anything for her, no matter what it was. But she was afraid. For the first time in her life, her sister was confusing her. She didn’t understand her.

Mukuro wanted to understand, she had to understand. Ryouko was her twin. No one else could understand her like she could.

Mukuro Otonashi and Ryouko Otonashi. They were two halves of a whole, and Mukuro was incomplete without her. The only thing she could do was try her best to understand why Ryouko was acting the way she was.

It started on the train. Did Mukuro do something wrong then? *Disappointed.* That’s what Ryouko said. What did she mean by that? She said Mukuro was predictable. But then, when Ryouko hit her…she said she didn’t predict that.

All of this thinking was hurting Mukuro’s brain. She wasn’t the smart twin. She needed help to figure this out, but the only one she could ask was Ryouko. She wasn’t sure if her sister would answer. Mukuro wasn’t sure what her sister would say, even if she answered.

When she stepped back into the main room, Ryouko was sitting on the bed, with her legs crossed. She held a beauty magazine in her hands and was flipping through it idly.

“Where’s Mom and Dad?” Mukuro asked, noticing their absence. Both their suitcases were open on their bed, clothes hanging over the brim and strewn across the rumpled sheets.

“They didn’t say where they were going, but they’ll be back in a while.” She said flatly, not looking up from her magazine.

Both girls were used to this behaviour from their parents. Ayako and Takeshi Otonashi were very much in love, and enjoyed every minute they spent together. However, they did not share this love
with their children.

It wasn’t unusual for the two to disappear for a few days, or leave the girls alone at night while they went on one of their many, many dates. They lived in a big house, and on some days Mukuro and Ryouko may not even bump into their parents at all. The girls were very self-sufficient, knowing how to cook and take care of themselves.

One time, a couple years ago, Ryouko and Mukuro ran away from home. It was all Ryouko’s idea, of course. She wanted to try living on the streets and see how long it would take for their parents to notice they were missing. Mukuro came along, of course, because she would never leave her sister alone.

It took them two months to notice the girls were gone.

When the girls returned home, their parents were very upset with them. They were grounded for a week, but since they came back relatively unharmed, their parents didn’t worry too much about it. Since then they’ve paid a little more attention to their daughters, but not much.

Both girls still loved their parents though. They would do anything for their attention. Ever since middle school had been approaching, their parents had been paying more notice to the girls and their activities.

It wasn’t a secret that Ryouko was a genius, and would never have trouble in school. The girl’s analytical abilities were remarkable, and after visiting a few specialists her parents were sure that Ryouko would be guaranteed an Ultimate title at Hopes Peak Academy once she was old enough.

Mukuro on the other hand, was having a bit more difficulty. Her parents weren’t very comfortable with the idea of having a daughter known for weaponry and military related talents. Mukuro was sure that eventually, her parents would warm up to the idea.

If she was lucky, they might even let her visit Fenrir while they were in Europe. This was her chance to show them that she could be useful.

Spurred into action, Mukuro rushed to her suitcase, searching through her things for the little folded map she brought with her. She could feel Ryouko’s eyes on her as she happily spread the map out across the floor, straightening out the creases carefully.

Her eyes scanned across the multi-coloured paper, before spotting the little red stars she had marked on the map to represent each of Fenrir’s bases. She looked for the little blue dot she had marked down to represent each of their stops on their Europe trip, only to see that the first square, the stop they were at now for only one more night, was almost overlapping with one of the red dots.

The closest base was only a short drive away.

Mukuro could feel her hands shaking with excitement. They were so close. The people that she looked up to the most, second only to Ryouko.

She could meet them.

Maybe they could give her some advice. Or tips. Maybe they’d let her take pictures for her articles. Maybe they’d even let her interview them.

As these thoughts bounced around Mukuro’s head, she didn’t notice that Ryouko had closed her magazine, hopped off the bed, and stepped into the small kitchenette that was set up in the corner of the room.
As she studied the map closely, examining which routes would get them to which base the fastest, she heard the kitchen drawer open.

Mukuro briefly glanced over, catching a glimpse of Ryouko casually grabbing something from the drawer and pulling it out.

Mukuro saw a flash of silver in the corner of her vision.

Then heard the pattering of liquid dripping on the floor.

Slowly, Mukuro looked away from the map and faced Ryouko fully.

She thought that maybe Ryouko had cut some of her hair off, which was why she could see red splashed across the tiled floor of the kitchenette.

Her heart stopped for a moment.

It wasn’t her red hair.

It was blood.

“Interesting.” She heard Ryouko mumble.

Instantly, Mukuro scrambled up, running towards Ryouko, calling out her name. She stopped in front of her, only to see Ryouko examining the back of her arm, looking at it inquisitively. A large, clean gash was cut across it. It wasn’t deep, but the sheer amount of blood dripping down it made Mukuro turn cold.

“R-Ryouko…W-what did…What did you d-do?” Mukuro asked shakily, taking careful steps forward.

Ryouko glanced up from her arm, smiling at Mukuro. “How do you feel right now?” She asked.

Mukuro sputtered, struggling for words. “T-that’s not important, we need to stop the bleeding, w-we need—”

“How are you feeling, Mukuro?” Ryouko repeated, harsher this time, but still with a smile. How was she so calm? Her sister was bleeding out, right in front of her. Mukuro was shaking. She felt like she couldn’t breathe. But Ryouko wanted her to answer. Her brain fumbled for an answer. “I don’t know,” She said shakily, holding back tears.

Ryouko frowned slightly. “You don’t know?” She asked a bit sadly, her arm still dripping with blood. Slowly Ryouko reached up with her free hand, before digging her fingers into the gash.

Mukuro gagged, almost vomiting at the sight. Ryouko didn’t stop, but she winced a bit, still smiling through the pain.

“Answer me Mukuro,” She hummed.

“W-why are you doing this?” Mukuro asked, horrified. Her head was spinning. All she could see was red. Red eyes. Red hair. Red blood.

Ryouko frowned again. “You don’t know?” She asked a bit sadly, her arm still dripping with blood. Slowly Ryouko reached up with her free hand, before digging her fingers into the gash.

Mukuro gagged, almost vomiting at the sight. Ryouko didn’t stop, but she winced a bit, still smiling through the pain.

“W-why are you doing this?” Mukuro asked, horrified. Her head was spinning. All she could see was red. Red eyes. Red hair. Red blood.

Ryouko frowned again. She dug her fingers deeper, wriggling them around. “Everything has become so…predictable,” She said tiredly. Mukuro couldn’t look away from the gash. She could see dark spots dancing around her vision. She couldn’t move. “But this? You feeling hurt, feeling...whatever you are feeling right now, I can’t predict that. What are you feeling right now,
Mukuro? I’ll stop if you answer,” She said pleasantly.

“Ryouko, please don’t—”

Ryouko wriggled her fingers deeper. A laugh bubbled up in her throat, a horrible cringing sound that had Mukuro close to vomiting all over again. “Don’t you want to make sure your sister isn’t in pain anymore? Answer my question Mukuro. I want to know.”

“Ryouko please stop—”

“Answer. The question,” She said through gritted teeth. Her smile turned strained as her fingers continued to move around. Mukuro caught a glimpse of bone.

“I feel…desperate,” Mukuro finally managed to get out.

Ryouko’s eyes sparkled. “Desperate? That’s a bit broad, lets narrow it down, shall we?” Her fingers stopped moving, but she didn’t remove them. Mukuro stopped herself from reaching forward and pulling them out herself. That might make the wound worse. “Find a synonym for me Mukuro. You can do it. You’re a smart girl,” She said encouragingly.

Mukuro’s chest felt like it was collapsing on itself. “I feel hopeless. Helpless. I want to help you, but all I feel is…despair,” She murmured quietly, her eyes still focused on Ryouko’s arm.

Ryouko let out another bubbly laugh. "Despair. That's it. Despair. The one thing I can't predict.”

Slowly, Ryouko removed her fingers. Mukuro let out a breath she didn’t know she was holding. Blood still gushed out, painting the tile in a deep crimson. Ryouko almost looked like she was melting in it.

“Thank you, Mukuro. You’ve helped me. Aren’t you glad that you helped your sister?” She asked innocently.

Mukuro nodded slowly. That’s all she could do. Nod.

Ryouko took a few steps forward, her feet making a sickening squelching sound as they stepped through the blood on the floor. She pulled Mukuro into a hug, a hug that Mukuro shakily returned.

“Since you helped me, I will help you. I’ll convince Mom and Dad to let you see Fenrir. That’s what you wanted, right?”

Mukuro nodded. What she really wanted though, was for the feeling of Ryouko’s blood running down her arm to stop. She wanted to get medical attention for Ryouko. Instead she nodded.

Ryouko giggled. “You are my sister after all, I would do anything for you,” She said so sweetly, it was unnerving. “Wouldn’t you do the same for me?”

Mukuro pulled away to look at Ryouko’s kind face, before nodding slowly. Suddenly Ryouko shot out her hand, gripping Mukuro’s arm. “Ryouko what—”

“You would do anything for me, wouldn’t you?” She said with a hollow smile before digging her nails into Mukuro’s skin, causing her to yelp out in pain. Mukuro tried to squirm away, but Ryouko held her in place.

Mukuro couldn’t make a sound. She could see Ryouko becoming impatient.

“Answer the question Mukuro,” She sing-songed, a smile still on her face.
“Yes, of course, I would do anything for you, please let me go—” Mukuro pleaded, but Ryouko only pouted, her grip still strong.

“Are you just saying that so I’ll let you go?” She hummed, digging her nails deeper.

Tears blurred the corner of Mukuro’s vision. “No, no, of course I’d do anything for you, you’re my sister, I—”

“Would you die for me?” Ryouko asked, her tone suddenly dark.

Mukuro fumbled for words, her head spinning as she looked at her sister, the sister she loved so dearly, the sister who loved her more than anything.

“Would you kill yourself, if I told you to?” Ryouko restated, when Mukuro’s expression remained blank.

She didn’t want to make her sister upset. She couldn’t. But all she could feel was her nails digging into her skin, piercing her with a sharp pain. All she could see was the trickling of Ryouko’s blood running down her wrist. She didn’t want her sister hurt. She wanted to protect her sister. She would do anything for her sister.

Mukuro Otonashi and Ryouko Otonashi.

Two halves of a whole.

She would do anything to protect her.

“Yes. I would die for you, Ryouko. I would do anything for you.”

Ryouko smiled.

Chapter End Notes

This might be my longest chapter yet, and it was originally meant to be one part. I have decided to split it up, so stay tuned for the second part to come out in about a week, maybe a bit less.

I apologize if I grossed out anyone, this chapter was difficult to write, even for me.
Mukuro couldn’t move, couldn’t say a word.

“I-I went to get a snack, and I dropped a plate. The g-glass cut me, Mama. It hurts.” Ryouko wept, their mother cradling her in her arms, patting her head soothingly as their father wrapped gauze around her wound.

Mukuro could only stare at the blood-stained shards on the ground, staring at the plate Ryouko told her to shatter so they could lie to their parents. Mukuro tried to tune out Ryouko’s crocodile-tears, knowing just how blank and cold her face had been just a few minutes earlier.

“I know sweetheart, I know. It’s going to be okay,” Her mother cooed, slowly rocking her back and forth in her lap. Neither of their parents had even glanced at Mukuro. She supposed they only had enough attention for one child at a time. Not that it mattered, Mukuro wasn’t moving anyway.

“It’s an awfully deep cut, dear. How did this happen?” Their father asked, still wrapping her arm gently. The white gauze was absorbing the blood alarmingly quick, forming a deep crimson blob in the shape of Ryouko’s gash.

Ryouko swallowed her sobs, though tears rushed down her red cheeks in twin streams. “T-the plates…are r-really high up, so I stood on the s-stool, but I’m not tall enough, and the p-plate fell, and then the stool w-wobbled, and I put my arms to stop my fall…a-and…a-and then…” She broke out into another fit of sobs, their mother hurriedly trying to calm her, hugging Ryouko just a bit tighter.

Their father shot a glance at the stool Mukuro placed on its side, right below the mounted cabinet that stores all the dishes. “You weren’t tall enough?” He asked sadly.

Ryouko nodded vehemently, still crying. Her red hair stuck to her cheeks, and to the blood stains on her clothing. “I-I’m sorry, Papa, I’m sorry, Mama,” She cried.

Mukuro didn’t move, didn’t say a word. She couldn’t. Everything was caught in her throat. Words, apologies, cries, everything. She couldn’t do anything.

With her uninjured arm, Ryouko reached up to wipe away her tears blearily. “Can we go out somewhere, after we’ve…cleaned up the floor?” She asked, pointedly glancing to the blood stains surrounding them.

Their parents looked down, looked at the mess of blood and glass, both wearing equal expressions of guilt.

Ryouko had already told Mukuro what she’d do. She was going to make them feel guilty for leaving them alone, and make them feel like if they were here, this wouldn’t have happened.

If only Ryouko hadn’t fallen from the stool, or if only there were someone strong enough to catch her.

If only Ryouko was tall enough, or if only there were an adult here to reach it for her.

If only either of the girls knew first-aid, or if only there were an adult here to help them.
Ryouko thought of everything, of every way to manipulate their parents into getting what she wanted. Mukuro knew her sister was smart, but this was on a whole new level. Twisting words, twisting feelings, controlling everything to go just right, Ryouko was like a God now.

Ryouko could get anything she wanted, and she was kind enough to confide in Mukuro, and ask for her help.

She was kind enough to get Mukuro what she wanted. Mukuro would owe her forever.

“Of course, sweetheart. We’ll clean you up, and then we can do anything you’d like. Where do you want to go?” their mother said gently as their father got up to find some cleaning supplies.

Ryouko glanced at Mukuro, smiling softly through her tears, though even with those blurry, watery eyes, Mukuro could see the sharpness in them.

“I want to go visit Fenrir.”

The car ride was quiet.

Not silent, but quiet. Silence was very different from the state of the car then. Music blared on the car’s stereo, though the sound was morphed slightly by static and was almost distorted, clearly wrong in some way. No one spoke a word. Their parents looked scared, eyes scanning the surrounding area, jumping at every little sound, hands clamped tight around the steering wheel and car seat.

Mukuro wasn’t surprised. The area surrounding a Fenrir base was an unsettlingly bare desert area, with nothing in sight besides the whipping of sand forming brief waves across the air. The signal was extremely poor out there, only adding to the feelings of helplessness.

Mukuro fiddled with her hands, looking at anything but Ryouko.

The red-haired girl was still crying, only to make sure their parents kept that guilt with them for the entire car ride. It was creepy, almost. The crying, the static, the sand whipping against the metal of the car’s exterior, the sound of the tires skidding against the dirt trail they were following.

All of those sounds seemed a little less important, all at once, when the sound of gunfire went off in the distance.

The car swerved slightly as their parents both jolted, and Ryouko choked back on her sob for a moment, almost shocked out of her act. Mukuro didn’t move. She just kept wringing her hands. She wasn’t afraid of the gunfire. There was so much more to be afraid of, after all.

The gunfire repeated, though once it was clear they weren’t the ones being fired at, their parents shot a wary glance back at Ryouko, and when she cried just a little louder, they both audibly gulped and kept driving.

Before long, a colony of black tents appeared in the distance. The roofs of the tents were littered with sand trails, streaks of brownish-orange that made the tents look like reverse-coloured tigers.

*Wait, No, Fenrir has no tigers.* Mukuro remembered from a book she read. *Only wolves.*

Outside of the tents, there were several fenced off areas, each filled with people practicing on tall wooden targets. Some held rifles, while some held multiple daggers in their hands, throwing them
with precision. They all held themselves with a certain sense of confidence, confidence that Mukuro was clearly lacking. They looked like they knew exactly who they were, what they could do, and what they needed to do. They were soldiers, in every sense of the word.

Each bullet, each dagger, was aimed with fluid movements, the Fenrir members holding their weapons with practiced familiarity.

Not a single person missed any of their shots, every throw nothing short of perfect.

Mukuro could only stare with wide eyes, taking in the sights around her, committing every single memory to detail. It was amazing. All of these talented people, all in one place. They were all masters of their craft, all incredible.

“They really are mercenaries, huh?” Their mother said with a nervous sort of laugh as they parked the car a little way from the tents.

Mukuro didn’t respond, instead opening the car door and rushing out. Her chest rose and fell quickly, giddy with excitement as she ran through the sand. It took a little for effort to push through, grains spilling into her sneakers, swallowing her feet whole, though she couldn’t find it in her to care. She was here. Her idols were right in front of her.

She came to a stop suddenly, watching as a squadron moved together, a group of at least twelve, each stepping at a different pace yet undeniably in tune with each other. They were part of a team, yet still individuals. They didn’t try to brainwash every member into uniformity, they allowed everyone to have their own freedoms, and to do what they are best at. That’s why Fenrir was so successful, and why Mukuro loved them.

They were individuals, something Mukuro would never be.

Suddenly, Ryouko came up beside her, slipping her hand into hers. Mukuro didn’t flinch, didn’t pull away, but she did turn her head slowly, cautiously looking at Ryouko’s eyes.

“Let’s go talk to them. It looks like they have some sort of reception desk,” Ryouko hummed, looking towards a tent with its flaps tied back, in which a cold-eyed girl sat at a large, desk-sized wooden crate, littered with sheets of paper.

Without waiting for their parents, the girls ran towards the desk, hand in hand, through the sand until they skidded to a stop in front of the desk, both their chests heaving with laboured breaths.

They both peered up at the woman, who now that they were a little closer, wasn’t much older than them. She was maybe in her late teens, though up close her red eyes were cold and standoffish.

“Kids…?” She grumbled under her breath, leaning forward a bit to get a better look at the twins past the table.

The girl’s dark chestnut hair was tied back into two long pigtails, both of which swung forward slightly as she stood to get a better look at Mukuro and Ryouko, who were too short to be seen past the table. Mukuro noticed that the girl’s eyes seemed to soften slightly when she looked at the girls, though quickly hardened again.

“Are you two lost or something?” She asked, her gaze trailing down to the bloody gauze around Ryouko’s arm. She frowned at it.

Ryouko shook her head, used to speaking on Mukuro’s behalf. “Nope. My sister is a big fan of yours. She writes about you guys in magazines and stuff. She just wanted to visit.” She explained
simply, a bright smile on her face.

The girl narrowed her eyes before sighing. She looked past Mukuro and Ryouko, looking behind them as their parents struggled to catch up with the girls, still making their way to the tent. She sighed again.

“Listen kids, I don’t know what kind of irresponsible parents would bring you here, but this isn’t a playground, and you should really just get lost—”

“Now, now, Maki, play nice.” A sudden voice said, emerging from a side-flap in the tent.

Both the twins and the girl they now knew was Maki looked at the newcomer.

A woman with close-cropped blonde hair stood with her hands on her hips, almost invisible against the tent’s fabric with her dark black jacket and black shorts. She had an air of confidence that all the other members had, though her green eyes seemed kind.

Mukuro stared with wide-eyes at all the weapons strapped to her, listing them off in her head quickly as her eyes darted from knife, to gun, to dagger. The woman must have noticed Mukuro’s curious eyes, because she threw them a lopsided sort of smile.

“These girls just stopped by to say hello, right?” The woman said, looking at Maki.

Maki huffed. “They came by to visit. Like we’re the fucking circus or something—”

The woman threw a glance at the brunette, harsh enough to silence her, before crouching down to be on the same level as Mukuro and Ryouko.

She smiled gently. “Thanks for stopping by, girls. It’s always nice to see new faces. So, which one of you has written about us?” She asked, looking between Ryouko and Mukuro.

Mukuro raised her hand tentatively, bringing a wide grin to the blonde woman’s face.

“What’s your name, hun? Maybe I’ve heard of you.” She asked with a wink. She saw Maki roll her eyes from behind her desk.

“M-Mukuro Otonashi.” She stuttered out, shifting nervously.

The woman hummed for a moment, thinking. “Mukuro, huh? Nice name. Hold on…did you write the piece about what our tattoos mean?” She said, before taking off one of her fingerless gloves to reveal the wolf tattoo on the back of her hand.

Mukuro’s eyes lit up at the sight of that ink pattern, finally seeing it in person. There wasn’t much known about Fenrir, so gathering information for that particular article was the most challenging research piece she’d ever done. It was all worth it, in the end, when she had her article published, a picture of her standing proudly featured on the cover.

Mukuro nodded quickly, realizing she didn’t give the woman an answer. Before the woman could reply, Mukuro and Ryouko’s parents hurried into the tent, eyes wide at seeing their daughters speaking so close to a stranger.

“Girls! You can’t just run off like that,” Their mother scolded, pulling Ryouko and Mukuro back and away from the woman, wrapping her arms around them protectively. The blonde woman looked unsurprised, though Maki did huff a little.
Ryouko squirmed under their mother’s grip. “Mama, it’s okay. This nice lady read Mukuro’s article.”

Both parents looked to the blonde woman, before looking back down at their daughters. Their faces betrayed their unease.

“Article…?” Their mother asked tentatively.

Mukuro looked up at her mother, watching her face filled with confusion. “My article, Mama. The one I wrote last year for school? It got put in that magazine?” Mukuro tried to say, though her mother’s face didn’t change.

She…didn’t remember.

Mukuro shouldn’t be surprised, not really. Their parents hardly spent any attention on them anyway, so why would she ever think that her mother would know about her work? Why would she ever have hope that her mother and father would pay attention to her efforts, to the research she spent months on?

“Incredible girl you have. She’s got a lot of potential.” The woman said, standing up fully to meet their mother’s eyes.

Their father frowned. “Potential to be a mercenary?”

The woman laughed, not at all offended by his tone. “Well, I must give credit where credit is due. I assume from your reaction that you’re not here to sign them up to join us?”

Both parents sputtered for an answer. Their mother managed to collect herself the quickest. “O-Of course not, don’t be ridiculous, the girls just wanted to say hello, which they’ve done, so we should really be on our way—”

“But Mama, we just got here,” Ryouko said sadly, spinning around to face their mother.

Mukuro didn’t take her eyes off the blonde woman, committing as much as she could about this place to memory. The way their parents were reacting, she might never come back.

Her mother’s frown only worsened. “Ryouko, sweetheart, we need to get back to the hotel. Now.”

“But Mama—”

“No. I’m putting my foot down. We said hello, but now it’s time.” Her mother’s eyes were dark and sharp. Unmoving. She glared down at both twins, not just Ryouko, with such an intensity that it made Mukuro shrink back a little.

Mukuro glanced over at Ryouko, confirming what she had already thought. Ryouko’s face was blank. Cold. Just like how she looked earlier that day, right after she cut herself. Analytical. Ryouko must have realized something, though even someone as dumb as Mukuro could have figured it out.

Ryouko didn’t have control anymore.

The blonde woman’s smile thinned. “Well, that’s a shame. You two should listen to your mother, though. It was nice meeting you both.”

Their father gave the two mercenaries a brief nod before reaching down, and picking up Ryouko in his arms. “Come on, honey. You lost a lot of blood, and should rest for now.” He said before walking towards the car while carrying Ryouko.
Ryouko met Mukuro’s eyes over their father’s shoulder, before mouthing the words ‘don’t worry’ with a twisted smile.

Their mother grabbed Mukuro’s arm, a little gentler than usual. It felt almost like an apology, for not knowing her better. She was just about to walk away, though before her mother could get far, the blonde woman called out.

“Wait, before you go, let me give you one thing.” She said suddenly, before patting around her thigh until her hand settled on one of the sheathed knives. She unclasped the holster, wrapping the chords gently before bending down to meet Mukuro’s eyes again.

She held out the dagger. “Here, kid. I wasn’t kidding when I said you have potential. I can see it in your eyes. You’ve got soldiers eyes kid, and if you ever need anything, just let us know. A wolf always looks out for their pack.”

Mukuro’s eyes sparkled, in awe at this woman in front of her. Mukuro carefully reached forward, before pausing. She looked up at her mother, almost asking for permission. After a brief moment, her mother gave a conflicted nod, so Mukuro’s little hand darted out and took the sheathed dagger, holding it to her chest.

“T-Thank you, um…” Mukuro paused after she realized she didn’t know the woman’s name.

The woman smiled again. “Yukina,” She offered.

Mukuro nodded, before being pulled away by her mother.

Mukuro didn’t let go of the knife for the whole car ride, though when she did eventually let it go, she would spend the rest of her life wishing she kept a closer eye on that little dagger.

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The tension back inside the hotel room was almost physical.

Mukuro sat in a small armchair, knees pulled up against her chest, still fiddling with the sheathed knife. She didn’t look up at her mother, who was sitting on one of the queen beds beside Ryouko, having the gentlest argument Mukuro had ever seen.

“I’m sorry I yelled at you dear, but you need to be more careful.” Her mother said, trying to soothe Ryouko.

The girl wore a frown ever since they left, and Mukuro found the expression unsettling enough to warrant her avoiding looking at Ryouko at all costs.

“You said I could choose anything I wanted. Mukuro wanted to see Fenrir, so I made you guys take us there. Aren’t I a good sister? Why are you mad at me, Mama?” Ryouko said dully, a pout on her lips.

Her mother’s hands twitched slightly at her sides, almost as if she was trying to reach for something. “I-I’m not mad sweetheart, but I just didn’t want you to spend so much time with those people…”

Ryouko looked up innocently. “Those people?” She repeated in question.

Her mother frowned slightly. “It’s not safe there. Those people are criminals. Runaways.”

*Runaways.* Mukuro thought. *What did they run away from?*
“They seemed nice.” Ryouko said simply in reply.

Her mother winced. “A lot of people who mean to do harm seem very nice at first. You need to learn to tell the difference, sweetheart.”

Ryouko suddenly pushed away from her mother’s embrace, spinning around to face her fully. “Can you tell the difference, Mama?”

Her mother didn’t hesitate. “Of course. It takes time to learn those things, and you’ll be able to when you’re a little older.”

Ryouko nodded, though Mukuro wasn’t sure that it was in agreeance. Ryouko’s eyes seemed distracted, like she was looking at something no one else could quite see yet.

“Thank you, Mama. I understand now.”

Ryouko said gently before pulling her mother back into a hug, looking over at Mukuro from over her mother’s shoulder.

Mukuro felt a pang in her heart, and the air around the room seemed to suddenly suffocate her. The look in Ryouko’s eyes, was that same coldness as before. Her heartbeat thudded in her ear, and her stomach seemed to be twisting. She felt sick. She felt guilty, somehow. Did she do something? Mukuro didn’t know. But the pain in her chest was multiplying. She wanted it to stop. Pictures danced behind her eyes.

Blood.

A knife.

The red of Ryouko’s hair.

The red of Ryouko’s blood on the tile.

The red of Ryouko’s eyes, a colour that was meant to be hot like fire, looking so cold and analytical.


Silver knife, cutting through skin.

White tile, splashed with blood.

Pale skin, splattered with blood.


A promise.

*I’d die for you, Ryouko.*

Mukuro pushed herself up from the chair suddenly, chest rising and falling with panicked breaths. The pictures went away, though she was a little dizzy from standing up too quickly, and the room was starting to spin. She placed the sheathed knife behind her, on the sofa.

On wobbly legs, she took steps past Ryouko and her mother. As she walked, her mother perked up a bit, her arms still wrapped around Ryouko.
“Where are you going, dear?” She asked gently.

Her father, who had been quietly reading on the other dark-green armchair this whole time, not getting involved, looked up over his novel. Mukuro glanced between them.

“I’m just going to the washroom…I don’t feel well.” Mukuro said shakily, pointedly avoiding looking at Ryouko.

“Do you need help, sweetheart?” Her mother asked, reaching up to push a strand of loose black hair behind her ear. Mukuro watched the gesture, though shook her head.

“I-I’m fine.” She said quickly before hurrying off.

Mukuro made the mistake of looking back as she walked away, only to see Ryouko catch her eyes. The girl smiled.

“Mama, can we play a game?” Ryouko asked as Mukuro entered the bathroom, locking the door behind her.

Mukuro spent a long time in the washroom. She let the shower run, the steam filling the bathroom, somehow soothing Mukuro and calming her down. She had seen people in movies splash cold water on their face when they were stressed, so she did that too.

It didn’t help, much. It just made her face cold.

She threw a bunch of towels into the bathtub (Which was separated from the shower, meaning this really was a fancy hotel room, at least in her eyes.) and sat inside, surrounded by the steam and fluffy towels, something that helped her calm down.

She wanted to tell herself it wasn’t real, but it was.

You’re okay, Ryouko is going to look out for you.

You owe her everything.

Ryouko loves you, and only you can help her.

She told herself all of this, though it felt forced in a way.

The running water was very loud. It drowned out all noise, even the pounding of her heartbeat. Slowly, very slowly, she was calming down.

All her efforts were undone in an instant, as soon as she heard a weird noise from outside the bathroom. It was muffled slightly, what with the sound of water and her deep breathing, but it was unmistakeably inside the hotel room.

The image of Ryouko’s bleeding arm flashed in her mind.

What if something happened to Ryouko? What if she was already too late?

Mukuro scrambled out of the bathtub, feet slipping and sliding with the towels along the porcelain, though she practically threw herself against the door, fumbling with the lock.
Dark spots were dancing around her vision, though she shoved and pushed against the door, until it clicked, and she fell forward, arms wind-milling as she struggled to keep her balance.

The first thing she noticed when she opened the door was the smell. The only way she could describe it was pennies. Metallic.


Mukuro’s eyes went tunnel-vision, only able to look at Ryouko, who was standing in the middle of the room. She spun around to face Mukuro, strands of red hair stuck to her face. She was smiling.

No, it wasn’t hair. More blood. Her face was spattered with blood. Mukuro’s eyes shakily trailed down the splatter of blood, all the way to Ryouko’s hand, where the knife Yukina gave her was grasped, painted deep crimson and *drip drip dripping* onto the carpet.

Oh, the carpet.

It didn’t even look white anymore. It was dyed completely red, so much blood making it look sticky and sickening. Puddles of blood could be seen in spots along the previously fluffy surface. So much blood.

And there, framed by the red strands of the bloody carpet, were her mother and father.

They were lying on their backs, blood, *so much blood*, pouring from their mouths, from slits in their throat, from gashes in their arms, from gashes in their legs, from large slices across their stomachs. Mukuro could almost see their insides.

Mukuro didn’t realize she was screaming, until her jaw cramped up, but then she quickly realized she wasn’t screaming. She tried, she really did, but the sound was caught in her throat, surrounded by so many different things.

*Mama.*

*Papa.*


“I bet you’re really confused why I did this, aren’t you, Mukuro?” Ryouko asked, and Mukuro flinched back.

Yes, she wanted to say. She was very confused. She was so many different things. She didn’t want to look back down at her parents. *Her parents.* Were they dead? The slits in their throats said so.

“They weren’t of any use to me anymore. Mama really couldn’t tell the difference, I suppose. You should have seen the despair on her face, when she realized her sweet little angel Ryouko had slit her throat. It was…exhilarating. Do you know what that word means, Mukuro?” She said, taking a step forward. Her steps made that telling squelching sound that only made Mukuro flinch again.

Mukuro looked down at her parents, at the slits Ryouko was talking about. Suddenly, she heard a gurgle. *Mama is still alive.* Her mother was choking on her own blood, tears running down her face, but she couldn’t breathe. Mukuro knew the feeling. She couldn’t breathe either. There was nothing she could do.

And Papa, poor Papa, he was already gone. Motionless. But her mother was still shaking. Shaking, and bleeding.
“It was indescribable. I guess a little part of me felt bad, or maybe it was just the absence of sadness. Like, I should feel sad, so my body just made my hands shake a little. Like a reflex or something. Not that its really important, after all, you can’t undo a stab wound. My body cant control my mind. That only goes one way.” She smirked.

Mukuro sunk to her knees, hands digging into the carpet, which was still white and fluffy right here, right outside the bathroom door, away from the carnage.

“I feel it, twisting in my gut Mukuro. That despair. I really did love them. I loved Mama, and I loved Papa, and I’ll owe them forever, for giving me this gift. This…despair. It feels so nice. Does it feel nice for you, Mukuro?”

Mukuro’s hands held onto the carpet, so much so that her knuckles were turning white, her muscles straining. It doesn’t feel nice. Mukuro didn’t say. It hurts, I can’t breathe. She didn’t say. Mama stopped struggling.

“I’ve been thinking about this for a while. About doing this. Don’t think its your fault, or something stupid like that. But I need your help Mukuro. You do want to help me, don’t you?”

For the first time since leaving the bathroom, Mukuro responded.

“Y-Yes,” She breathed out.

Ryouko smiled. “Today is the beginning of something wonderful. Like a birthday, but my death at the same time. Today is the day that Ryouko and Mukuro Otonashi die. And you’re going to help me do it. You’re going to help me kill us.”

For a moment, Mukuro met Ryouko’s eyes. “Y-You’re going to k-kill m-me? Us?” She asked, though it sounded more like a plea.

Ryouko hummed, rocking back and forth on the balls of her feet. “Not in a physical sense. From now on, I’m going to need a new name. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that the two daughters who lived and survived the attack were the ones who committed it. So, we need to disappear.”

Mukuro reached up to wipe her eyes, though the tears wouldn’t stop. “D-Disappear? H-How?”

“Today is the day that Ryouko Otonashi died. I’ve spent some time thinking about a new name for myself. Junko Enoshima. It’s a very pretty name. One fit for a model. That’s what I’ll be. But I need your help, Mukuro.”


**Ryouko** Junko’s smile twisted. “Good. You’re going to go join Fenrir. And when you’re ready, we’ll meet again. I’ll look different, of course, but I’ll always be waiting for you Mukuro. I need you to be strong for me. You don’t want to be useless like Mama and Papa, do you?”

Mukuro shook her head. **No. I want to be useful. Don’t kill me **Ryouko Junko. **I can help you.**

“Very, very good. Time is ticking Mukuro. Your new life starts now. Better hurry, or you’ll miss your chance.” She said with a giggle.

And so, Mukuro ran.
Mukuro’s hands were still shaking.

She didn’t think they ever did stop, or that they ever would.

They just kept shaking. Wait, no. Not shaking. You could shake with excitement. Or anticipation. No, this wasn’t anything like that. What did animals do when they were afraid? When they had nothing else to do, but suffer?

Once, Mukuro and Ryouko went on a school field trip to a farm. They saw them harvest the produce, they saw them milk the cows, they even let the class take turns trying to churn butter.

But then, Ryouko had convinced Mukuro to slip away during lunch time, to do some exploring around the farm. A little further away from the lunch area was an odd structure. There was this big, silver, barn-shaped building. But even now, Mukuro was sure it wasn’t a barn, since it wasn’t the cute red-and-white wooden ones she knew from picture books.

The girls slipped inside, through a smaller compartment that faced the chicken coop. There was a latch on the compartment, and it was littered with feathers, though that didn’t stop them from moving forward.

Inside, were dozens of chickens, all crowded around each other and caged in with fences. They seemed terribly cramped, all clucking in protest and squawking as they shoved against each other, occasionally flapping their wings though never really flying. The room smelt horrible, so bad both girls gagged at it. The chickens were all shaking, like Mukuro’s hands. What did Ryouko say, when she saw them?

“Poor things. They’re trembling. I bet they’re cold.” She had reasoned, making a clicking sound in disapproval.

Trembling.

Not far from the fenced-area, was a zipline of sorts. There were more chickens, tied by their feet, hanging upside down. Below them was buckets, catching the blood that was dripping from the slits in their necks.

Those chickens didn’t tremble. The ones that were alive were trembling.

Tremble, tremble, tremble.

The dead chickens just hung there.

Bleeding.

Drip, drip, drip.

Mukuro was trembling. But that meant she was alive, right? The dead ones didn’t tremble.

They only bled.

Chapter End Notes

Wow! This might be my longest chapter, though i think after such a long wait it was
well deserved.
Next chapter we flash back to the present, and continue this story built from the despair in the past. Hope you all enjoyed!
Comment below to let me know what you thought, i’d love to hear what you have to say! =D
Yui walked into the back room with a frown, closing the door behind her softly as she looked down at Makoto and Kyouko, who were sifting through a large cabinet filled to the brim with templates and other sewing materials.

Makoto thought it was odd, to see such a serious expression on the normally cheerful girl. He didn’t know her that well, but to him it still looked out-of-place. Unsettling, in a way. It made him feel like whatever was serious enough to bring that expression to Yui, was something that he should be worried about.

“Yui…?” Kyouko asked her as she stepped a little closer. Kyouko’s face was neutral though her hands tightened painfully around the spool of white thread she had pulled from one of the bins.

Yui’s solemn look didn’t waver. “There is something I need to tell you two. Its about Mukuro.”

Instantly, Makoto’s expression paled, his entire body stilling at the grave tone she spoke with. “What happened? Is she okay?” He asked quickly.

Yui looked away, crossing her arms. “She’s fine, I think. It’s less about her, and more about the Otonashi case. Have either of you heard of it?”

Makoto shook his head, though to his surprise, Kyouko nodded.

“Ayako and Takeshi Otonashi. Mukuro’s parents.” She murmured, her expression turning solemn as well.

Makoto’s hands began to shake. “W-What about the case? What happened to them?”

Kyouko sighed, releasing the spool and letting it fall back inside the bin. “They were murdered about nine years ago. It was…gruesome. I’ve seen the pictures.” She explains, almost gagging at the thought. “They never found the killer.”

Yui began pacing back and forth. “But we can.”

Both Makoto and Kyouko looked at her with mirroring expressions of confusion.

“They never found the killer, though conveniently they never found the missing girls either. I have evidence that would lead me to believe the culprit was either Mukuro, or Ryouko Otonashi, the couple’s young daughter, and Mukuro’s twin. She disappeared shortly after the murder and hasn’t been seen since.” Yui explained, her tone almost excited.

Kyouko looked unsure. “Yui, this case has been closed for nine years, I’ve looked through the case file and there isn’t any legitimate evidence, no unbiased witnesses, nothing that could lead to an actual trial.”

Makoto’s shoulders sank. “You can’t be serious, right? You really think Mukuro would kill her own parents? That’s ridiculous, she would never—”
“You of all people should know what she is capable of.” Yui cut him off. Though her words were harsh, she spoke with such certainty that hit Makoto hard. “There is an equal possibility, however, that Ryoko killed them. The twins were most likely together at the time of the incident, and they are the only leads we’ve got.”

Makoto furrowed his brow in confusion. “Ryoko is Mukuro’s twin…? Would that mean they’re triplets?”

Both girls turned to look at him, and while Kyouko shot him a look that said ‘you’re an idiot’, Yui stared at him with wide-eyes.

“Who is the third sister?” She asked, taking a step towards him.

Instantly Makoto clamped his jaw shut, all the blood draining from him at once, as he realized the truth behind Mukuro’s fear and dependence to her sister. Of course, there isn’t a third sister. Mukuro’s twin is Junko, and always has been.

Ryoko…is Junko.

Junko killed her parents.

Junko killed Mukuro’s parents.

“Oh shit,” He mumbled to himself, scrambling to stand up so quickly both girls jolted a little at the sudden movement. “I need to go out there, I need to talk to Mukuro right now, what if she’s—”

Yui quickly moved to block the door, hands outstretched, ensuring he would keep his distance. “Calm down, she’s fine. If you really want to help her, you can tell me everything you know about this…third sister, you mentioned.”

Makoto’s eyes flicked towards Kyouko before looking back at Yui. “It was nothing, I must have misspoken or something,” He answered quickly before moving to push past Yui.

The girl didn’t budge. “Makoto, I understand you’re worried, but I need you to answer my questions. If you know anything relevant to the case, then I need you to cooperate.”

Makoto eyed her warily, still unsure of whether to tell her what he knows. After all, it wasn’t his information to tell. What if he said something wrong, and got Mukuro in trouble?

If Yui brought this up with Mukuro, who knows what kind of catatonic state she could be in right now. She’s out there, in the front of the store, all alone. What if she left? What if she ran away, to avoid having to get involved with any of this? Mukuro could be arrested. Makoto frowned for a moment, realizing that Mukuro has done a lot of things that made her deserve to be put in jail, but this? This wasn’t one of them.

For this, he had to protect her.

“I’ll tell you what I know. But first, I need to see Mukuro. Please,” He said firmly, though there was a certain air of weakness to his words.

Yui gave him an odd look, narrowing her eyes at him. After a few moments of tense silence, she sighed, stepping aside. “Fine. You can go talk to her while I let Kyouko know a bit more about my research. Don’t even think about leaving the store, or else,” She said warningly, though her tone made her words feel like she was almost desperate, pleading.
Makoto met her eyes as he pushed past her, making sure Yui saw just how harshly he was glaring at her.

Stepping back into the front of the store, Makoto’s heart stilled. The room was empty. Well, it wasn’t completely bare, as it was filled with all the fabrics and other merchandise that the store sold like before, but there was not a single living person to be found.

Makoto’s eyes scanned the room from behind the counter, taking careful steps forward. His eyes darted from wall to wall, searching for something, anything, but no one was there. All he could see was the bright colour of dyed fabric.

But then, just as he was about to call out for Mukuro, he heard a sound. It sounded like…someone was crying. An unsettling feeling crawled across Makoto’s skin as he quickly moved towards the sound, stepping around the counter to the corner of the room.

Yet, just like the rest of the store, the corner was completely empty. The only thing there were large tapestries hung neatly from the ceiling.

He frowned at the panels of intricate fabrics. Maybe he misheard? But no, Makoto was sure the sound was coming from this corner. He waited for a moment, standing still, trying to listen for the crying again.

“N-No…” A voice that sounded very much like Mukuro hissed shakily.

Without any hesitation, Makoto carefully reached between two panels of fabric, pulling them apart to reveal a small hidden corner of the room, shielded from the outside.

There, sitting on the floor with her knees pulled up to her chest, was Mukuro. She was shaking, gripping her head with both hands, holding onto her short, black hair painfully. Makoto could hear her sobbing quietly, much clearer now with the fabric not blocking the sound. Her face was pressed into her knees, her muffled sobs sounding more and more like painful wheezing.

“Mukuro…” He whispered, slowly stepping forward and letting the fabric close back up behind him.

Mukuro didn’t look up, though the sound of her crying cut off abruptly.

Carefully, Makoto knelt down beside her, reaching to gently grab the hands that were still gripping onto her hair. As he touched her skin, she flinched, though after a moment, she released her grip, letting Makoto guide her hands away slowly.

“Hey. Can you look up?” Makoto asked softly, making sure to speak quietly and slowly.

After a moment of tense silence, Mukuro slowly raised her head from her knees. Her face was red and splotchy, stained with tears, and her eyes were equally as red, the skin around them swollen from her sobs. Her disheveled black hair was sticking to her face, matted and framing her sadness.

Makoto smiled gently at her. “It’s okay now.”

Her eyes met his for a moment, and they flickered back and forth, as if she were looking for something in them. She shook her head slowly at first, before the shaking quickened frantically. “I don’t know what to do,” She mumbled before another sob made her throat close, her body heaving in on itself.

“I know. Its okay,” Makoto repeated in a hushed and reassuring tone, reaching forward to brush the hair away from her eyes.
Tears began to run down her face, quicker now. “W-we need to stop her, Makoto. T-There was…so much blood…a-and it hurts…” She mumbled shakily, reaching up with one hand and placing it over her heart. “I-It hurts,” She repeated, before burying her head back into her knees.

Makoto felt torn for a moment, not sure what to do to make her feel better. He couldn’t just sit there and watch her cry. He slowly scooted closer to her, very carefully wrapping his arms around her to pull her into a hug.

She flinched again when she felt his arms, before freezing completely as he held her securely. After a tense moment, she raised her arms back up to hug him back, her hands clenching the back of his hoodie as she cried.

“I don’t know what to do. I can’t do this on my own. I’m useless by myself,” she wept into his shoulder, shaking as her body wracked with sobs.

Makoto reached up with one of his hand, stroking her hair gently to try and calm her. “You’re not. You’re the most capable person I know.”

She tried to respond, though her words came out garbled and unintelligible from her weeping.

“We’re going to do this together, okay? I understand that there are…certain things, that I don’t know, but I’m going to do my best to help you.”

Mukuro held on tighter. “I-I’m sorry,” she mumbled into his shoulder.

Makoto merely hushed her, a determined expression on his face. “You don’t need to apologize. Tonight, we are going to go to the festival. We are going to find Hajime Hinata, and we are going to stop Junko. And we’re going to do it together…” he trailed off, noting that Mukuro’s breathing had slowed considerably, slowly winding down from the tension her body was wrought with before. He didn’t speak back up again, listening to her soft breathing as she calmed down.

Only when he was sure she was completely settled, feeling her hands slowly unfurl from where they had a death-grip on his hoodie, did he speak again. “I may not be the most reliable person, but I’ll do my everything I can to protect you.”

For a moment, Makoto thought Mukuro had begun to sob again. Her shoulders shook, and she buried her face a little deeper into his shoulder. He could feel the vibrations of her voice through his sweater as her next words rung out, gentle and even.

“How many times are you going to see me cry before this is all over? It’s embarrassing…” She murmured, her tone surprisingly light. Makoto felt Mukuro’s shoulders shake once more, though the sound she made was very clear this time.

_Ah. So not a sob, then_, Makoto reasoned to himself. _Laughter._

He carefully unwrapped his arms, moving back a little to give her some space as she finally raised her head to meet his eyes. When he saw her face once more, he noticed the slight quirk of her lips, something he would never have noticed if he weren’t so close to her. It wasn’t a smile, not quite, but it was close enough.

“As many times as it takes.” he said, returning her smile with one of his own. “Though I’ve gotta say, it’s kinda hard to see you as a cold and tough soldier when you’re like this.”

She tipped her head forward a bit, as if to shield her face from his, though even in the dim lighting of the corner there was no mistaking the light blush that dusted her cheeks. “Like what?” She asked,
soft and timid.

Makoto hesitated, eyes scanning over her face, which was so very close to his. He never noticed just how pretty her freckles were, dusting her cheeks like a sky of little stars. He never noticed the shape of her eyes; not quite round like most people’s, but more slanted in a delicate manner that made her appear sharp yet fragile. Less like a weapon or a knife, and more like a shard of glass. The crystal blue of her eyes only illuminated this fact, a mosaic of different shades that spiraled in her irises like a kaleidoscope.

To Makoto, she didn’t really look like a soldier. Sure, she had the confidence of one, the practice and rigidity in her posture that speaks of expertise, though Makoto knew such things were the product of years of training. He remembered the conversation he had with Kyouko in the car ride the day prior.

“So, in a way, your motive is her?”

“I guess so.”

Seeing Mukuro vulnerable and closed in on herself, tears streaking down her cheeks, made him sure that he had to do everything he could to protect her. After all, underneath all of that coldness was the girl he had come to know.

The girl he had come to love.

Makoto suddenly stood up, catching Mukuro off guard with the sudden movement as he spun to face the fabric panels leading to the storefront, his back to her.

“They’re probably waiting for us.” he mumbled before parting the fabric once more, almost tripping over himself as he hurried out, not even waiting for Mukuro to catch up.

He kept his head down as he walked briskly towards the back of the room, hearing Mukuro’s footsteps as she followed him with wobbly steps. He didn’t look back, hiding the bright-red of his face.

Oh, I’m so screwed, He swore to himself, heart beating erratically. How could I have let this happen? I’m so screwed. I love her. Oh god, I’m so screwed.

He pushed the door to the back room open once more, only to see that Kyouko was sitting on one of the work tables with her arms crossed, listening closely as Yui spoke to her in a hushed tone. The other girl had a binder overflowing with paper splayed across the space beside Kyouko.

In another time, Makoto might have made a joke there, something about how hypocritical it was that Kyouko had been sitting on the desk when she had just scolded him the day before, but his head was starting to spin, and he hardly felt like it was the time for jokes, anyway.

He loved her. God, how could he let this happen? This would only make things more complicated. Now wasn’t the time for his feelings, as the past few days have proven to him.

He forced himself to raise his head to stare straight at Yui, who had turned away from the binder to shoot him an unimpressed look.

“Are you ready to cooperate now? Both, of you?” She asked, her eyes flitting to a spot over Makoto’s shoulder.

He didn’t need to turn his head to know Mukuro was close by. He could hear her shallow breathing as she stood near him, in a way that almost felt like she was hiding behind him. Makoto had noticed
she did this quite often, using Makoto as a shield from the eyes of others, even though she was noticeably taller than him.

“I-If I tell you what you need to know, w-will you leave us alone?” Mukuro asked, her voice fearful.

Yui nodded, her expression tight though her eyes were sympathetic. “Yes, but…Kyouko told me what’s going on, and I really think that if you let me help—”

Mukuro sucked in air through her teeth, a harsh hissing sound that made Makoto recoil. “Kyouko did what?”

Kyouko sighed, hopping off the table to stand fully, the corners of her mouth turned down in something a little less severe than a frown. “Mukuro, trust me on this. I’ve looked at Yui’s research and I really think that we could stop Junko with her help,” She said, gesturing to the binder still laying open-faced on the table.

Even from such a distance, Makoto could see splashes of red in photographs that were paperclipped to a few of the files, their colour causing a sickening feeling to settle in Makoto’s gut. Before the situation could escalate any further, he took careful steps towards the binder, all eyes on him as he pushed past Yui.

In one movement, he slammed the binder shut, papers flying out as he did. Everyone in the room went quiet.

“We need to get ready for the festival, and Mukuro could probably use some time to settle down. You did bring some seriously traumatic stuff back to the surface, so why don’t we use this time to finish the yukatas?” He suggested, forcing as much positivity into his voice as he could manage. “Then you could do your interrogating.”

Yui sighed. “I wouldn’t call it interrogating, though I suppose the questions could wait. I didn’t mean to overwhelm you all…I just—”

“It’s fine, Yui.” Kyouko cut in, smiling gently at her friend. “Could you help me pick my fabric? I’m afraid I haven’t really decided yet.”

It was an obvious attempt to get Yui to settle down a bit, though the seamstress fell for the manipulation easily, chatting amiably with Kyouko as they went to the front of the store once more to browse through fabrics.

As soon as the door closed, Mukuro turned to Makoto, her eyes still glossy with unshed tears.

“Thank you…I really wasn’t ready to talk yet…” She mumbled, almost sheepish.

“Yeah, I kinda figured…” He coughed nervously. “So, um, how about we get started on our yukatas?”

Mukuro pressed her lips into a thin line. “Yui gave me a package out there, one that was sent to the store but addressed to me. There was a yukata inside, and a note. From Junko.”

Makoto’s face paled. “Oh. Are you going to…?” He didn’t finish the question, but Mukuro understood him anyway.

“I think so. I think…I owe her that, at least. I can still help you with your yukata, though.” She suggested innocently.
Makoto turned to look at the bin of sewing materials still on the back counter, attempting to hide his nervousness. “S-Sure. Let’s get started then.”

Working in pairs, it took a total of two hours to finish the yukatas. It might have gone faster if Makoto’s hands didn’t shake the whole time, or if he didn’t flinch back every time Mukuro so much as brushed her hands against his while they worked on the fabric.

By the end of it, Mukuro did seem considerably calmer. The redness in her face had faded, a small smile on her lips as she did her best to follow Yui’s instructions on how to sew properly. Makoto couldn’t help but stare, a smile brought to his own lips when he saw her sticking out her tongue in concentration, as she finished working with the sewing machine, tying off the last knot.

“Finished,” She announced quietly, almost to herself, though Yui stepped in as soon as she was done.

The other two girls had already finished working on Kyouko’s yukata, and the detective had decided to wait for Makoto and Mukuro to finish by skimming through Yui’s research.

Yui held up the finished yukata, humming as she examined the hems and stitching. “For your first time, this is really good! Makoto better wear it with pride.” She said, throwing a little wink his way.

Makoto flustered, looking away. “So, what now?”

When he looked back up, the light-hearted mood instantly dissipated from the room.

Yui sighed. “Well…now it’s time for the questions.”

Kyouko looked up from the binder. “Would you like me and Makoto to be here, Mukuro?”

Mukuro looked at Makoto, conflicted. He knew instantly what had to be done. This certainly wasn’t the situation that Mukuro wanted to tell this personal information to Makoto, and he understood.

“Let’s go wait outside, Kyouko. Give Mukuro some space. We don’t have time to waste.”

He looked over his shoulder just in time to see the confused expression on Yui’s face, though after a moment she nodded hesitantly in agreement.

He could hear Mukuro sigh in relief, and it sent a pang of guilt through his heart. What she didn’t know, was that those words held a double meaning for Makoto.

He couldn’t waste time on his feelings.

Yui sent Makoto and Kyouko to wait outside while she interrogated Mukuro. While the seamstress claimed it would only be a few questions, the other two students had to wait in the front of the store for almost an hour, not a single sound to be heard on the other side of the closed door.

In that time, Kyouko had remained completely silent, a pensive expression on her face as she stared at seemingly nothing. Makoto deduced that she was probably lost in thought, thinking over the information she had heard from Yui.
Her posture was controlled, rigid, and calm. Makoto, on the other hand, was a complete mess. He was pacing back and forth around the room, fiddling with the hem of his hoodie sleeves as he tried vainly to control his breathing enough to slow down his quickening heartrate.

All this time waiting had given his thoughts the perfect opportunity to drift, to wander straight into the dangerous territory that was his newly realized feelings.

How had he not noticed this before? It was far too early for love, but how else could he describe it? He hadn’t even known Mukuro that long, so how could he possibly be in love with her? Infatuation, maybe, but even that word felt like it only skimmed the surface of his feelings. He thought of every little smile he had managed to pull from Mukuro, every little laugh that could only be compared to the twinkling of a bell.

He thought of every moment that, without hesitation, he followed Mukuro. He wanted to be by her side, helping her through her separation from her sister. He wanted to be there for her. He wanted to protect her, because he knew she would do the same in a heartbeat.

But he couldn’t risk confessing to her.

Maybe he did love her. That didn’t matter, not when there was so much more on the line. Aside from the obvious fact that they had the whole Izuru Kamukura project to worry about, who knows how Mukuro would react to hearing his feelings?

No, it was far too risky. He couldn’t tell her. Mukuro already trusted him, right? There was nothing more he needed. It was selfish to want more. He couldn’t risk ruining the trust she had given him, so all he had to do was keep quiet about how he really felt. Just as he decided this, a voice made him stop in his tracks.

“You’re overthinking something, aren’t you?”

Makoto whipped his head around to look at Kyouko, only to see that the detective was watching him with narrowed eyes, the same pensive expression as before, only now it was directed at him.

Makoto’s hands twitched, fighting the urge to shift away from Kyouko’s glare. “What makes you think that?”

She sighed. “I see it in your expression,” She rose a hand to gesture to all of him. “Nervous posture, shaking hands, wide eyes. Plus, I can practically hear your heart beating. All signs of a person lost in their own head.”

He turned his head away, face turning red. “Sorry. It’s nothing to worry about.”

Kyouko didn’t speak for a moment, crossing her arms. “It doesn’t look like it’s nothing.”

Makoto covered his face with one hand in an exasperated gesture. “It’s not important right now. There’s a lot more we should be focusing on, and this…shouldn’t be a priority.”

“Well, when will it be important, if not now?” Kyouko asked, though the question seemed to derive from a provocation rather than genuine curiosity. What was her goal here? He wondered vaguely.

Makoto shot her an odd look, dropping his hands. “I don’t know, when this is all over, I guess? Maybe never.”
Kyouko snorted. Makoto wasn’t sure he’d ever heard the detective laugh before, and it took him by surprise. “For someone so optimistic, you’re being awfully negative right now.” She pointed out lightly.

Makoto pressed his lips into a thin line, averting Kyouko’s eyes. “If you knew why, you’d agree that this is a waste of time.”

“Well, I can’t know that unless you tell me, right?”

Makoto looked up at her once more, surprise lining his features. Kyouko rolled her eyes. “Look, if you don’t want to tell me, that’s fine. I take it that this is something you haven’t told Mukuro, correct?” She asks, one eyebrow cocked in suspicion.

Makoto nodded sheepishly. “Yeah.”

Kyouko looked from Makoto to the backroom door, before looking back at him. “Well, she isn’t here now. If you want to tell me, you should do it quickly. She’s going to need you by her side when Yui is finished, and you won’t be of much use panicking the whole time, now will you?”

Kyouko made a good point, and Makoto knew that. Knowing she was right didn’t stop him from being bitter, however.

“You can’t tell her, okay? Or anyone, for that matter. This stays between us.” He said, trying to force as much seriousness into his tone as possible.

Kyouko’s eyes widened slightly, as if surprised by the severity of his words. “Of course.”

Makoto nodded, before running a hand through his hair nervously. “Okay so…I didn’t really realize this until recently? By recently I mean like…a few minutes ago, but that’s not important. The thing is…I think I’m in love with Mukuro. And I don’t know what to do.”

After he finished, he kept his eyes on the ground for a few moments, waiting for some kind of reaction.

Kyouko didn’t say a word.

He looked back up at her, only to see Kyouko staring at him blankly. She blinked, once, twice.

“Was I…supposed to be surprised by this?” She asked, with an innocently bemused expression.

Makoto gasped indignantly. “You knew?!”

Kyouko rolled her eyes. “Well, it doesn’t take an Ultimate Detective to find your behaviour a little suspicious. Besides, you haven’t exactly been subtle about it.”

He could feel his face heat up, humiliation clenching his heart painfully. Was he really that oblivious, that Kyouko knew his feelings before he did? Somehow that was more embarrassing than admitting his feelings in the first place. He could only hope that Mukuro hadn’t been as perceptive.

Makoto buried his face in his hands, groaning. “I’m so screwed, Kyouko. What am I supposed to do about this?”

Kyouko narrowed her eyes at him. “Obviously not bottling it up like you were planning to,” She said, a little more than accusatory.
Makoto lowered his hands to glare at her. “This isn’t exactly the time for a love confession! We are literally trying to solve a murder case. A-And there’s so much more going on, with the Izuru Kamukura stuff, and the whole stopping Junko thing, even Yasuke Matsuda, and who knows how long that’s all going to take to settle down—”

“You’re making excuses because you’re afraid she’ll reject you.” Kyouko cut in bluntly.

Makoto snapped his jaw shut, clenching his fists to hold himself back. Why does Kyouko have to be so good at her job? He whined to himself.

“Makoto, as I’ve said before, you can’t be sure of someone’s actions or behaviour until you speak to them yourself. Don’t you think you should tell her, and accept what reaction she shows you? Hiding it will only complicate things further. You’re right this is a serious situation, all the more reason why I can’t have you frantic and overthinking every little thing. I say this not only as your classmate, but as your friend. Tell her how you feel. Not now, but perhaps after the festival is taken care of.”

As soon as she finished, Kyouko briskly walked past him and towards the backroom door. Without hesitation, she swung it open, revealing Yui and Mukuro in the same positions they had left them. Mukuro, sitting at one side of the table with her hands folded tightly in front of her, Yui on the other side of the table with her binder splayed out in front of her, flipping through pages.

Makoto caught Yui’s eyes through the doorway just before she looked to Kyouko. Yui didn’t seem as cold as before. In fact, she looked hopeful.

“Yui, I’m sure you’ve gotten more than enough information from Mukuro.” Kyouko announced firmly. Yui tried to protest, though Kyouko continued before she could. “It’s time for us to go.”

Not wasting any time, Mukuro stood up from the table shakily, bowing hesitantly to Yui before exiting from the room. The action puzzled Makoto, though before he could think about it any further, Mukuro was already hurrying towards him, her expression carefully blank.

“Y-You okay?” He asked as she found her place, standing beside him.

Mukuro gave him an odd look at the shakiness in his voice, though nodded after a moment. “I think so. Yui…said I’m not a primary suspect anymore.” She shrugged. “Still a suspect, but at least she trusts me a little.”

An invisible weight was lifted from Makoto’s shoulders. “I’m glad. But…are you okay? Like, emotionally, I mean.”

Mukuro thought for a moment, before nodding again. “Yeah. It still hurts…and I’m still scared…but we’re doing this together right? I think I’ll be okay.”

Before Makoto could reply, Kyouko walked past them, arms full of yukatas and a pink box Makoto hadn’t noticed before. He didn’t miss how Mukuro flinched as her eyes caught sight of the box. He quickly deduced that box to contain the yukata her sister made.

“Let’s go you two.” She said before casting them a glance over her shoulder, lavender hair whipping back as she did. “We can’t be late. We have a festival to attend, after all.”

Chapter End Notes
Hi everyone! Thanks for reading. Yesterday (I think? Maybe the day before that?) this fic reached 5000 hits!!!!! Thank you all so much for reading, it really means a lot to me. Also a special thank you to Mary+D+Kidd, who helped edit a bit of this chapter. Couldn't have done this without your support ^u^ 

I hope you enjoyed this chapter, sorry for the delay xD
The next chapter will be the start of the festival!!! I hope you're all excited.
Mukuro woke up in the corner of a cold, empty, dark room.

Her head was spinning, and she had the overwhelming urge to simply slow her breathing and sleep. She felt as if all her limbs were being weighed down by heavy metal chains; as if she were stuck at the bottom of an ocean, pressure everywhere.

Instead of lying back down, she forced herself to get up. Slowly, she pushed herself off the cold concrete floor, struggling for her hands to find purchase on the slick surface. She glanced around, her eyes squinting against the throbbing pain in her temple, trying to find anything in the darkness of the room.

Mukuro noticed that on one of the four steel walls that made up the room, there was a large chalkboard affixed to the wall.

“A classroom…?” She whispered aloud, immediately regretting speaking as it increased the pain in her head tenfold.

With incredible difficulty, Mukuro managed to stand up fully, fighting against the wobbliness of her legs to hold herself up. She stepped closer to the chalkboard, her vision warped and blurry as she fought to make out what shapes were drawn on the black surface.

When she was close enough, she saw clearly the familiar outline of a black-and-white bear that sent chills down her spine.

Monokuma.

The sight of that bear brought back with it a flood of memories, of every terrible and wonderful moment that transpired in the past twenty-four hours.

Her mind spun with these memories, piecing together what had led her to end up in such a disturbing situation. All she could do was watch, as they played on the back of her eyelids like a movie screen.
TWENTY-FOUR HOURS EARLIER...

Sayaka held the makeup brush in her hand like a pro. Even so, Mukuro couldn’t help but flinch as the brushes fibers tickled her cheeks as Sayaka dusted them with blush.

“Hold still please.” She asked sweetly, speaking in such a way that made it seem like this girl had an infinite pool of patience and kindness to share with people.

Mukuro did her best to stay as still as she could, keeping her eyes pinned on a spot on the wall. Sayaka was kind enough to come over before the festival to help Kyouko and Mukuro with their makeup.

Although Mukuro knew the Ultimate Idol meant well, the thought of caking her face in makeup—in the same way her sister did—made her stomach churn with a sort of odd disgust.

Sayaka leaned back from Mukuro’s face, narrowing her eyes before humming. “I think you’re all done!”

Mukuro sighed in relief, clenching her fists to avoid touching her face and ruining Sayaka’s hard work.

“Thank you for your help. You’re really talented at this.” Kyouko said from the other side of the bathroom, working with nimble fingers to braid her lavender hair.

Sayaka smiled. “Its no trouble, really. I usually do my own makeup for performances, so it was nice to practice on some other faces.” She said with a giggle, packing up her brushes and various containers of sparkly powder into her makeup. “I won’t be going to the festival until later, since I have to catch up on some homework, so I’m thankful you two let me atleast participate in the festivities by helping you dress up! That was my favourite part, anyway.”

Mukuro kept her eyes down. She should say thank you to Sayaka, after all she must be practically unrecognizable with all these layers of makeup on, but she couldn’t even bring herself to look.

Until, that is, Sayaka pulled out a small compact mirror, placing it in Mukuro’s hands. “Here. I noticed you don’t have any compacts…or makeup, that is…in your dorm, so you can have this one!”

Mukuro felt like she was going to throw up. “Y-You really didn’t have to—”

Before Mukuro could protest, Sayaka pulled out another small object. It had just two buttons on it, one red, and one green. She placed it in Mukuro’s hand, closing her fingers over it.

Sayaka’s smile suddenly turned strained. “This…is something else. I don’t have a cellphone, since it would be too easy for fans to track my number. Instead I use pagers. Keep the compact, that way, if you notice that you need any touch-ups on your makeup, you can just press the green button and I’ll come help!”
Mukuro stared at the object, frowning. From the corner of her eye, she saw Kyouko lean over to take a look.

“And the red button…?” Kyouko asked carefully.

Sayaka’s face suddenly turned serious. “W-Well, being an idol has its dangers, y’know? And I usually give one to my managers, in case I’m surrounded by fans and can’t get out safely. Or…alone with just one. I think you understand what I mean.”

Oh.

Mukuro’s face turned pale. “H-have you ever…?”

Sayaka’s eyes widened at the question, though she quickly shook her head. “No no, thankfully not. I’ve been in close situations, but nothing’s ever…happened. No need to worry. I can handle myself. So…just press the green button, if your makeup gets messed up okay? Red is for…serious emergencies.”

Mukuro and Kyouko nodded, both girls having a bit more respect for Sayaka. “Thanks again for your help, Sayaka. Really.” Kyouko said, giving the girl a slight bow.

Mukuro felt the impulse to bow as well, staring Shakily at the compact and the pager in her hand. “I r-really should repay you somehow…I d-don’t deserve—”

Sayaka waved her hand dismissively, cutting off Mukuro. “Don’t worry about it! It’s a gift. Friends give each other gifts from time to time, right?”

Mukuro’s throat was closing up. “I-I suppose…”

The navy-haired girl nodded once in affirmation, before turning to Kyouko. “Same goes to you. If you need anything, just call.”

Kyouko gave her a half-hearted smile, nodding once more.

Without lingering any longer, Sayaka stepped out of the room, passing by Makoto as she exited. Mukuro watched as Sayaka paused in front of him, before whispering something that made him blush furiously, Sayaka giggling before exiting the room.

Just as Makoto turned his head to look at Mukuro, Mukuro reached forward and closed the bathroom door. She wasn’t ready for him to see her. She quickly slipped the compact and the pager into one of her inner pockets.

Kyouko gave her an odd look but didn’t question her about it. “Okay, all that’s left is to put on your yukata. Can you stand in front of the mirror for me?”

Mukuro followed her instructions, keeping her eyes down still. Slowly, she raised her arms, holding them out at her sides.

Kyouko made quick work of putting the yukata on Mukuro, concealing the bulletproof vest she wore underneath, and the various daggers strapped to her thighs and arms. Mukuro didn’t miss how Kyouko avoided looking at the weapons, busyiing herself with helping Mukuro get ready.

Mukuro could feel her heartbeat pounding in her ears. She wanted to see what she looked like. She wanted to see how the makeup had changed her features, how the beautifully crafted yukata looked on her gangly frame. Mukuro may be able to move gracefully, but she looked anything but graceful.
She forced herself to look into the mirror, ripping her eyes away from the floor.

Bile rose in her throat as she met her own eyes in the reflection, her hands shaking at her side.

*This is not me.*

“It doesn’t look that bad.” Kyouko said from behind Mukuro, tying the sash of the yukata around Mukuro’s waist. “Glaring at the thing won’t change it.”

“I don’t want to change it or anything…” Mukuro mumbled as Kyouko fiddled with the last knot. “It’s just…different.” Mukuro couldn’t stop staring at her reflection, at the fabric, at the intricate patterns that Junko picked out just for her.

The yukata was a silvery grey colour, glinting slightly in the artificial lighting of the bathroom. Stars littered the top half of the yukata, forming constellations that Mukuro vaguely recognized but couldn’t pin down by name. On the bottom dark blue hills rolled and swooped gently, encircling to rise just above her knees. Perched upon these hills were beautiful embroidered wolves, their heads tipped up in the tableau of a howl.

Her sister knew her well.

Absentmindedly, she reached up to touch the inked wolf on the back of her right hand, tracing it slowly.

Kyouko gave her an odd look through the mirror. “If you really want to change it, I suppose you could go in casual clothes.”

Ah. Kyouko thought Mukuro’s problem was with the yukata. Mukuro pinched at the fabric, stretching the hems her sleeves experimentally. It was an odd texture, an unusual mix of cotton and silk Mukuro had never felt before.

“It’s fine, I guess. I’m just not used to wearing this kind of thing,” She explained, still getting used to the look of the yukata itself. She felt like a walking art display. “I don’t really…look like I usually do.”

Kyouko smiled half-heartedly, misunderstanding her discomfort. “Don’t worry too much. Tonight, everyone will be dressed up in much flashier yukatas than ours. We’ll just look like part of the crowd.”

Mukuro nodded, though she couldn’t help the unease that held over her. Mukuro wasn’t sure if she was anxious because she was wearing a yukata and going to such a public event like a festival, or the fact that this was a yukata Junko specifically chose for her.

Or maybe because that girl in the mirror is *not her*.

Not at all.

In order to try and blend in with the rest of her classmates, she was wearing makeup. Her freckles were hidden beneath a thin layer of foundation. Her eyes are lined with black, making the blue of her irises too sharp. Her eyelashes were too long, her cheekbones too prominent, her face too different.

She looked like Junko.

Mukuro felt sick.
“Maybe this is a bad idea. I mean…Junko picked this out for me, so if I wear it, she’ll be able to notice us from a mile away. What if she tries to get involved? What if she gets to Hajime Hinata before us? What if—”

Kyouko tugged on the last knot on the sash roughly, effectively cutting off Mukuro’s rambling as the air was knocked out of her.

“Don’t worry so much. Try to have a good time, okay?” Kyouko said firmly, before stepping back to examine her handiwork. “You should find something to pin your bangs back before we leave. I do the same thing when I’m trying to keep focused. Might help.” She offered, her tone softer.

Kyouko stepped out from the bathroom, leaving Mukuro wincing as she struggled to catch her breath, staring bitterly at Kyouko’s back. The purple-haired girl was stronger than she let on.

As the door swung open, she caught sight of Makoto over Kyouko’s shoulder. He already put on his yukata and was waiting idly at Kyouko’s desk, resting his head in his hands. When he heard the girls enter, he looked towards them, his eyes widening as he caught sight of Kyouko’s hair.

“That is…quite a look,” He said, bemused, earning a glare from Kyouko as she gently reached up to touch her hairdo.

In the same amount of time that Mukuro spent fumbling with her yukata, Kyouko had not only helped Mukuro get ready and put on her own yukata, but also tied up her hair into a crown of intricate braids. Pins with pearls affixed to the ends held the purple braids in place, their ivory shine matching the iridescent yukata Kyouko wore. She looked regal, like an empress.

“I could say the same for you. Did you choose a yukata that looks like a giant grass stain or purpose?” Kyouko shot back, suppressing a smile.

Unlike both of the girls, Makoto opted for a fairly neutral pattern. A simple forest green yukata was cinched around his waist with a simple black sash. Though Mukuro would never say it out loud, the green of the fabric made his already stunningly green eyes so much more vibrant.

He rolled those eyes at Kyouko, a half-smile tugging at his lips. “Just for that, don’t be surprised if I accidentally push you into the grass, just so you can have a big grass stain of your own.”

Kyouko sighed, not even bothering to come up with any sort of retort. “I’m going to get the car started. I’ll text you when I’m outside of the dorms, then we can drive to the main campus together.”

Makoto gave her a little mock salute, which only made Kyouko roll her eyes in response before leaving the dorm.

Mukuro used Kyouko’s exit as a distraction, so that she could quickly step past Makoto. For some reason, she felt as if she had to hide her appearance from him. She couldn’t help but feel self-conscious, since he had never seen her wearing such a frivolous thing.

What if he liked her better like this, all dressed up and fancy, and wouldn’t like the normal her anymore? She wore the yukata like a shell, like some sort of mask. Hiding the killer waiting inside. This isn’t her.

Even so, the familiar weight of her compact weapons felt like a reassuring weight as they sat in the various pockets Yui had sewn in for her. Her insecurities swirled around her head, leaving her dizzy as she sifted through Kyouko’s jewelry box for some bobby pins to push her hair back, as per Kyouko’s advice.
That would help. Keep focused. Maybe. No, it would. It had to. She just needed to focus.

“Mukuro?” Makoto asked, oddly soft. Like approaching a scared animal.

“What?” She responded, keeping her eyes forward.

There was a stretch of silence before Makoto spoke again. In that time, Mukuro had already found the little pins made of black metal, holding them tightly in her hand. Still, she kept her back to him.

“Are you alright?”

Mukuro thought for a moment. She took a deep breath and answered truthfully. “I’m nervous.”

Much to her surprise, Makoto hummed in agreeance. “Yeah. I get that. I’m nervous too. But we’re gonna do this together. We’ll find him.”

“Oh.” Mukuro’s hands tightened around the pins. “That…never mind.”

She could feel Makoto’s eyes on her back, a presence that made her hands shake, but not in fear. “What do you mean? Are you…nervous about something else?”

Mukuro could hear the way his voice was carefully controlled, and part of her wished she could find the strength in her to turn around, just to see what sort of expression he was wearing. “It’s stupid. It’s just…I don’t really wear…this, often. And…y’know…”

Makoto snorted. “You’re nervous that you’ll look too nice? Too pretty?”

Mukuro instantly felt heat rush to her face. “T-That’s not…I, um, just—”

“Do you not want me to see you?” His voice quickly shifted from amusement to dejection.

“T-That’s not it either, I’m just…I don’t feel like myself. Not like this.” The words were caught in her throat, she felt like she was choking. Still, she managed to speak. “I look like her right now. I know its me but…I don’t really wear…this, often. And…y’know…”

Makoto raised her eyes to meet his, her face scrunched up in confusion. He was smiling, but his eyes held some sort of determination that made her flinch again.

“Mukuro, turn around.”

Mukuro flinched. He didn’t say it like a command, or like an order. He wasn’t forcing her. But still, there was an odd sadness in his tone. She did what he said, slowly turning to face him, eyes pinned on the ground.

“Hmm. I don’t see the resemblance. Nope. Definitely the same Mukuro.”

Mukuro raised her eyes to meet his, her face scrunch up in confusion. He was smiling, but his eyes held some sort of determination that made her flinch again.

“Makoto, I—”

“You see, if you really weren’t yourself, I wouldn’t know those eyes. Your eyes are special, you know that? They’re blue, but also grey. Like a stormy sky.”

She pressed her lips into a thin line. “You don’t need to—”
“And your hair, it’s the same black hair I’ve seen everyday. The colour of a raven’s feathers. Did you notice, that in the right light, your hair is so black its almost a dark blue?”

The bobby pins dug into her palms as she held herself back. She had the urge to walk over to him right now, but she stopped herself.

“I guess, the only difference is the freckles. But they’re there, aren’t they? They didn’t vanish like magic, right?” He asked, slowly getting up.

Mukuro shook her head. “N-No. They’re still there.” She mumbled. “I don’t like hiding them. It’s one of the only things that separates me from…from her.”

Makoto came to a stop in front of her, a sad smile on his face. “I can help with that, if you want. But, uh, only if you want me to.”

Slowly, Mukuro nodded. She wasn’t sure what he was going to do next, but she trusted him.

He raised one of his arms, the long sleeve of his yukata bundled in his hand. With the inner layer, he reached up towards her cheeks.

Mukuro flinched when the fabric touched her skin, though after a moment she understood that he was only wiping away the makeup. His touch was gentle, but Mukuro felt like her face was on fire, heartbeat pounding in her ears so loud she couldn’t think. She couldn’t understand why she felt like this.

All she could see was his eyes, staring intently as he did this small gesture for her.

Before she could even realize it, he had pulled away his arm, the inside of his sleeve stained with foundation. He didn’t seem to notice, staring only at Mukuro. “There. Much better.” He smiled.

Mukuro pulled the compact out of her pocket, looking down at her reflection. She could still see the bits of Junko in her appearances, but her freckles, something she used to feel embarrassed about as a kid, were a calming sight to see. She was herself again, even just a little bit.

She raised her eyes back to Makoto, who was still standing very very very close. Was it fair to say a boy had pretty eyes? Mukuro had never though boys were pretty before, but that was the only word she could think of.

“Mukuro?” He asked, which snapped her back to attention, realizing that she was still staring at him.

Without thinking, she raised her hand, the one still gripping onto the bobby pins, and held it out.

“C-Could you do one more favour for me? Its…um…my bangs, they uh…I n-need to pin them…back.” It was a struggle to get the words out, and she was mentally kicking herself, because what is wrong with me? What is happening?

She could easily pin her hair back by herself. She wasn’t a child. But still, she didn’t pull back when Makoto slowly took the pins from her hands. He worked quickly, quicker than expected, his fingers brushing her skin as they pinned back the loose strands of hair.

“I help my sister with her hair sometimes, when my mom is at work. I’m not very good with braids, but even a clutz like me can use a few pins.” He explained with a lopsided smile, reading Mukuro’s unasked question.

Even with his skill, his fingers lingered just for a moment too long.
His hands were shaking.

Mukuro noticed.

“There. Done.” His hands dropped back to his sides, but he didn’t step away.

_What is happening?_ Mukuro wasn’t sure. “T-Thanks.”

He smiled again. “No problem.” His lips moved when he spoke. Something lips always did when someone spoke, but Mukuro had never thought to stare at them before.

Before this point, Mukuro had never thought to do many things. Like look at the way Makoto’s eyelashes fanned out against his cheeks. Or memorize way his hazel-coloured bangs fell across his forehead, his green eyes shining beneath them. Or how his smile had faded, and now he was looking at her in the same misty-eyed way she was staring at him, and she wanted him to keep staring at her like that.

In a rush of strange exhilaration, she wanted his eyes on hers.

And then, her phone buzzed.

Whatever haze had clouded Mukuro’s mind was gone like a flash. Her face flushed red as she and Makoto stepped apart, his face equally as red. She fumbled to pick up her phone of the counter, pushing those foreign thoughts away for now.

Kyouko was calling. Mukuro answered, placing her phone against her ear. “H-hello?”

“Where are you two? I’ve been texting Makoto non-stop. Hurry up, I’m waiting outside.” Kyouko hissed into the phone.

“R-Right. We’re on our way.” She mumbled back, still slightly dazed.

She could only pray that Kyouko couldn’t hear how shaky her voice was.

Luckily, the festival wasn’t a long drive away. Mukuro wasn’t sure she could stand another minute of sitting next to Makoto in the car, her head reeling from what just happened. She had to focus. Now, things were serious. She couldn’t spend time worrying about her feelings just yet.

The three stood together at the entrance to the festival, at the edge of a campus no longer in use by the academy.

Kyouko was right. The yukatas would help them blend in without difficulty.

Thousands of students were all dressed up in a myriad of patterns and fabrics, Mukuro spotting multiple bright and vibrant floral patterns, as well as blues so deep they seemed to challenge the sea.

The entire festival itself was made up of three pathways, lined with various food vendors and festival games, all connected by one horizontal path at the far back. It was shaped almost like a capital letter E on its side, the prongs of it giving room for three different entrances for students to walk through.
The air was swirling with the scents of various delicacies, some stands run by students themselves.

The sun was setting and cast a soft orange glow on the entire scene, and soon the sun would be gone altogether, and vendors would light little oil lamps to brighten the paths. Mukuro was captivated by the sight of it.

“Alright. The entire school should be in attendance today. Since there’s three lanes, we should each take one. Notify each other as soon as Hajime Hinata has been found.” Kyouko said firmly, going over once more their plans for tonight.

In preparation, each of them had looked over Hajime’s profile, making sure they knew what he looked like.

“And then?” Makoto asked, his eyes already darting to glance at the students walking around him.

Mukuro sighed. “Then, we do whatever we can to keep him away from Junko. She’s…going to be here. I can feel it.”

Kyouko and Makoto shared a concerned glance.

“If you think she’ll be here, then should we really split up? I mean, one of us could get lost in the crowd and cornered or something…” Makoto mumbled, concern lining his features.

Mukuro hesitated. He did have a point. “The quicker we find him, the quicker we can leave. We’ll just be going in circles if we stay as one big group.” She said, reassuring both herself and Makoto in tandem.

He locked eyes with her then, but she forced herself to break his gaze. Her earlier thought spun through her head. *I want his eyes on me.* She blushed at the idea, shaking her head to dissipate the thought.

Not the time for it.

With a deep breath, Kyouko continued speaking. “We should get started then. Makoto, you take the first row. Mukuro can take the centre. I will take the last row. Let’s not waste any time.”

Reluctantly, the three students split apart, going their separate ways as they searched for Hajime Hinata.

The row Mukuro was assigned was undoubtedly the busiest, and she could understand why. It seemed each row had some sort of defining theme, and this one was traditional, always a popular attraction at festivals.

As Mukuro walked down the pathway, gravel crunching beneath her combat boots, she paid close attention to her surroundings, scanning the faces of the crowd. A stall with decorative paper lanterns lining its shelves—lanterns which would later be used in a ceremony at the end of the night—had the longest line.

Mukuro made sure to linger around the line, feigning a sudden interest in the lanterns in order to get a better sight of the faces in the line. She recognized a few students from her class, a class she had been skipping for the past week, but other than that she didn’t catch sight of the elusive Hajime Hinata.

The next couple of stands were fairly normal, ranging from udon stalls to stands selling freshly steeped tea, their herbal aroma lingering in the air. Still, no Hajime.
“Mukuro Ikusaba? You’re sure that’s her?”

Mukuro’s head whipped towards the voice, hands hovering over the daggers sheathed in her hidden pockets.

Instead of the danger she expected to find, her eyes locked with a very frightened student, most likely a first-year student by the way she yelped and hid behind her friend at the sight of Mukuro.

The braver girl out of the pair didn’t seem disturbed by Mukuro’s eyes on her. Instead, she turned to her friend, whispering. The first girl stepped out from behind her friend, before narrowing her eyes at Mukuro, watching the Ultimate Soldier from a safe distance.

“Oh my god, it is!”

“I heard she killed a lot of people and liked it or something, she must be some sort of sociopath.”

“She shouldn’t be allowed in a school like this. I mean…she’s a killer.”

Mukuro sighed, letting her hands fall back down to a relaxed position. It seemed even here, she was still recognizable. People still feared her.

In an attempt to avoid any further unwanted attention from other students, Mukuro scurried away from the two girls, though she could still feel their eyes on her back as she walked away and towards an oddly built stall, with a large crowd of students standing around.

Traditional Japanese music floated from hidden speakers beneath a stage, on which an upperclassman with one long ponytail, most likely an ultimate based on her skill, danced. As she flashed the paper fans in her hands to and fro, matching her footwork, a red-haired girl was happily snapping photos.

Mukuro felt like she recognized the two girls, but couldn’t quite place when. Instead, her eyes focused on the paper fans in her hands cutting through the air like knives.

How odd, that a talent with such similar movement to a soldier, the same grace and power and fluidity needed to perform, was celebrated. This girl could easily become a killer. She had the form, she had the movements down. Where she was celebrated, Mukuro was feared.

Mukuro supposed it wasn’t because Mukuro could kill that she was feared, but it was because she had killed. Many times. Everyone can kill.

The image of those two fans being replaced by deadly steel quickly snapped Mukuro back to attention. She needed to work quickly. She needed to focus and find Hajime.

Focus.

She walked quicker down the path, eyes catching every face, scanning. The crowd was getting denser as more students arrived. The sun was setting, slowly, some stalls already lighting their oil lamps. The darkness and the large crowd sent a rush of pressure to Mukuro’s head.

Focus, she told herself. Still, it was difficult. There were so many faces. So many people whispering, all around her. They were all too close. She needed to breathe. She couldn’t breathe.

A flash of red hair caught her vision.

It wasn’t the same red as the photographer girl. No, this was a vibrant red, the colour of freshly
spilled blood. Mukuro knew that colour.

As if she were in a daze, Mukuro shoved through the crowd chasing the red. Red red red. There was a pain in her chest, curling around her heart like a closed fist. She had to follow.

Mukuro caught another glance at the red-haired figure as it darted through the crowd. What she saw only pain the pain in her chest worsen. A girl, her height, with long swooping red red red hair. Mukuro couldn’t see her eyes, but all she could see was that colour.

The sounds of the festival, the crowd, the flash of the oil lamps, it all felt like static in the back of her mind. All she could see was one thing.

Red.

Part of her mind was screaming, that she should run the other way. Don’t follow. Go back. Find Makoto. Find Kyouko. Stay away.

Her feet carried her forward, towards the figure.

But then, a hand closed around her wrist.

She pulled out her daggers.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Sorry for the cliffhanger, but I did promise this chapter was going to come up fairly quickly after the previous one. Just some notes for this chapter...
- I wrote this in the span of 2 days and christ it was a frickin rush. Like, my mind is reeling from the adrenaline
- Also i wrote it while listening to Rose-coloured boy by Paramore for like 8 hours straight so if that has bled into my writing, welcome to the fun zone.
- This chapter takes place one day before the previous chapter. What happens in those twenty four hours? Lets explore that together in the next chapters.
-hell im making this up as i go man its a wild ride and theres no seatbelts here we go

I hope you all enjoyed! If you have any questions or theories or anything to say, leave it in the comments below! I'll reply in between sessions of screaming because holyshit this chapter was wild to write
There was a knife pressed against Makoto’s throat. A hand holding down his chest, his legs and right arm pinned down by the weight of another body.

He was having trouble breathing.

But then again, so was she.

“Mukuro,” He tried, pressing down into the gravel path as hard as he could. Anything to put distance between his neck and the deadly steel against him.

Mukuro’s expression remained the same, but her grip wavered slightly, and he froze as he felt the steel press a little closer with her movements.

It wasn’t that he thought she would actually hurt him, but he didn’t want to take the risk that she might flinch when he moved or spoke. Especially since people were starting to gather, circling like vultures. Makoto could only hope he wouldn’t end up as the metaphorical carcass in this very literal situation.

“Mukuro, it’s okay.” He kept his voice low, careful. The last thing he wanted to do was scare her. He could see her expression clearly, thanks to the bobby pins holding her bangs back. Mukuro seemed troubled.

Makoto was sure she must’ve seen something before he tried to get Mukuro’s attention and was briefly worried it might have been Junko. But surely the pink-haired psycho model would have garnered some attention from the crowd.

Even with so many people gathering, murmuring and muttering, Mukuro didn’t move. She just kept her eyes pinned down on him, wild and feral. Makoto felt like even though she was so close, she was a million miles away.

“It’s okay. Just breathe,” He supported. Her eyes darted across his face, scanning for something it seemed like she wasn’t finding. Her breathing was slowing considerably, but he could still see the glimmer of unshed tears in the corner of Mukuro’s eyes.

Slowly, he lifted his free arm to the arm Mukuro had pressed against his chest. He touched her, gently, barely brushing the skin peeking out from under the billowing sleeve of her yukata. She felt so cold.

As soon as Mukuro registered the contact, she jolted back immediately, pulling the dagger away with her. The light tap seemed to snap Mukuro back to reality, as she suddenly scrambled off of him, her expression twisting into a mix of horror, panic, and guilt that send a sharp pang through Makoto’s heart.

“Hey, it’s okay, you’re fine, just breathe,” Makoto hurried to say, sitting up. He held out one hand towards her in what he hoped to be a reassuring gesture.
“What…?” She looked from him, to the dagger in her hand, then to the crowd surrounding them. Mukuro’s eyes settled on the dagger in her hand before she let it clatter to the ground, as if it had burned her. “I’m… I’m so sorry,” She made a sound then, this horrible choked back sob that she tried to cover with her free hand, until her knees gave out from under her.

People started murmuring even louder, and Makoto could pick up their whispers, no matter how hard he tried to push them away.

“She really is dangerous.”

“Should someone call the police?”

The back of his head was pounding from the impact of hitting the ground, but he pushed through it, shifting to sit on his knees, scooting closer to Mukuro.

“I’m fine, you’re fine. I just need you to breathe okay?” Makoto took her free hand in his, holding it tightly.

She shook her head back and forth quickly, choking back another sob. “I… I almost… I could’ve… ki — hurt, you.”

“What if she tries to kill one of us next?”

“Is she crying? Really? She almost killed that guy! Pathetic.”


Mukuro just kept shaking her head. Back and forth. Tears pooled in the corners of her eyes. “I just. I — I saw her. It was…”

Makoto’s face paled instantly. He gripped Mukuro’s hand a little tighter. “Then we need to hurry. If she’s here…”

Mukuro’s expression somehow turned even more pained. “Not… Junko. It was… just… red… It’s… I can’t do this. I’m just…”

He squeezed her hand tighter, only to pull back when she winced.

Is she in pain? Makoto thought, confused. It was then he remembered still-healing gashes across her palms.

“Oh…” Makoto said, stupidly. His eyes settled on the rippled skin, warped and scabbed over, lingering for just a moment too long.

That seemed to set her off again, because her expression became frantic once more. “I’m just… broken.”

Makoto frowned. “You’re not. You’re… anything but that. Listen, we…” He lowered his voice into a whisper, just loud enough for her to hear. “We found him. Kyouko found him. I didn’t want to tell you here, but… God. We’re so close, Mukuro. You can do this.”

“A girl like her… should be in prison.”

“A killer like her…”
Mukuro’s expression turned into something more painful than a frown. “What if I can’t? Why would he listen to me?”

Makoto felt this bubble of anger inside him, not at Mukuro, but at everything that could be making her feel this way. Haven’t they gone through this enough? When will the world give her a break?

“We can do this, okay? Just—We’re a team, remember?” He didn’t mean for his voice to raise, but the people around him were circling closer, and his head was spinning. “I trust you. You know that, right?”

Mukuro lowered her head. “I… I don’t know.”

“…shouldn’t be alive at all.”


And then he was grabbing her by her wrists, keeping his grip loose enough so that she could pull away if she wanted to. Still, she let herself be dragged away.

Makoto shoved his way through the crowd, pushing aside students left and right. He couldn’t find it in him to care. He didn’t look back to Mukuro, only taking solace in her hurried footsteps close behind him.

Makoto was a firm believer in the fact that violence isn’t the answer. Problems should be solved peacefully, whenever possible. But right now? God, he was just…so upset. That’s the only way he could describe it. So, he dragged Mukuro away from the crowd, away from those eyes, mumbling curses the whole way.

Mukuro didn’t ask any questions when he took them off path, into a forested area beside the campus. It wasn’t far from the festival, but just shielded enough to hide them in case the other students really did decide to call security.

As soon as they were far enough, he let her go, taking a few steps away. He still kept his back to her but could hear her softly sniffing.

“Makoto?” She asked weakly. “I’m sorry I—"

“No.” He didn’t turn around. “No more apologizing. I’ve had enough. Its just…fuck, how could you still think I don’t trust you? It’s like…every step we take forward, we take another two steps backwards.”

He could imagine the expression on her face. Wounded. “Makoto…”

He ran a hand through his hair. “Fucking hell.” He breathed out shakily.

There was a stretch of silence then, filled only by the distant sounds of the festival. The sun had already set, and the forest was shrouded in shadows, lit only by the moonlight that filtered in through the leaves. He couldn’t slow his heart rate, no matter how much he tried to focus on the scenery around him.

All he could hear was her footsteps shuffling through the grass as she shifted in place.

“I’ve never heard you…swear this much before.” She mumbled.

He turned around then, eyebrows pinched together. “We’ve gone through this enough, Mukuro.
Really. You aren’t Junko. You aren’t…Ryouko.” She flinched at the name, but he continued nonetheless. “You’re you. And…you can do this. We can do this. I’m trying, I really am, just to show you how much I love you but God it’s so difficult to listen to you talking about yourself like you don’t matter.”

Mukuro’s eyes widened.

“You matter.” He sighed.

Mukuro opened her mouth, before closing it again.

“You…You’re the only thing that matters.” He finished, dropping his hands to his side.

She took in an unsteady breath. “You…love me?”

Makoto’s jaw clamped shut. Did…he really say that? He mentally flipped back through his words before it dawned on him. He just…confessed. In the middle of a forest. He told her he loved her.

I love her.

God. How could he just say that? Without any hesitation? He didn’t mean for it to come out, but…he meant it. He knows they haven’t known each other for very long, but he just wanted to be there for her. But the way she’s looking at him now, why does it make him feel so nervous?

It’s too soon. It’s all too soon. He shouldn’t have said that, now was not the time.

“Mukuro, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to say that, I…” He tried to backpedal, but he could feel himself mentally stumbling.

She blinked at him. “You…didn’t mean to?”

He opened his mouth and closed it again. It seemed that small action was all she needed, because suddenly Mukuro’s expression closed off all together.

“Right. Of course. I’m…of course.” She took a deep breath, exhaling shakily. “Right. Of course, you didn’t mean to say that. You were just…trying to comfort me, and it slipped out right?”

“Mukuro…”

“I’m right, aren’t I?” She asked, firmer this time.

Makoto thought he could imagine what wounded looked like, but this was so much worse. She looked away then, eyes pinned on the ground beneath her.

She looked betrayed. Hurt. “Mukuro, I—”

“Kyouko is waiting for us, correct?” She interrupted, her tone shifting from shaky to serious so fast it gave him whiplash. She wasn’t meeting his eyes.

Makoto blinked at her, confused. “Y-Yeah, but—”

Mukuro’s jaw shifted. “Then we should go.”

Before anything else could be said, Mukuro spun on her heel and began walking back to the festival. Makoto just stood there, dumbfounded.
Mukuro was already making her way through the trees, but Makoto couldn’t move his legs. He just felt…stuck. It seemed she noticed he wasn’t following, because her steps slowed to a stop.

She turned her head slowly, just enough that he could see her face, but she still kept her eyes down. “Let’s go.” She repeated. “You didn’t mean to say that, right? Forget it then.”

“Mukuro…I’m sorry…I—”

“Let’s. Go.” She said through gritted teeth, and Makoto swallowed down whatever inhibition was holding him back. He followed Mukuro forward.

She was reacting sensibly. He kept telling himself that. Mukuro had every right to not return his feelings, because it was insane to fall in love with someone after only a few weeks. Barely a month. He kept telling himself that it was only reasonable.

But why did every second she didn’t look at him feel like the twist of a knife?

They remained silent the entire walk back to the festival grounds. Mukuro kept her gaze forward, though Makoto didn’t miss the shaking of her hands. It was understandable. She said she saw…something. If not Junko, then who? No matter who she saw, he was worried.

“So where are we meeting Kyouko?” Mukuro asked, breaking the silence. Her eyes were darting across the faces in the crowd. It was as if she was pretending nothing happened at all. Totally casual.

Her tone threw Makoto off kilter a bit. “Oh, um…she said to meet by the street lamp at the end of her path. I saw her with Hajime then.”

Mukuro gave him a carefully guarded look. “You met him already?”

Makoto nodded. “Only briefly. I told him I was going to go get you, and to wait there.”

Mukuro hummed in agreeance before turning to face forward again. Casual. Casual was good. It was time to focus, right?

Except for a kid who can barely sit still half the time, casual silence is torture. There’s so much he wants to say, but he can’t get the image of her wounded expression out of his mind. He glanced down to her hands, where he saw her fists curled tightly. It looked like it hurt.

“Mukuro. Your hands.” He mumbled, pretending like he wasn’t paying that much attention. “You, uh…”

She side-glanced at him, frowning. “My hands?”

“Yeah.” Makoto swallowed, pointing at them. “Doesn’t it hurt?”

She unfurled her fists before looking away. “Didn’t notice.”

Makoto’s shoulders sagged a little and she frowned again, but kept her eyes forward, her footsteps sure. Before Makoto could stay anything else, Mukuro halted to a stop.

“He’s here.” She breathed out, eyes wide.

*Hopeful,* his brain supplied.
Makoto followed her gaze, scanning the crowd to find Kyouko. Except, Kyouko wasn’t there.

The only person there, sitting on a bench under the street light, was Hajime Hinata. He wore the standard Reserve Course uniform, a black suit, and had a small disposable cup in his hand, half-filled with what looked like some kind of tea. He looked up when they approached, eyeing them warily.

“You’re Hajime, right?” Mukuro asked hurriedly. It seemed she hadn’t noticed yet. Instead she stepped closer to Hajime, almost caging him in with her height as he was still seated. Hajime only leaned away slightly to keep his distance.

“And you’re the Ultimate Soldier?” He asked, tone slightly bitter as he set the half-finished cup down beside him.

Mukuro narrowed her eyes at him. “Is that a problem?”

Sensing the tension, Makoto quickly stepped forward, separating Mukuro from Hajime with a gently tug of her wrist. “O-kay…we don’t really have time for this,” He chuckled, unable to hide the flutter of panic in his voice. “Where is Kyouko?”

Hajime frowned, his eyebrows furrowed. “The purple haired one?” Makoto and Mukuro nodded in unison. Hajime rubbed the back of his neck. “Don’t know. We were having some tea, and then suddenly this girl came up to us. I didn’t catch her name, but she said something to uh, Kyouko, and then Kyouko suddenly pulled her away, and told me to wait here while they went towards the old building. So, here I am.”

Mukuro turned to look at Makoto. “She could be in trouble. You should go find her.”

Even though it sounded like a suggestion, Makoto couldn’t help but bristle at her tone. “R-Right. I have my phone on me, so I’ll call you if we need anything. You sure you’ll be fine?” He asked, looking between Hajime and her.

Mukuro hesitated, before nodding once. “You said it yourself. I can do this.”

Makoto spared her a small smile. She didn’t smile back.

Without reading too deeply into that expression, he rushed off towards the main building, leaving Mukuro to handle Hajime on her own.

He really didn’t like the idea of separating, but if Kyouko was in danger, he couldn’t let her go around alone for much longer. He pulled out his phone, dialling Kyouko’s number as he walked through the crowd.

“Tea?”

He spun around to see a plum-haired girl holding a tray of glimmering yellow liquid. It was faint, like a firefly’s glow. She smiled brightly, but her eyes held an odd dimness.

Makoto raised an eyebrow at her, his phone still held up to his ear. He felt like he recognized the girl, but couldn’t put his finger on it. “Uh…”

The girl moved closer. “It’s just a sample of the lemon tea we’re selling at our booth. Care for some?” She asked, gesturing the tray closer.

Makoto eyed the cups. The tray was still pretty full, only a couple missing from the arrangement. But Makoto didn’t want to be rude to the girl, I mean, she’s just selling some tea, right? “Sure. Thanks.”
He mumbled, taking a cup from the tray.

The girl bowed slightly before dipping back into the crowd, a humble smile on her face. Makoto couldn’t help but feel unsettled by the girl’s faint familiarity.

He shook off the feeling, continuing his walk to the old building, the ringing of his phone in his ear. Kyouko still wasn’t answering her phone. The longer the phone just kept ringing, the deeper the pit in Makoto’s stomach sank.

What if she had met Junko? Who was the girl she met with? Makoto reasoned that it could have been Yui, but what would Yui be doing here?

After the third time the call went to voicemail, Makoto sighed, utterly frustrated with worry. “C’mon Kyouko. Pick up, pick up.” He mumbled.

He figured that maybe she had poor reception? He tried sending her a text instead. It was a bit difficult to hold his tea and type at the same time, so he eyed the yellow liquid one more time before swallowing it in one shot.

Immediately, he started coughing. Because, *wow*, that is horrible.

“Lemon flavoured, my ass.” He mumbled cynically. *What the hell was that*? It was so bitter, and ugh, just…horrible.

He shook it off, quickly reassuming his task of texting Kyouko, tossing the plastic cup into a garbage bin at the side of the path.

_Makoto: Where are you? Is everything alright? Call back ASAP._

Content with the message, he pressed send, tucking the phone back into his pocket. If Kyouko was anywhere besides the old building, then she could come to him. The festival was pretty big, so if she was still there, at least he wouldn’t have to scour the entire place.

He took off running towards the old building, the last place she could be.

That is, until he began to feel his legs wobbling. Maybe he was just tired? He slowed to a stop in front of the building’s courtyard. Away from the festival, it was extremely dark. He could barely blink through the moonlight to scan over the concrete structure before him.

“Kyouko!” He called out, cupping his hands around his mouth. “Are you here!?”

He paused to listen, but still nothing. His shoulders deflated a little, until he heard a rustling from the forested area beside him. He squinted through the darkness, only to freeze in confusion at what he saw.

“Mukuro?” He asked, quietly.

A pair of blue eyes watched him through the darkness, the same angular face as Mukuro, but that… that is *not* Mukuro. He quickly began backing away, panic coursing through his veins.

“Nononono…” He muttered to himself, suddenly finding it difficult to breathe.

“What do you think you’re going, huh cutie?” A sickeningly sweet voice chirped out to him, and *this is not good, no no no*, because he recognized that voice.

He spun around to run, only to find his legs buckle from under him. He landed on the ground with
his arms outstretched, holding him up. That didn’t last long, because suddenly he was very, very, dizzy, his arms giving out from under him and leaving him with his face pressed into the gravel.

“Well, well, well. Feeling a little under the weather?” The voice was closer now, their footsteps audible as they shuffled closer.

“Y-You…I can’t…move…” Makoto struggled to get out, gritting his teeth against the urge to sleep.

She only giggled. “Aw c’mon, You can’t give up now! We’ve only started. You’ve got to give it everything you’ve got! It’s…punishment time!”

He saw a flash of red hair before the world blacked out completely.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Hope you enjoyed this chapter!
We're really cutting it close to the end, so here's some notes on the chapter itself
- So, uh, remember that liquid from like, chapter 3 or something? Finally came back into play...
- Also the biggest betrayal of this chapter has to be Makoto not getting the good tea he deserves, someone get this boy some Nestea ASAP
- Thanks for everyone supporting this fic, i couldn't have done it without you.
- Also, did you really think i would not write more angst? I am the angst master. The angst never rests. Dont get used to that fluffy bullshit for too long
Struggling

Chapter Notes

EDIT: For those who saw this chapter yesterday, the next chapter button is broken for some reason?? I'm trying to republish this chapter to see if it fixes it, so bear with me! (´▽`)

(Also, some of the text has been altered, to make up for an error I noticed. Not too much has been changed, just a certain scene. I'll mark the scene that has been changed starting with an asterisk (*) and ending the changes with one aswell.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

=+ MUKURO POV +=

Mukuro kept her eyes trained on Makoto’s back as he walked away, watching as his hands fumbled to find his phone in the pockets of his yukata.

There’s a sharp pain in her chest, this constant hum that hadn’t settled since they left the forest. She couldn't get his words out of her head. He said it. He said he loved her.

But…he didn’t mean it.

Mukuro had to keep repeating that fact to herself over and over again. She was an idiot to think he could love someone like her. He was wrong. She is broken, and she was a fool to let herself believe him for one minute. She’s already begun trying to distance herself from those stupid thoughts. Makoto doesn’t love her, and she shouldn’t have wished for anything else.

“Hey, are you alright?” Hajime asked, snapping her out of her thoughts. She turned quickly to look at him, eyes blinking back tears.

“I’m fine.” She managed to clip back. Hajime merely narrowed his eyes, unconvinced. “It’s not important. We…need to talk.”

Hajime’s eyebrows scrunched up in confusion. “Yeah, see…that’s the thing. I don’t know what you people want from me, but if this is something dangerous I don’t want to get involved”

Mukuro’s expression darkened. “Something dangerous? It seems to me like you already are caught up in something dangerous, Izuru.”

Hajime straightened, his jaw clamping shut. Good, Mukuro thought. At least he’s taking this seriously now.

Hajime took a deep, steadying breath. “What do you want, then?”

Mukuro hesitated before speaking. “We know what you’ve signed up for, and we were hoping you’d reconsider. This project is bigger than just you, Hajime,” She said bluntly. “It’s bigger than all of us, and it’s something that simply can’t happen.”

That seemed to be the wrong thing to say, because suddenly Hajime was standing up, putting the ten centimetres of height he had against Mukuro to good use.
“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” He muttered darkly.

Mukuro’s hands hovered over the butterfly knife in her pocket. “I think I do. You’re desperate to have talent, to join the main course, and the project is simply a step to complete that selfish desire—”

“You can’t understand what it’s like! To—to be looked at like you’re worthless!” He spat at her, and suddenly it was Mukuro flinching back.

His tone was so familiar, it sent a sharp ache through Mukuro’s head.

“To the academy, I’m just another sucker caught in their scheme for money, and I’m sick of it! I’m sick of being looked at like…like I’m nothing! Everyone around me—all the students in the reserve course—they’re fine with living like this. I just want to be someone.” He finished, his chest rising and falling rapidly.

Was he having trouble breathing?

“And you think becoming Izuru would fix that?” Mukuro asked.

Hajime paused, as if he were really weighing her words. He was swaying on his feet a bit, as if dizzy. “Yes. It would.”

“You would become someone else entirely. A monster. You don’t want to be a part of the academy’s scheme? Of Jun—” Mukuro cut herself off, closing her eyes for a moment to collect herself. “Of those who want to use Izuru for their plans? Then don’t do this.”

Hajime gritted his teeth. “You said I’m selfish. Tell, me Ultimate Soldier.” He hissed her title like it was a curse, which she supposed it was. “Is it selfish to want a future? Is it selfish to want to be welcome somewhere? Is it selfish to want to be treated like a fucking human being?”

For that, Mukuro had no response.

“And you just expect me to…to give up on that dream? Look, if…if I don’t do this…I’ll be kicked out from the school. I don’t have the money, and—”

“I’ll give you whatever money you need.” Mukuro interrupted quickly.

Hajime startled, looking at her like she had grown a second head. “You? You would be willing to pay thousands of dollars to keep…a total stranger, at Hope’s peak? A reserve course student, who has nothing to do with you?”

Mukuro nodded. “My parents left me a large sum of money when they passed. I don’t have any use for it. Stopping the Izuru Kamukura project is my priority.”

Hajime narrowed his eyes at her. Before he could speak again, a girl walked up to them.

* 

“Tea?”

They both turned to look at her. A plum haired girl stood in a traditional-patterned yukata. Mukuro recognized her insantly. Mikan Tsumiki. She held out a tray of yellow liquid, glowing like a firefly. Mukuro thought the colour was…familiar.

She looked into Mikan’s eyes, watching the swirls of despair there. “No thanks.” Mukuro said firmly, and Hajime said the same.
“I already had some.” He explained sheepishly.

Mikan smiled. “Then you can tell this girl just how great it was!” She exclaimed, gesturing the tray towards Mukuro. Hajime grimaced, which…was definitely not a good sign.

Mukuro shifted uncomfortably. If Mikan was here…then Junko had to be close. “I really don’t—”

“It’s just a sample! Lemon tea. We’re selling some at our booth.” Mukuro had to give the girl credit—that she was nothing if not persistent.

“Just take it. She wont leave unless you do.” He murmured, nodding to the half-filled cup on the bench behind him.

Mukuro eyed the tray one more time. "I'll take one...if you tell me where my sister is."

Mikan blinked blankly. "Junko? Hmmm...she's not here." She said with a little frown. "I haven't seen Junko in days."

Mukuro felt an odd twist in her gut. Mikan...wasn't lying. Mukuro had grown up with liars her whole life. And in this moment...Mikan was telling the truth.

"A deal is a deal, Mukuro~" Mikan sing-songed. "Unless...you want me to call Junko...?" She asked innocently. The tone was so grating and sickening Mukuro winced.

Mukuro sighed before reluctantly taking a cup. “Fine.”

Mikan simply smiled in reply. But…she didn’t leave.

*Does she want me to take a sip…?* In an effort to get her to leave, Mukuro made a show of lifting the cup to her lips and swallowing some.

Instantly, Mukuro winced at the flavour, spitting as much as she could out onto the pavement.

Mikan giggled. “Have a nice night!” She chirped, before darting into the crowd once more.

Mukuro promptly began coughing hoarsely, because, *wow.* Mukuro usually enjoyed bitter things, but this was just…nightmarishly awful. Mukuro was grateful the Mikan wasn’t still there to watch Mukuro’s near-gagging reaction to her drink.

* * 

“Yeah…it’s pretty bad.” Hajime mumbled, and Mukuro shot him a glare.

“A warning would have been nice.” She snapped back.

Hajime frowned. “Am I supposed to be nice to you? Because really, you have been asking a lot of me, and I haven’t even asked anything of you.”

Mukuro straightened herself. “Go ahead. Ask.”

Hajime hesitated. “Why? Why do you want this so badly? What do you possibly have to gain from this?”

Mukuro’s expression hardened. “I…the person who…killed my parents. They want to use Izuru. They want to do…something.”
“Do…something…?” He asked, raising an eyebrow sceptically.

Mukuro realized this all sounded very ridiculous, but if Hajime didn’t say no…Junko would win. Mukuro didn’t know how, but she knew this was the key part of her plan. “Something bad. It would hurt a lot of people.”

Hajime frowned. “I’m sorry about your parents. And I hope you stop…whoever that is. But—”

*No, please. No no no. Please.*

“—I’m not giving up. Keep your money. T-this was about more than money anyway.” He finished, almost stumbling over his own words.

“Hajime, I’m asking you to please, just reconsider.” Mukuro insisted.

Hajime just shook his head, but that only left him swaying even more. “N-No. I’m…sorry…” He drawled, pressed his palm to his forehead. “Agh…”

Mukuro took a step forward. “Are you feeling alright?”

Hajime shook his head again, right before he blinked slowly at Mukuro. “I…don’t…”

Hajime took another step forward, but it only resulted in his legs buckling out from beneath him. Mukuro was able to move quick enough to catch him, but her legs felt oddly rigid. She ignored the feeling, holding up Hajime.

“H-Hey…what happened?” She asked, shaking him gently to try and stir him awake.

Hajime seemed to be blinking in and out of consciousness. “I…can’t move…”

Mukuro frowned, now seriously worried. Something strange was going on here. First Kyouko conveniently goes missing, and now Hajime falls ill mysteriously. Mukuro quickly remembered what he mentioned earlier.

“That girl you mentioned, what did she look like?” She asked hurriedly.

Hajime winced once more, his words slurring. “Y-Your height…long red hair…a m-main course uniform, b-but th-that’s…all I…”

*Red red red.*

*Mikan really wasn’t lying.*

*Junko isn’t here.*

*But she is.*

Hajime went limp in her arms. Mukuro couldn’t help but remember holding Yasuke in the same way, back when he had a seizure.

Makoto felt an unsettling haze wash over her, stomach twisting with dread. *This…could not be good.* She could only pray Hajime did not end up with a similar fate.

Before she could do anything else, someone called out from the crowd.

“Hajime?!” A girl’s voice shouted, running towards Mukuro. She had short light pink hair, slightly
curled at the ends. Her eyes were wide with worry, as pale pink as her hair.

Mukuro watched the girl warily as she knelt down beside Mukuro, taking Hajime from her arms.

“What happened to him?” Even though her tone was worried, her voice was still soft, as if Hajime was simply sleeping and she didn’t want to wake him up.

Mukuro was nothing if not content that the girl could take over. If Kyouko had somehow passed out in the same way…then Makoto might be in danger as well. “I assume you’re his friend?”

The girl nodded sadly, reaching to brush the hair from Hajime’s eyes. Mukuro raised an eyebrow. More than friends? “I’m Chiaki. But what happened? How did he end up this way? Is there anything we can do to help? Maybe I should call someone—”

“No.” Chiaki flinched back at Mukuro’s interruption. “Sorry…it’s just…I’m not sure how he fell unconscious, but my friends might be in similar trouble.”

Mukuro had paid close attention to the girl’s determined expression. She seemed to really care about Hajime. If Mukuro could manipulate the girl into helping, perhaps Chiaki could convince Hajime to give up on the project if she saw the dangers surrounding his involvement. It was a cheap and shady tactic, but it was all she had.

“If we find them, we might be able to help Hajime. Will you come with me?” Mukuro asked, trying to keep her expression as gentle as possible.

To her credit, Chiaki didn’t hesitate. “Of course. Tell me what to do.”

Mukuro quickly bent down, scooping Hajime up in a princess-carry. Chiaki’s eyes widened at the feat of strength, but she didn’t comment. “Take my phone from my pocket. It’s unlocked, so all you need to do is dial the number for the contact titled Makoto. Follow me.” Mukuro instructed quickly.

Chiaki nodded, taking out the phone and doing as told. Mukuro began walking towards the old building, Chiaki close by her heels.

“He’s not answering yet.” The pink-haired girl murmured.

Mukuro felt her arms shaking with strain, but gritted her teeth and kept walking. “Maybe he has bad reception.

Chiaki picked up her pace a little to catch up with Mukuro. “Hey hey, are you sure this is the right way?”

Mukuro nodded, but found her mouth to feel fuzzy, like it was filled with cotton. “Y-yeah. He went…in t-this direction.”

Chiaki frowned, but remained silent, continuing to dial Makoto’s number over and over.

Mukuro could understand why she would be wary. After all, a complete stranger was holding her unconscious friend (Boyfriend? Classmate?) in her arms and was suddenly guiding her towards an abandoned building. It was a lot to take in, and Mukuro felt a pang of guilt for leading the girl on.

Mukuro could have easily passed Hajime over to Chiaki, and went to find Makoto while Hajime was taken to a hospital. But…she couldn’t let Hajime out of her sight. The mission, her mission, was too important.
It was a cold thing to do. But Mukuro was raised to be a cold person. And if this is what it took to stop Junko, then so be it.

Right as they approached the doorway to the building, Mukuro’s legs gave out, and she fell to the ground. She struggled to grip Hajime in her arms, letting go gently so he could roll onto the ground.

Chiaki quickly rushed over, kneeling beside her. “What happened? What’s wrong?”

Mukuro was wincing, her vision swirling as dark spots lined the corner of her vision. “I…I don’t—"

*The tea.*

Mukuro swore under her breath, gripping her head with one hand. “T-The tea was d-drugged… Hajime, passed out…I d-drank only a bit, so…so—”

“So its affecting you less.” Chiaki finished for her, noting her struggle. “It’s okay, I’m just going to call someone, it’ll be alright. Hang on as long as you can—”

Chiaki was cut off by the sound of rustling in the bushes. Mukuro watched as Chiaki spun towards the sound, looking towards the treeline.

Mukuro heard a familiar click, and that was all it took for her to yank Chiaki by the wrist, tugging her to the floor.

She yelped as the dart whizzed past her, a blur of yellow.

“She’s here.” Mukuro thought, using the little strength she had left to keep herself awake.

“G-Get back.” Mukuro ordered, moving to shield Chiaki and Hajime’s bodies with her own.

“Made some new friends I see.” Junko’s voice called out from the shadows, and for a minute Mukuro thought it might have been a hallucination.

But then a second dart, one Mukuro’s drugged mind was too hazed to pick up on, whizzed over Mukuro’s shoulder, striking Chiaki in the neck.

The pink-haired girl winced when it entered, but it didn’t take her long to pass out. She fell to the ground with a dull thud, landing right beside Hajime.

“Adjusted the dosage. That little dart is soooo much more efficient, but hey, can’t go shooting people in a crowded place, huh?” Junko chirped, but Mukuro frustratingly couldn’t pinpoint her voice.

It was getting harder and harder to keep her eyes open. Mukuro already couldn’t feel her legs, and at this rate, she wouldn’t last much longer. If she could just…grab her phone.

“How’d you like the tea?” Junko said with what Mukuro imagined to be a sly smile.

“Tasted like shit.” Mukuro clipped back, her hands slowly reaching back to where Chiaki laid, palm outstretched, phone sitting innocently on the ground.

Junko snorted. “I’ll give your compliments to the chef.” She drawled.

Mukuro felt her hand close around the phone. All she had to do…was…bring…it…closer.

“Welp. I think that’s enough waiting, right?” Junko sighed, noting Mukuro’s silence.
Her sister was always the impatient one. Mukuro should’ve just mused her. If she could just…buy some more time…

“It’s…punishment time!”

The dart shot straight into her neck, and stayed there.

Chapter End Notes

Two chapters????? In one week???? Yes, that's right kiddos. This is going to be an interesting week.
It's March Break, which meaaaaans.....a whole lot of writing.
Some notes on this chapter...
- I like to imagine that Mukuro and Hajime could have been good buds if everything didn't turn out so...well, like shit. I mean, both of them got inferiority complexes, so maybe they could help each other out. Two negatives make a positive, right?
- Also, Junko being a shady bitch as always.
- I love tea. But if you've ever tasted pure hibiscus tea, you would know just how nasty bitter things can be. Sure as hell ain't lemon tea
- 5 unconscious kiddos + Junko's evil schemes = No bueno for anyone. just. not gonna go well. this is going to be a shitshow. I love it.
Hope you enjoyed this chapter! Let me know if you have any questions/comments/theories in the comments below, i'd love to hear what you think! Have a great day/night/whenever everyone!
Mukuro dragged her hand over the blackboard. Chalk dusted across her fingertips as she traced the outline of Monokuma, her heart and head pounding in tandem. She was beginning to gather the broken fragments of her memory now that the drug’s effects were starting to wear off.

Still, she still felt this indescribable dizziness making her sway with every step. She wasn’t sure how long she’d been in the room. A few minutes? An hour? A day? She couldn’t tell. She only knew that whatever drug was in that dart was to blame for the way her head was pounding.

Mukuro had dabbled in mithridatism, the practice of poisoning oneself in non-lethal doses to build up an immunity to poison, back when she was with Fenrir. If she was this badly affected by the drug, who knows how horribly the others could be dealing with it?

She had to find them.

Mukuro glanced around the room once more, squinting in the dark for any sort of clue as to how she could escape. Besides the chalkboard, the walls were completely bare, spare for a single-screen monitor in the corner of the wall.

Mukuro shuffled closer to the monitor, feet dragging across the cracked concrete floor. Up this close, she could see a camera affixed to the top. Unsurprisingly, she was being watched.

Junko was watching her. Junko trapped her here.


It was a paradox, really. Someone who is Junko, but who is not Junko. Mukuro knew her sister well. Even though Junko was running around, parading herself as Ryouko just to mess with Mukuro’s head, there were some things that never change, no matter who her sister was calling herself.

She was the kind of girl who sweet-talks strangers into killing themselves just so she could revel in the despair of it all. The kind of girl who tries to kill her sister just to feel the despair of losing the only family she has left. The kind of girl who would psychologically ruin her boyfriend, just to leave him obsessively wishing for the very person who left him in that state.

Junko was a monster, but she had limits. Junko always left a way out. Every time.

Mukuro could rely on this fact, and it spurred her into action. She began running her hands across the steel wall. If Junko brought her in here, there had to be some sort of entrance. Or, for Mukuro’s purposes, an exit.

She had to hurry. Junko must have brought everyone else to this place as well. Judging by the chalkboard, it must be the old reserve course building. It made sense. Abandoned classrooms, perfect for storing hostages in the school without being found out.
Mukuro stopped suddenly when she felt a ridge in the wall, a seam of some sorts. She peered closer, pressing her eye up to it. *Light.* This was the way out. Still, Mukuro frowned at the steel wall.

“No handle…” Mukuro mumbled to herself, pressing her hands across the panel, tracing the frame. It didn’t have the shape of the door, which could mean there simply wasn’t a door. Junko could have welded the room shut. As long as Mukuro didn’t know how long she’d been unconscious, anything was possible.

If she could manage to pry open the panel, she might be able to escape. All she needed was something to act as a lever. She rummaged through the pockets of her yukata, searching for any sort of knife that she may have—

Mukuro froze. Her arms dropped to her side, limply hanging there.

Of course Junko would have taken all her weapons. All her pockets were empty, all the daggers and pistols she had strapped to her arms and thighs were missing. But then she felt something, two lumps beneath her clothing that Junko must have missed.

Mukuro deflated once she realized what it was. The two items Sayaka had left her. While the compact was utterly useless, Mukuro realized the pager could be used to contact Sayaka. Mukuro frowned at the device. There needed to be a way for it’s signal to get out, or else she’d just be wasting its battery.

Mukuro tucked it back into her pocket, saving it for when she could get to higher ground.

Before Mukuro could start searching the classroom one more time for anything useful, the sound of static crackling to life startled her. She spun around, watching as the monitor lit up the tiny room.

There on the screen was Ryouko. Or, well, Junko. With her hair dyed a bright red and straightened the way she used to have it when she was little. Mukuro’s hands begun to shake at the sight of her, at the overwhelming urge to run. But she couldn’t move.

All she could do was watch the screen.

Junko sat in some sort of control room, machinery of all types lining the walls, monitors of all sizes mounted up above her head. They shone down on her with a sickeningly green glow.

“*Hello everyone! How’s everyone doing today? I hope you enjoyed the refreshments.*” She said with a little wink that made Mukuro gag.

“*Okey-dokey, now that I’ve gathered all ten of you here—*”

Ten? Where did she find five more people?

“*—we’re going to have a little fun! I’m sure you’re all very confused, but please meet in classroom 5C. Or else.*” She gave a little two fingered salute, and the screen went black once more.

Or, atleast Mukuro thought it did. It flickered right back to life after a moment.

“*Hiya Mukuro! This is being broadcasted just to you! Don’t you feel special?*” She asked with a smile.

Mukuro simply glared into the camera.

Junko’s smile dropped. “*Boo. You’re no fun. Any-who, I just wanted to say that I gave you a bit of*
an extra challenge! Fun, right? You’ve probably noticed buuuuut…you don’t have any door to your room. Kinda sad right?” She explained with a mock frown.

It seemed like she was waiting for another reaction out of Mukuro, so she gave her sister just what she wanted…and just glared into the camera.

Junko rolled her eyes. “Boring as usual. Thought you might’ve learned to lighten up after hanging around that wimp Makot-hoe for a while, guess that was a lost cause.” She said with a smile, obviously proud of her little pun.

Seeing as this conversation was going nowhere, Mukuro reassumed the task of searching the classroom. That seemed to only piss Junko off even further.

“Hey, didn’t your mother ever tell you to listen when people are talking to you? Tsk tsk.” Mukuro flinched at the mention of her mother, but gritted her teeth and kept her back to the screen.

There has to be a way out…there has to. Mukuro thought to herself, eyes scanning the walls once more.

“Ugh, whatever. Just saying…you only have a few minutes left before I’m going to have to punish you for being late! Rules are rules, y’know. So…keep your chin up! You’ll get out.”

The screen went black, and Mukuro froze, her eyebrows scrunching up in confusion. You’ll get out? Keep your chin up? Since when did Junko start encouraging me?

Mukuro froze once she realized it wasn’t encouragement. It was a hint. Chin up. That was the way out.

Mukuro looked to the ceiling, only to see a metal grate, loose on its hinges., right above the chalkboard. This classroom had no desks to stand on, so her only option was to use the frame of the chalkboard as a step stool of sorts.

She moved quickly, gripping onto the top of the frame with the tips of her fingers before hoisting herself up. Her nails were screaming in protest, but she stuck through it, teetering on the edge as she used one hand to hold on, and one hand to knock the grate open.

It fell to the floor with a clatter, and Mukuro hopped down to give her hands some rest. She still didn’t feel comfortable leaving the room without any sort of weapon to defend herself. She scanned the area, looking for anything she could use. Something sharp, like a knife, or a shard of glass.

A lightbulb went off in her mind as she started at the monitor where Junko’s face had previously been brightly displayed. Quickly Mukuro shrugged off the robe of her yukata, leaving her in only the school uniform she had worn underneath. Sadly, she left her kevlar vest in her duffel bag, but the standard shirt and skirt the academy provided would have to suffice.

She ripped the yukata into shreds, feeling no guilt for ruining such pretty fabric if it meant she could rescue her friends. She wrapped the cloth strips taut around her fist, acting as a buffer.

Quickly, she reeled back and punched the monitor with enough strength to fracture the glass screen, but not so much as to leave it in miniscule shattered pieces. Picking up a shard that she deemed worthy, she wrapped the duller end with another cloth strap, and tucked it into the waistband of her skirt.

A comforting hum fell over her, the safe feeling of being armed and ready for a fight.
Content in leaving the room in its decrepit state, Mukuro hoisted herself back onto the ledge of the chalkboard, and precariously balanced herself, just so she could steady her grip on either side of the vents entrance, before climbing through.

“Escape…success.” Mukuro mumbled to herself with a small smile as she shuffled through the tight space, moving forward on her elbows and knees through the vent-shaft.

It wasn’t the most comfortable position but compared to the war zones she had faced in the past, this was a piece of cake.

Just as Mukuro felt confident that she would get out, she came face-to-face with a crossroads of sort. And by crossroad, she meant five different paths, all going in different directions, with no indication of which way would take her to classroom 5C.

“This…will not be fun.” Mukuro sighed with a grimace.

*Well, process of elimination it is then.*

---

Makoto woke up sitting in a desk in a cold room.

As soon as his eyes opened and he caught sight of the dim lighting in the room, he felt a rush come to his head. He blinked wearily at his surroundings, raising his head up from the desk.

“W-where am I?” He asked himself, looking around.

He froze when he caught a flash of pink hair in the corner of his vision.

Makoto spun around instantly, only instead of Junko there was a girl with pale-pink hair sitting at a desk behind him. Her head was resting limply on the desk’s surface, still knocked out cold. She wore the standard main course uniform, but the colour of her tie, red unlike his classmate’s black ties, made Makoto realize she must be a year older than him.

Makoto stood up from the desk, only to feel another rush of nausea slam into him like a ton of bricks, forcing him to double over in pain as he puked the entire contents of his stomach onto the cold floor.

“He stood there for a moment, gripping his stomach, struggling to catch his breath.

*What was in that tea?* He thought jadedly. He briefly wondered if the girl had drunken some too. If so, just how many people did Junko rope up into her plans?

He staggered towards the girl, wincing against the waves of pain in his mind. “H-hey, are you okay?” He asked, wiping bile from the corner of his mouth.

The girl didn’t move.

Makoto felt a chill run down his spine. He cautiously reached forward, towards one of her hands that was hanging over the desk lifelessly. He pressed two fingers to her wrist, feeling for a pulse.

“Thank god,” He sighed in relief once he felt the weak thumping of her heartbeat. The sound of static suddenly called his attention.

He spun around, only to see a familiar face light up on a monitor in the corner of the room.

*She really is behind all of this* He thought to himself. He couldn’t help but stare at her hair, how the red colour matched the flash of red he saw in the forest.

“Okey-dokey, now that I’ve gathered all ten of you here, we’re going to have a little fun! I’m sure you’re all very confused, but please meet in classroom 5C. Or else.” She smiled and did a little gesture with her hand, and the screen went black.

Makoto blinked blankly at the monitor. 5C…

He gulped audibly. Ten people…ten innocent people that were roped up in her scheme. Including this girl, still unconscious.

Makoto turned to look at her one more time, but she still wasn’t waking. She must have taken a lot more of whatever drug was in that tea, if she could be like this for that long. Junko’s little “Or else.” reverberated in his mind.

He knew that if he left this girl here, who knew how long it would take for her to wake up? Or how long they had been knocked out, for that matter. He had to help her.

Makoto gritted his teeth and mustered as much determination as he could.

He was going to get her out and help everyone else who Junko trapped.

---

Kyouko walked down a dark, cold, and narrow hallway.

She had woken up only a few hours earlier and had taken to investigating the entire building. All the doors were locked, including those leading to other classrooms. Windows were barred off, boarded up with metal plates.

Kyouko knew they had closed up the old building beforehand, but not to this degree. This was the work of someone else, someone with many loyal subjects at her disposal.

Only one person fit that description and had the motive to kidnap her in the first place.

Kyouko didn’t recognize Junko when she first came up to her at the festival. She thought everything was going according to plan, until the now red-haired girl stopped by with a bright smile and introduced herself as Ryouko Otonashi. Kyouko knew she had to get Junko as far away from Hajime as possible, which is exactly what she did.

What Kyouko did not expect, was Mikan Tsumiki, Ultimate Nurse, to come out with a dart gun and shoot her in the neck.

Kyouko rubbed the entry wound the dart left on her skin with a grimace. Clearly, Junko wasn’t messing around this time.

She knew others had to be somewhere in the building with her, but as to where they could be, Kyouko couldn’t tell. If they were in the locked classrooms, then Junko must be waiting for everyone to wakeup for her to start whatever she had planned. If she wanted to simply kill them off
outright, she wouldn’t have gone through the trouble of knocking them out in the first place.

Before Kyouko could analyze things too deeply, she suddenly heard the sound of slamming, and someone wailing in anguish.

“Please! Get us OUT! Please! We didn’t DO ANYTHING!” A girl’s voice shrieked, combined with the sounds of sobbing.

Kyouko hurried towards the sound, coming face to face with another classroom door. This one was a wooden door, with an automatic metal lock in place of a door handle.

“Hello? How many of you are in there?” Kyouko called out towards the door, and another voice responded.

“There’s three of us here. But…who are you? Did you trap us here?” A male voice called out, his tone firm and self-assured. Kyouko couldn’t recognize either of the voices.

Kyouko suppressed the urge to sigh, because did this boy really think his captor would have told him that they were the ones who captured? The naivety was refreshing, honestly.

“My name is Kyouko Kirigiri. I was trapped here, just like you.” She replied, keeping her tone carefully neutral.

There was some stirring on the other side of the door, before a third voice, another girl, spoke up. “You’re the headmaster’s daughter right? Who do you think did this to us? Why are we here?” she asked, her voice much softer and gentle than the high-pitch of the other girl’s voice.

Kyouko hesitated. “I have some ideas as to who it is, but we should get you out of the room first. Then we could start on finding a way out together.”

There were some murmurs of agreement from the other side, but then the boy’s voice spoke up again. “I should probably tell you our names first. We’re all part of the Hope’s Peak Academy student council I’m Soshun Murasame.”

The quieter girl spoke up next. “I-I’m Karen Kisaragi.”

Then, finally, the high-pitched girl spoke. “And I’m Aiko Umesawa. Thank you for helping us, Kyouko. We’ve been in this room for a few hours now…”

Kyouko sighed. “It’s no problem. Do you have anything we can use to break the door down from inside your room?”

“The rooms completely empty, except for a monitor and camera. We were going to try and break it down with the monitor, but it’s too high for us to reach.” Karen replied.

Kyouko paused to think for a moment. Her eyes caught sight of a fire extinguisher, just to the left of the door. “I’m going to try and break it down from this side, but I need you all to stand back.”

“O-Okay.” Aiko replied, before there was the sound of more shuffling from the other side.

Kyouko quickly unlocked the hatch that protected the extinguisher in a glass case, and carefully took it out the case.

With a deep breath, she reeled back, and began slamming the end of the fire extinguisher against the door, enough to leave a dent the size of her fist in the centre of the door. She pulled back again, only
to pause at the sound of static coming from a monitor in the hallway.

“Hey! What do you idiots think you’re doing?! Doors like those don’t come cheap, y’know!”

Junko’s face flickered to life on the screen, twisted in a mock-sort of anger that Kyouko couldn’t help but roll her eyes at.

Someone on the other side of the door yelped, but they quickly silenced themselves at the surprise of seeing the screen light up so suddenly.

Kyouko made sure to look directly into the camera, narrowing her eyes.

“Well well well, someone’s in a fussy mood. Didn’t sleep well?” Junko asked with a tilted smile.

Kyouko pulled back the fire extinguisher once more, swinging forward—

“Wait! Okay! Jesus, learn to take a joke…” Junko continued grumbling incoherently before pressing a button on a control pad in front of her.

Suddenly, there was a click coming from the door. Cautiously, Kyouko reached forward, and slid the door open easily.

Soshun, Karen, and Aiko stepped out from the room with little hesitation, smiling gratefully at Kyouko.

The girl she assumed was Aiko, judging by the petite girl’s appearance, rushed towards her, wrapping Kyouko in a hug. “Thank you! We’re going to get out, together!”

Kyouko froze for a moment, unsure how to respond. “Oh, um, no…problem…?” She said, awkwardly patting the brown-haired girl on the shoulder.

Soshun and Karen took a more reserved approach, bowing slightly in Kyouko’s direction.

“Thank you, really.” Karen said, the green-haired girl smiling resignedly. Still, Kyouko could sense a glint of nervousness hidden behind the girl’s glasses.

“I assume the red-haired girl on the screen is the one who is keeping us here?” Soshun asked, his hazel eyes narrowed inquisitively.

“Ding ding ding! Aren’t you a smart one?” Junko exclaimed with a little wink. “Also, I gotta say, all this touching introduction stuff? So cute, I might just puke.” She sighed, rolling her eyes dramatically. “I’ll be back in a moment, stay tuned kiddos!”

The screen went black once more, though the students were all put on edge as they awaited what new message Junko had waiting for them.

It didn’t take long for the screen to flash back to life.

“Hello everyone! How’s everyone doing today? I hope you enjoyed the refreshments.”

The three student council members blinked at the screen, confused.

“Refreshments? What is she talking about?” Aiko asked, tugging on the ends of her yellow bunny hoodie.

It seemed that the student council members were captured in a different way than what Kyouko assumed to be some sort of drugged liquid, most likely whatever was in that dart.
“Okey-dokey, now that I’ve gathered all ten of you here, we’re going to have a little fun! I’m sure you’re all very confused, but please meet in classroom 5C. Or else.” Junko did a little salute, and the screen went black.

All four of them stood in silence for a moment before Karen broke the silence.

“Ten people…there’s six other students here? Do you think they could be from the student council too?” She asked, looking towards Soshun for answers.

Soshun merely gritted his teeth, the brown-haired boy seemingly disturbed by the thought. “I hope not.” He raised his eyes. “Kyouko, do you know anyone who might have been captured as well?”

Kyouko paused before nodding. “I know three others who are most likely here. As for the last three…I have no idea.”

All the students tensed up at her words.

Surprisingly, it was Aiko who took on a determined expression. “I guess we gotta go to classroom 5C, huh? We shouldn’t wait for too long.” She said, her fists clenched at her side.

They all took off towards classroom 5C.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm, i wonder whats going to happen at classroom 5C?...
Hi everyone! Thanks for reading this chapter, i hope you enjoyed. A huge shoutout to everyone who's been commenting on my fic lately, y'all are the reason i love writing ^u^
If you have any questions, comments, or theories, leave them in the comments below!
Even with the added challenge of carrying the pink-haired girl, Makoto was the first student to arrive in classroom 5C. He managed to use a rolling chair found behind the teacher’s desk to push the girl around. Finding the chair was a pure stroke of luck. In part due to the fact that the girl seemed to be his height, and there was no way he would be able to carry her down the hallway.

Finally, my Ultimate Luck is good for something. He thought optimistically. If there was any time for his luck to be useful, it would be now.

Luckily (again), he didn’t have to roll the girl too far, as the room was only a few doors down from where Makoto woke up and wasn’t too difficult to find. As soon as he stepped into the room, he pushed the chair to the side of the room, away from the door just in case someone who wanted to hurt them couldn’t get her so quickly.

The room seemed to be just a normal classroom, like all the others. There was a chalkboard, faint white chalk lines visible on its surface, and several aged wooden desks. The only difference from the room Makoto woke up in was that this room had large windows on one side, although they were boarded up with steel plates.

He walked over to one of them, giving the steel plate an experimental pull, but it was welded to the wall.

“Worth a shot.” He sighed to himself.

He didn’t like the idea of simply waiting here for the others to arrive, but there was nothing else he could do. He didn’t want to leave the girl alone, and if he did, what if he was punished for leaving the room himself?

As Makoto glanced around the room, something odd caught his eye. Multiple cameras? Why would Junko need more than one camera? He counted four cameras, each one affixed to a corner of the walls. Even with the additional cameras, there was only one monitor.

Before he could think of the odd detail any further, the sound of someone shifting called his attention. The pink-haired girl was finally waking up.

He rushed over to her as she raised her head weakly, rubbing at her eyes.

“W-Where…am I?” She asked weakly, blinking.

Makoto breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m glad you’re awake, you’ve been out for so long I was starting to get worried.”

She was swaying gently, one hand pressed against her head. “I-I don’t feel well…”

Makoto took a small step back. “Well, you’re doing a lot better than I did when I woke up,” He mumbled sheepishly, remembering the sudden wave of nausea that overtook him. “Do you want me to find you a bucket or something…?”

She took a deep, steadying breath. “I think I’ll be okay.” She looked up at him, narrowing her eyes.
“You’re Makoto, right?”

He startled at how easily the girl recognized him. “Y-Yeah, how did you know?”

She hummed for a moment. “I saw your picture when I was helping that girl with the black hair, we were trying to contact you…I guess that crazy lady got you too?”

Makoto’s shoulders slumped. She must be talking about Mukuro, meaning she must have got caught too. A small part of Makoto was hoping she got out alright, but that only meant he had to work harder to get her out. “Y-Yeah. I’m not sure who else is here, but apparently there’s ten of us in the building in total. Eleven if you count the, uh, crazy lady.”

The pink-haired girl nodded thoughtfully. “So, all we have to do is find the others and then find a way out, right?”

Makoto winced. “Well…actually…”

He went on to relay the message Junko broadcasted while she was asleep and explained some backstory as to how he was caught. The girl did the same, introducing herself as Chiaki, and telling him how Mukuro, Hajime, and her all were attacked while looking for him.

“So, you’re friends with Hajime, I’m assuming?” He asked, throwing an occasional glance towards the doorway, just to see if anyone was coming.

Chiaki nodded. “I was really surprised to see him at the festival. He’s been kind of…distant lately.” She mumbled sadly.

Makoto felt bad for the girl. Hajime must have kept the Izuru Kamukura project a secret from her, even though it seemed she considered him a close friend. It reminded him of how at first, Mukuro hid a lot from him.

“You said that the red-haired girl told us to meet here, right?” She asked, almost apprehensive, as if she were afraid of what the answer might be. “If Hajime is in the building, do you think he’ll come here too?”

Makoto forced a reassuring smile to his face. “I think so. If we can get everyone to work together, then we’ll get out for sure.”

Chiaki only nodded, her expression taking on a withdrawn look.

Makoto bit his lip, unsure what to say next. He wanted to comfort the girl, but he wasn’t sure how. He settled to simply pulling a chair from one of the desks and setting it up beside her.

She gave him an odd look, almost an unsaid question, before quickly returning to her thoughts. Her pale-pink eyes settled on a spot on the floor, swirling with the same uncertainty that Makoto could feel stealing his breath and leaving his head reeling.

He rested his head in his hands, trying to settle the irregular beating in his chest. He felt his anxiety like it was a tangible thing, caught in his throat and refusing to swallow back down. He was worried, more than anything. He hated being so unsure, so in the dark about what would come next.

He hated being so out of control. He felt like his thoughts were grains of sand slipping through his fingers, each too small to catch before they fell to the ground and pooled at his feet. He just wanted to see Mukuro, to make sure she was alright.
Would she even want to see me right now?

He shook that thought away. Of course she would. He knew Mukuro cared, just not in the way he selfishly wished she did. He just had to keep a distance between himself and her. As long as he made sure to keep his feelings in check and not get too close to her, he would be fine.

Another lump of anxiety found its way to his mind, tangling his thoughts. What if after this, she didn’t want to be around him anymore? Not even as friends? He knew it was a lot of ‘what if’s’ and he could never really predict Mukuro’s actions, but he was finding trouble dissipating the idea that Mukuro might never want to be around him again.

Maybe all he had to do was apologize, just to make sure.

The sound of footsteps walking down the corridor snapped him away from his mind. He could feel Chiaki freeze in place beside him. From the corner of his eye, he saw her glance over, eyes wide with fear. He refused to keep his eyes off the door.

Four figures stepped through the doorway, and Makoto let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

The vents were harder to crawl through than Mukuro had anticipated. Her elbows and knees were sore, various scratches and scrapes lining her arms and legs from bent metal corners protruding from the vent walls.

She felt as if she were going in circles, like every turn just led her back to where she started. She had managed to avoid any dead ends by occasionally letting out a small yell down the vent, listening for any echoes that would signal to her how far the vent stretched back.

Each second felt like a minute; each minute felt like an hour. Sweat lined her brow, and she was starting to feel light-headed from the lack of fresh air.

Just keep crawling, she commanded herself, gritting her teeth and continuing her shuffle down the twisting and turning maze of vents before her.

The trek wouldn’t be so bad if it weren’t for the anxieties churning in her stomach. The thought that Junko was somewhere in this building, that for once, she couldn’t understand what her sister wants her to do; it was torture.

The image of Junko on that screen, dressed as Ryouko just to mess with her head, was enough to leave her winded. Mukuro wanted to get away from Junko. Yasuke put himself in Junko’s hands just so she could lessen her grip on Mukuro.

He sacrificed himself, just so she could get away.

How could she throw away that chance and end up right in Junko’s grasp again?

As Mukuro passed another crossroads of vent shafts, she paused when she heard the sound of voices, distant and muffled.

“…here for weeks?”

“I doubt it. People…looking…”
“Would…able to…?”

“…not sure.”

Mukuro strained to make out the voices, but the echo of the vents made their words choppy and practically meaningless. She quickly turned down the shaft that the voices sounded the loudest from, unable to fight the spark of hope inside her. She couldn’t help but hope one of the voices was Makoto, that he was safe, and she had finally found him.

At the end of the vent shaft was a grate, facing the ground. Mukuro pressed her face against it, squinting through the bars.

Though it was dark, she could make out the figures of people walking down the hall. She felt an instant flood of relief as she saw a familiar head of brown hair. Hajime was here, and he was safe. Though Mukuro was still concerned about her friend’s well-being, as long as she kept Hajime out of Junko’s hands this all would have been worth it.

Hajime was carrying someone on his back, though the shadows of the hallway left her unable to make out any distinctive features.

Mukuro’s eyes shifted over to the other figure beside him, but as soon as she did her blood ran cold.

*Nagito Komaeda.*

A sudden rush of anger bubbled up in her chest, feral and instinctive. Now that she was closer, she could hear their voices much clearer now as they walked by.

“How many others do you think are here?” Hajime asked, shifting under the weight of the body on his back.

“Ten, including us,” Nagito replied with a cheery tone. “A nice, even number.”

Hearing him chat so freely, so carefree, made her skin boil. He set this up. He must have, why else would he have been following Junko around like a dog for the past few days? It made her sick. *He* made her sick.

“I don’t think there is anything nice about this situation at all.” Hajime countered pointedly.

Mukuro waited for them to walk past the grate before pulling out the glass shard she had tucked into her waistband. She had to jump down there, and she had to do it now. She couldn’t leave Hajime wandering around with that psychopath.

She ran her fingers along the grate, feeling for any bumps or divots. Nothing. Just smooth, flat, metal. Mukuro sighed. *Nothing to unscrew...* Brute force would have to suffice.

She tucked the glass back into her waistband and shifted around until her feet were over the grate. She really didn’t want to have to break the building any more than she needed, especially since the vents were so wobbly as it is, but it seemed she had no other option.

Mukuro pulled back her legs, before slamming into the grate with both her heels. She heard a small yelp from below the grate as both boys shouted in surprise. They began walking back towards the her, curious as to what is causing the sound.

“Stay back, I’m coming down,” Mukuro called out in warning.
“Mukuro? Is that you?” Hajime called out uneasily.

She could hear Nagito mumbling some nonsense about how lucky he was, and it only fueled the anger inside her.

With one final kick, Mukuro managed to knock the grate off its hinges with her heels. It clattered to the ground, and Mukuro teetered forward a bit as she lost her footing.

“How do you need any help?” Nagito called out.

Instead of replying, Mukuro scooted forward until she was positioned over the grate, her arms holding her up against the metal walls. She quickly hopped down, making sure to bend her knees as she landed on the ground to carry the momentum.

“Guess that’s a no,” Hajime muttered, slightly amused.

She gave herself a moment to steady herself as she stood crouched on the ground, her joints aching from all the crawling she did through the vents. After a moment, she stood up, keeping her eyes pinned on Nagito as she rose. The white-haired boy widened his eyes as he took in the full weight of her glare.

“Nice to see you, Mukuro,” he said with a smile. “What are the chances that you and I would meet again, here of all places?”

He threw his arms out, gesturing to the hall around them as if they were in a beautiful palace instead of a decayed and decrepit school building.

Mukuro gritted her teeth. “I have a feeling the chances were pretty high, considering what you’ve done.”

Nagito blinked at her, before his eyebrows scrunched up in confusion, his arms dropping back down to his side. “Pardon?”

That faux innocence snapped something in Mukuro, and suddenly she had the glass shard pinned against Nagito’s throat before he could even blink.

“Whoa, is that necessary?!” Hajime choked out from behind her, clearly caught off-guard.

She pressed the shard closer, watching as Nagito slowly raised his hands in surrender, eyes flashing with worry. He looked down at the glass shard. “Not the greeting I expected.”

Mukuro narrowed her eyes at him. “What have you been doing with Junko? Yasuke…he said he saw you.” She spat, struggling to keep steady as anger pounded in her head like a base drum. “After you broke him. What did she plan?”

Nagito’s expression remained blank, his lips pressed into a thin line. “Would you believe me if I said I had nothing to do with this?” His eyes flicked to a spot over her shoulder. “Or…with why he’s here?”

Mukuro frowned, confused by his cryptic words. “I don’t believe you are completely innocent. But you didn’t take Hajime here, at least.”

Hajime cleared his throat awkwardly from behind her. “Um…I don’t think he’s talking about me.”

Mukuro furrowed her brow in confusion, following Nagito’s gaze behind her.
From her high angle peering down from the vent shaft, she never had a chance to look at who Hajime was carrying on his back. The room was too dark to make out his black hair, to see the dark circles under his closed eyes, to see the familiar face that struck her core cold.

With shaky hands, Mukuro tucked the glass shard back in her waistband.

On his back, Hajime was carrying Yasuke Matsuda.

She took a step forward, legs suddenly struggling to hold herself up. “Wh-Why…” she murmured, a toxic mixture of anger and instinct coiling inside her stomach.

“He was in the room with us when we woke up…Nagito told me about what happened and how he was hospitalized,” Hajime explained, somewhat cautious. “We couldn’t leave him there.”

Mukuro stopped herself from moving forward, closing her eyes for a moment. She straightened herself, taking a deep breath. “Hajime, can you set him down. Please.”

She didn’t need to open her eyes to know Hajime had done as she asked, listening as he shuffled around until there was silence. Only then did she open her eyes again did she full take in the sight of Yasuke propped up against the wall of the hallway.

Mukuro clenched her fists, moving to kneel beside him. She searched him carefully for any injuries, noticing the pinprick on his neck. He was injected with the same drug as the rest of them, then.

She turned back to look at Nagito and Hajime, keeping herself in front of Yasuke in a subconscious effort to shield him. “Has he been unconscious the entire time?”

Hajime answered for the both of them. “Yes…but he was mumbling something in his sleep. He looked like he was in pain.”

Mukuro’s heart sunk. “He is.”

Hajime nodded thoughtfully at that, looking at her in a mixture of vague pity and something else she couldn’t quite place. “Then…we should get him out of here as fast as possible.”

Something about his tone stuck an odd chord with Mukuro. She frowned, but forced herself to nod. “Right.”

Carefully, she reached down, adjusting Yasuke into a position where she could lift him up easily. She ended up with one arm holding up his back and the other scooped under his legs.

As she rose, Hajime gave her an odd look. “Are you going to be okay carrying him alone like that?”

The slightest tilt of a smirk found its way onto her face. “Considering I carried you like this earlier, I’ll be just fine,” she countered as she walked past them, catching a glimpse of Nagito snickering as Hajime’s face turned a bright red.

She took a few steps down the hallway, before pausing when a thought crept into her mind.

She tilted her head to cast a glance over her shoulder. “We need to get moving. I still don’t trust you Nagito, but you might be useful. For now, you live.” She explained reluctantly.

For once, Nagito remained silent. Instead, Mukuro listened as the two quickly followed her down the hall, footsteps echoing in the silence. She kept her eyes up, scanning the nameplate of every classroom.
It seemed they were getting closer to their destination, but every second Mukuro spent walking through the silence, she could feel her thoughts spinning and swirling. She wanted nothing more than to tie up Nagito, but if he really wasn’t involved in trapping them, it was more likely that Junko betrayed him as well. It didn’t surprise Mukuro one bit. For now, the situation worked in Mukuro’s favour. As long as Nagito was in the same boat as everyone else, he may not be so quick to try anything.

Her eyes kept getting pulled down to Yasuke’s sleeping face. With every move Junko made, Mukuro felt like she knew less and less about her sister. As if there was a glass pane between them, getting thicker and hazier with every moment they spent apart.

What scared Mukuro wasn’t what Junko was planning, or how they were going to get out of here. No, all of that paled in comparison to what she was really feeling.

Mukuro wanted to deny it, but holding Yasuke in her arms, and feeling the rush of anger she had felt before…it led her to one conclusion.

Stopping Junko…it wasn’t about giving Junko the despair she wanted anymore. Mukuro wasn’t doing this for Junko. Everything in her life had revolved around her sister…and for once, she wanted something terrifying.

Mukuro’s twisted desire sat like a heavy weight in her chest.

She wanted Junko to be punished for what she had done. Mukuro wanted to be the one to make Junko pay for her crimes, even if she had to hurt her to do it.

Even if she had to kill her.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Hope you enjoyed this chapter. Just some notes...
- Sorry it's been a while, school has been kicking my ass
- This chapter was cut off a bit short, but expect the next chapter to have some important plot movements!
- I have the ending for the fic outlined, and tbh i was crying a little while writing it. whether that be due to the fact i’ve been working on this for 2 years and its ending, or the actual ending itself, i’ll leave as a mystery for you guys ;)
- Finally, the 10th person has been revealed! #YasukeProtectionSquad activate
Breathe

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mukuro sat on the floor at the back of the classroom. She pulled her knees up to her chest, resting her chin down on them. The pressure of her legs against her ribcage helped her focus; it helped keep her steady. Yasuke was slumped against the wall beside her, still unconscious but still breathing. From where she sat apart from the rest of Junko’s captives, she could just barely hear the voices of the other students over Yasuke’s shallow breaths. She tried to line her own breathing with his to calm her nerves.

In.

“Is she alright?” a girl with green hair and glasses whispered, nodding towards her. Karen, Mukuro remembered her name to be. Kyouko had introduced all the student council members to her earlier. Mukuro still found it hard to match their names to their faces.

Out.

“Oh, yes, she just doesn’t do well with crowds…it is a quite stressful situation, right?” Makoto explained, a placid smile on his face. He’d been telling everyone in the room the same thing.

In.

“I see,” the brown-haired student council member, Soshun, said, looking back towards Mukuro. Again, she pretended she couldn’t feel their gazes dragging across her skin like the claws of a vulture.

Out.

“Do you three have any idea how you got here? Or why?” Makoto asked, wringing his hands. He kept his tone light, but the way the three student council members tensed up struck an odd chord with Mukuro.

She sat up a little straighter, shifting her attention towards the small circle of students. Junko had never mentioned the student council members before, but if they were roped into her plans they had to pose some kind of threat to her.

The girl with the yellow hoodie opened her mouth to speak but closed it. Kiko? Anko? Mukuro couldn’t remember her name. The girl cleared her throat, throwing on a smile far too strained to be genuine. “No clue. Guess we’ll have to figure that out together, right?”

At once, all three of them glanced towards Mukuro. Makoto followed their gazes, frowning. It seemed he was noticing the same things she was. The way they shifted from one foot to the other, the way they kept glancing from Mukuro to the monitor—they knew something about her.

The three didn’t meet her eyes, only Makoto was brave enough to keep her gaze. He shot her a questioning look, mouthing You okay?

Mukuro nodded in response, still keeping the three in her peripheral vision. After a moment of terse silence, the three strangers went back to muttering amongst themselves, effectively shutting Makoto out of their little circle.
He shuffled across the room towards Mukuro, stopping at her feet.  

She kept her eyes down.  

He nudged her foot with his.  

“They’re not gonna trust you if I keep doing all the talking,” he said, hands shoved deep into his pockets.  

When Mukuro first entered the room with Yasuuke in her arms, Hajime and Nagito at her heel, she didn’t say a word. She didn’t think she could trust herself to say anything that would clear suspicion from herself, instead settling on pushing past every other captive to keep Yasuuke in a safe spot at the back of the room. She knew how bad it looked. She knew from their stares they all knew who she was, and how little they would trust her.  

Only Makoto and Kyouko approached her, and she filled them in on everything that happened while they were separated. She of course excluded her and Makoto’s argument in the forest, a detail that didn’t escape Makoto. From then on, it was Makoto’s turn to perform damage control.  

Mukuro’s mouth tilted into a frown. She pushed his foot back with her own. “They weren’t going to trust me anyway. Nothing I say or do will change that,” she said, pulling her legs tighter against her chest.  

He knelt down to sit in front of her, forcing Mukuro to meet his eyes. His worry seemed genuine. “It doesn’t help that you’re sitting so far away. Or that you’re glaring at them pretty harshly…”  

Mukuro shrugged, tracing the cracks in the cement below her. “I can keep an eye on everyone from this distance. Just in case Junko planted a mole.”  

Makoto frowned, craning his neck to cast a glance behind him. The students were chatting amongst themselves, fear so thick in the air it was almost tangible. “You really think she would?”  

Mukuro hummed. “I wouldn’t put it past her. If it were anyone, it would be Nagito. Or the student council members, since I know next to nothing about them. I don’t trust them.”  

He nodded absently. “They seem to be hiding something, but I don’t know if they have bad intentions…”  

Mukuro didn’t have a reply to that, settling on staring over Makoto’s shoulder, watching the student council members. Specifically, at Karen and Soshun. There was some odd tension between them; Mukuro wasn’t sure to make of it. The only thing she knew for sure is that she couldn’t trust them, and if that meant they wouldn’t trust her? She was fine with that.  

Mukuro tapped the ground, restless. “Junko’s been making us wait for quite some time…I can’t help but feel its for a reason.”  

Makoto tilted his head. “A reason? How so?”  

She paused, thinking over her words carefully. Mukuro caught sight of Kyouko standing with Hajime and Chiaki across the room, talking with them in a low voice. If she were Kyouko, a detective studying human behaviour, what would she do?  

After all, she knew Junko better than anyone.  

“Well,” she started, taking a deep breath, “if Junko wanted us to hurry inside this room, threatening
us with punishment, that means she needed us to all be in the same place, without risking us trying to find our own way out.”

Makoto contemplated this, narrowing his eyes. “You think this is a trap?”

Mukuro leaned her head back against the wall, baring her neck as she spoke. “I think we have no choice but to do as she says. She holds all the cards here, and as we’ve seen, my sister isn’t above hurting us to get what she wants. She’s most likely using this time to prepare for something.”

Makoto nodded, staring blankly at a spot on the floor. “There’s nothing we can do, then.”

“Nothing besides wait,” she sighed, closing her eyes.

Makoto nudged her again, trying to catch her attention. Locks of his brown hair were falling in his eyes, shielding them from her view. “If we have some time now…can we talk?”

She tensed for a moment, keeping her face carefully blank. “About what?” she asked, feigning innocence.

Makoto pressed his lips into a thin line. Mukuro tried not to trace their shape with her eyes. They looked far nicer when he was smiling. “I didn’t want anything bad to happen before we had a chance to talk again.”

Mukuro lowered her head. “Junko might come up on that monitor any second now,” she said, knowing full well it was a cheap excuse.

He made a non-committal sort of sound, furrowing his brow. “I know. It won’t take long.”

She didn’t have any excuses for that. Instead, she clamped her jaw shut, breaking her eyes away.

“I wanted to apologize.”

In an instant, Mukuro’s eyes were back up to Makoto’s. She frowned at him, raising her head from her knees. “Apologize…?” she echoed.

He nodded. “I know when we were in that forest, it wasn’t the right time to say stuff like that, so I’m sorry. I promise I’ll try to stay focused from now on.”

Mukuro tilted her head, feeling a wave of nausea wash over her. “What are you talking about? Stuff like that? I don’t understand…”

Now it was Makoto’s turn to look confused. “That’s why you were mad at me, wasn’t it? Because I…said things like that so suddenly. I meant what I said, just…it wasn’t the time for it. We had bigger things to focus on.”

Mukuro blinked at him, running the conversation between them over and over in her head. She thought Makoto just said that to calm her down, but…he meant it?

“I wasn’t…I think…I think you’re confused,” she stammered.

Makoto frowned. “Look, I understand that you don’t love me back, but if putting aside my feelings is what it takes to stay friends, then I’ll do my best. I just don’t want to go into this dangerous situation without you knowing that. I’m tired of avoiding talking about it.”

Mukuro couldn’t move. Couldn’t think. Couldn’t breathe. He thought…she was upset with him. When he said he loved her, he didn’t mean to say it in that moment. This whole thing was all just a
stupid misunderstanding. All because she was so quick to shut him down, out of fear he really didn’t mean what he said.

Mukuro clenched her fists tighter and tighter until she could feel the sting of the scratches on her palm. “I wasn’t trying to avoid you, it’s just…I thought you…”

She trailed off, unable to find the words. What else could she say? What could she possibly do to fix this. How could she ever explain to him how stupid she’s been?

Makoto blinked at her, frowning. “You thought I what?” he asked, struggling to understand her broken sentences. And honestly, how could he? She’s been doing the exact thing her sister expected of her.

She could practically hear Junko’s mocking tone in her head. *Mukuro is such a disappointing girl. Mukuro doesn’t understand people. Mukuro doesn’t understand anything. Mukuro doesn’t talk, doesn’t share, doesn’t smile. Mukuro doesn’t love, because no one loves her.*

Mukuro took a deep, steadying breath. “Back there in the forest…when you said you didn’t mean to tell me that, I thought you…I thought you were saying you didn’t mean it.”

“Oh,” he said. And then, “Oh.”

Mukuro buried her face in her hands. She could feel the heat coming from her cheeks. “But…you did mean it. You…you really do love me, don’t you?”

Through the cracks in her fingers, she could see Makoto watching her, a mix of embarrassment and vague pity on his face. He lowered his head.

“I thought you knew that already,” he said.

Tell him you love him back. Just tell him. But the words were stuck in her throat.

“I’m sorry,” she replied instead.

Mukuro raised her head back up. Makoto was smiling. But it wasn’t like his usual smiles. This was the smile of someone who is so tired, they can barely pull it together. She made him look like that. She did this. She got them all into this mess.

“Sorry? You don’t need to be sorry. I’m just…relieved. I didn’t want you to be angry at me.” He was trying so hard. So hard.

Mukuro looked down at her hands, at the red scratches still healing. He was trying, and all she was doing was covering. She threw tantrums when she was upset. She lashed out and acted like a child. It was sickening.

But she couldn’t keep acting like this. She had to try, because for some reason, a reason Mukuro could never understand, Makoto loved her. She had to try. And he was giving her the perfect opportunity to do so.

Mukuro took a deep breath. She looked into his eyes, because she felt he deserved that. A flash of confusion flickered across his face, but as if he could sense the importance in her expression he held her gaze too.

“Makoto, can I tell you something?” she asked. She waited for an answer, even though she knew he wouldn’t say no.
Makoto’s smile fell. He nodded, even though he looked afraid. Like a puppy about to be kicked. It stung somewhere deep inside her to see him that way. “Sure.”

She took another deep breath. It sent a wave of dizziness to her head. Like she was standing at the top of a high building, looking down.

“You said that…you wanted to put your feelings aside, because I didn’t love you back…but…what if I did?”

Makoto blinked at her. Mukuro wasn’t sure why she asked it like a question, but she couldn’t help the way her voice tremored at the thought of saying something so bold outright. So, instead of treating the statement like the rhetorical question Mukuro stupidly made it sound like, Makoto actually answered. Because of course he would. Because it’s Makoto.

“If you…loved me back, then I would be really happy. But I would want to make sure you were being honest,” he said firmly. It seemed like he had this answer for a long time.

Mukuro frowned. “You would think I was lying?”

Makoto tilted his head, then what he said must have hit him because he immediately shook his head. “Oh! No, no, that’s not what I meant. Its more like…well, you’ve spent a long time always following what other people tell you to do. That’s why I never told you earlier. I didn’t want you to feel like you had to feel the same way. If you did, I wanted it to be your choice.”

For a moment, Mukuro was speechless. She covered her mouth with a hand, unable to control the swell of emotion that rushed over her. He cared about her. He really did. He loved her, so much so that he was willing to let her go just to make sure she wouldn’t be under anyone’s control anymore. He wanted to be together, but he wanted her to be free more than that.

It was more than anyone had ever done for her.

Mukuro knew she had a stupid smile on her face, and she knew her eyes were watering like the child she was, but she didn’t care.

“Makoto,” she said, trying to call his attention back from where he was nervously mumbling to himself, flustered by his own words.

“Y-yes?”

Mukuro held his eyes. They sparkled her favourite shade of green. “I love you.”

Makoto’s eyes lit up. His breath hitched in his throat, as if she had just knocked the air out of him. “Really?”

Mukuro couldn’t help but laugh a little at how pure he sounded. “Really. I’m sorry…I…I should have been more open with you earlier.”

A smile rose to Makoto’s face, the kind that made the room seem a little brighter. He shook his head, laughing a little. “You don’t need to apologize so much. We can be happy right? I know this isn’t the best place to be…and I know the situation is really messed up, but for some reason the only thing I can feel is happiness.”

Mukuro knew exactly what he meant. It was like the whole room had filled up with light, and she was standing in the center of it. But Mukuro forgot something.
There’s always one corner left in the dark.

Makoto’s smile fell for a second, and his eyebrows scrunched together, as if he was trying to speak but there was a pain in his throat. He opened his mouth a second time, but before he could, a click resounded through the room.

Everyone in the room went silent. They turned towards the door, watching with wide eyes. Hajime stepped forward on behalf of the group, moving towards the door.

He reached forward, twisting and jiggling the handle, but it wouldn’t budge. He turned towards the rest of the group, shaking his head solemnly.

“It’s locked,” he said, as if it couldn’t be any more obvious.

Mukuro clenched her fists. If the door suddenly locked like that…then Junko was on the other side. Either that, or she had someone working with her on the school grounds. Possibly Mikan, since the girl was eager to help drug them all earlier.

“Is there any other exit? Like, a window or something?” The girl in the yellow hoodie asked—and seriously, what was the girl’s name? Mika? Aki?

Nagito put on a placid smile, stepping forward. “Maybe Hajime just didn’t turn the door hard enough?”

Hajime glared at him, crossing his arms. “Of course I turned the do—what are you doing?”

Nagito stepped past Hajime and towards the door. “Opening the door,” he said cheerily.

Though Mukuro was sure Junko locked it, she still couldn’t help but be curious as to what Nagito might do. He reached for the door, twisted the handle and—

Clink.

The doorknob broke off in Nagito’s hand.

He turned around, a sheepish smile on his face. “Uh…oops?”

Mukuro pressed her lips together to hide her smirk. She glanced over at Makoto, who was watching Nagito with an equally amused expression, covering his mouth with one hand. Seems like the older Ultimate Lucky student didn’t really live up to the name. The rest of the room didn’t seem to find the humour in the situation.

Hajime reached over, punching Nagito in the shoulder. “What did you do?!”

Nagito chuckled lightly, rubbing his arm. “Jeez, you’re stronger than you look…”

“What are we going to do? How can we get out if he broke the door?!” Karen asked, hands on both sides of her head.

“There’s no need to get angry at Nagito,” Kyouko answered, staring pensively at the door. “Leaving the room would be a bad idea, even if we could get out.”

Karen spun towards Kyouko. “A bad idea? What would you rather have us do, wait in here and die?”

Kyouko hummed “We’ve clearly been waiting for a reason, correct? If we were supposed to get out,
Chiaki nodded. “She did tell us we’d be punished if we didn’t come here, right? What if she
punishes us if we left? I don’t think it’s worth the risk…”

Soshun looked pale. “So all we can do is wait for that psycho to kill us?”

Makoto spoke up from his spot beside Mukuro. “If Junko wanted to kill us, we would be dead
already. We just need to stay alert.”

Karen looked practically livid. She turned her glare on Makoto. “Is anyone else finding it suspicious
that he’s such an expert on our captor?”

Makoto turned red immediately, looking anywhere but Mukuro. It seemed Karen was easily affected
by their stressful situation, making her a prime candidate to fall into despair. If Mukuro wasn’t
suspicious of her before, she sure as hell was now. How could she trust the girl who went from a
gentle and calm demeanor to practical banshee in a few minutes?

Mukuro slowly rose from her spot against the wall, leveling Karen with a dark stare. “That’s
enough.”

knife, huh?” she spat.

Karen!” Soshun snapped, but she didn’t seem to care.

“Um, guys, I think we should—” Chiaki tried to butt in, but she was quickly cut off by Karen.

“You’re connected to all this, aren’t you? Don’t think we haven’t noticed that shard of glass tucked
so neatly into your waistband. Were you planning on keeping that to yourself the whole time?”

Mukuro froze, her hand absently reaching for the shard. Makoto took a step forward, sticking out his
arms as if he was trying to protect Mukuro from Karen. It was touching, in a way.

“She didn’t do anything wrong here. She has that to protect us,” he said firmly.

“Is mocking the Ultimate Soldier really such a good idea?” Nagito cut in unexpectedly.

Mukuro threw Nagito a confused glance, not understanding why he would feel the need to come to
her defense. His mouth was pulled into a dangerous smile.

Hajime cut in before Mukuro could. “I trust Mukuro. I don’t think she wants to hurt us, and you
really shouldn’t be making snap decisions on people like that.”

Mukuro was stunned. Why was Hajime defending her?

“Look, while she could have said it a little better, Karen does have a point,” the girl in the yellow
hoodie offered, wringing her hands.

Kyouko raised a questioning eyebrow. “And that point is…?”

The girl (Anko? Was it Anko? Mukuro was starting to think it may be Anko) frowned, shifting
uncomfortably. “You three are kinda…suspicious? I don’t mean to say it in a bad way, but with the unconscious guy over there that you brought in, and you seem to know the reserve course guy pretty well—”

“Wait, why do I have anything to do with this?” Hajime snapped.

The girl’s eyes widened, raising her hands in some sort of surrender. “I-I didn’t mean to offend! It’s just, well y’know…”

Nagito nodded pensively. “Hmm, I don’t agree with you about Mukuro and the others, but a lowly reserve course student? Amongst Ultimate’s? It is peculiar…”

“Nagito,” Chiaki chided, aghast.

“What the hell’s your problem? Are you seriously suspecting me because I don’t have a talent?” Hajime asked, narrowing his eyes at the white-haired student.

Nagito turned to level Hajime with a flat stare. “I didn’t say that. I’m just saying that your presence is unusual. Why would Junko be giving you special attention?”

“Everyone enough,” Soshun yelled suddenly, effectively quieting the whole group. “This isn’t the time to be pointing fingers.”

Chiaki breathed a sigh of relief. “Finally.”

“But…” Soshun said, “I do think that by questioning those who seem the most suspicious, we might be able to figure out—”

And with that, the entire room exploded into even more arguing.

Mukuro looked down at Makoto, exchanging an uncertain glance. He was fiddling with the hems of his sleeves nervously, clearly distraught by the scene of chaos before them.

“So much for teamwork, huh?” She said, trying to lighten the mood.

Makoto threw her a half-hearted smile. “Maybe they should take a lesson from us in how to get along.”

Mukuro didn’t get the chance to respond.

”For fucks sake, are you all done arguing? I’m getting so booooooored.”

Junko’s voice suddenly rang through the room, a piercing shrill that made both her and Makoto flinch in surprise.

“I think it’s finally time to start the killing game!”

Every head in the room spun towards the monitor, watching in horror as the red-eyed girl laughed giddily. The monitors behind Junko were turned on now, black and white specs buzzing across the screen like flies.

“Killing game…? Is that why we’re trapped here!!” The girl in the yellow hoodie shrieked, darting to hide behind Soshun. “Karen was right! Mukuro is the only one with a weapon! We can’t trust her!”

“Now, now, while it would be fun to see you all fight blood-bath style, I do think the odds are
skewed in my dear sister’s favour, don’t you?” Junko sighed, a smirk on her lips. “A two-minute battle wouldn’t be that entertaining.”

Every eye in the room locked on Mukuro.

“Sister…?” Karen asked, the fury on her face evident.

Even Chiaki seemed disturbed by the news. “Is this true?”

Junko clearly meant to let that little piece of information slip just to make sure no one in this room would trust Mukuro. Mission accomplished.

“Especially since I’ve gathered a such a nice group of exciting guests! How could I waste them all in one go?” Junko said, flipping her hair over her shoulder.

Nagito repeated her words under his breath. “Exciting guests… I’m not sure if I should take that as a compliment…” he sighed, distressed by her choice of words.

“Will you shut up?” Hajime hissed back.

“I think we can all use a change in scenery, wouldn’t you agree?” Junko asked rhetorically, clapping her hands together. “It’s settled then! By the way, don’t bother holding your breath—it’ll just waste my time~”

Then, the screen faded to black. For a moment, the room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. The peace didn’t last long.

“You’re her sister?!” Soshun asked incredulously.

Nagito blinked around the room. “Oh. Was this not common knowledge…?”

He let out a small yelp as Hajime whacked him in the arm once more.

“Then… Karen really was right…” Anko mumbled—and for sh*t’s sake, that just didn’t sound right. But like, what could it be other than Anko? Mika? Miko?

Mukuro couldn’t pay too much attention to their distrust however. It seemed Makoto and Kyouko were realizing the same thing she was, eyes scanning every corner of the room frantically.

Don’t bother holding your breath.

It was a warning. Junko was warning them.

Karen opened her mouth, probably to spit more venom at Mukuro, but the Ultimate Soldier had reached about as much bitching as she could from the green-haired girl.

“Shut up, all of you. I don’t care that you don’t trust me, and I don’t care if you want to stay as far away from me as possible,” Mukuro shouted as Kyouko and Makoto got to work, running around the room and overturning anything that seemed suspicious. “But I’m going to tell you this; Yes, I am Junko’s sister. But that means I know her better than any of you, and if you all don’t start looking for a way out right this fucking minute, we’re all going to be in huge trouble.”

Mukuro could feel herself trembling, but it seemed like everyone in the room was too.

For a second, everyone stared blankly at her. After a moment of tense silence, Soshun was the first to move, and then Chiaki, and then everyone else followed. No one would meet Mukuro’s eyes, but
she didn’t care. Mukuro could feel her mind slowly slipping into tunnel-vision, eyes scanning the metal plates of the walls. The only thing she could see was the cracks between plates, too thin to pull apart or wedge between. She pressed closer, peering into the crack, when a whirring sound kicked up behind the classroom walls. Mukuro leaned closer to the sound, trying to pinpoint it, but it was as if the sound was surrounding the entire room.

Suddenly, Chiaki let out a small yelp.

Mukuro craned her neck to look, watching as the pink-haired girl backed up from the wall, pulling Hajime and Nagito away with her.

“Its coming from the walls!” Chiaki shouted in warning, quickly backing up to the center of the room.

For a moment, Mukuro didn’t understand what she meant. But then she saw it.

A glittering yellow fog was seeping in through the cracks in the walls, slowly filling the room. Mukuro’s eyes widened.

“Cover your mouths!” Kyouko shouted, raising her sleeve to cover her own mouth.

Mukuro did the same, backing away to the center of the room. She cast a glance over at Yasuke, but there was no way she would be able to pull him away fast enough. Her mind was spinning, thinking desperately about what to do.

Mukuro looked to the ceiling, but it seemed that Junko had specifically chosen a room without vents. All nine of them cast silent panicked glances at each other, some student’s eyes welling up with tears. Whether the tears were from the sheer panic of their situation or the gas itself, Mukuro wasn’t sure.

She had to do something to get them out.

Mukuro took a deep breath of what was left of the clear air, before darting into the fog that was slowly inching closer. She ran towards the door, slamming into it with her whole body. Her shoulder was aching, her head spinning, but the adrenaline kept her from feeling the full brunt of the pain right away.

Junko’s plan was to drug them all once more and take them somewhere else. Who knows where this new location would be, or how long they would be knocked out, or who would still be alive when she woke up. Junko wouldn’t be against sending them a message by killing one of them out of nowhere.

If there was any time to get out, it would be now.

Mukuro kept slamming her body against the door, kicking with as much power as she could, but still it wouldn’t budge. She looked back over her shoulder at the students still huddled in the weakest area of the gas. Some of their legs were wobbling, feeling the effects of oxygen deprivation already.

All she needed was to create some sort of crack in the wall, enough to let the gas seep out. Junko couldn’t have filled the machines with too much drug, right? It had to run out sometime. If they could just wait it out, if they just had more time, then maybe Mukuro could knock down the door.

Dark spots danced in the corners of her vision, her lungs burning and constricting. All her movements were leaving her using up what little oxygen she had left. She wasn’t going to last long.
Thump. Thump.

Two students were already knocked out. Nagito and the girl in the yellow hoodie. They laid helplessly in a heap on the floor, Kyouko hovering over them nervously. The detective seemed to be swaying, as did most of the others.

She just needed more time.

Mukuro slammed once more into the door, not finding the strength to pull away, when suddenly she felt arms pulling her back.

Confused, she looked, watching Makoto trying to ease her back from the door. He shook his head minutely, looking from Mukuro to a spot over her shoulder. Hajime and Soshun had taken her place, working together to beat the door as hard as they could.

It wasn’t working.

Mukuro knew they weren’t going to get out of this. As her vision slowly flickered, her head swimming and her chest burning, Mukuro slowly fell heavier and heavier into Makoto’s arms.

She felt him lay her down gently on the floor before she passed out completely.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! It's been some time since I last updated, but I hope you enjoyed this chapter!
I'm gonna try and have this fic finished by the end of June so expect a lot faster updates, lol.
Some notes on this chapter...
+ I'm so sorry Karen, i know i played u dirty but u kinda pulled a shovel on everyone in the anime so i dont feel that bad.
+ Something about Mukuro being unable to remember Aiko's name was really funny to me while i was writing at 3am so I kept it in for shits and giggles i guess
+ FINALLY THE TWO DORKS CONFESS, IVE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS FOR 2 FUCKING YEARS
Mukuro was getting really sick of being unconscious in random rooms.

As soon as she woke up, her body kicked in with the sudden urge to breathe in as much air as possibly, leaving her gasping and writhing on the floor. Her lungs burned like she had never felt before, a sharp pain in her temple bringing the bite of tears to her eyes.

“She’s awake,” a calm voice announced, but they sounded faraway. Like Mukuro’s ears was were filled with water.

Mukuro rolled so she was lying on her back, prying her eyes open. It took her a minute to make out the outline of Kyouko’s face peering above her, another minute for the room to stop spinning. Mukuro blinked up at the Ultimate Detective wearily, moving to try and sit up. Before she could, Kyouko held down her shoulder with a single gloved hand. Though Mukuro was far stronger than Kyouko, that gentle touch was all it took to keep her down.

“Don’t get up too quickly. You were slamming against that door pretty harshly,” she explained. Her voice sounded rough. “It must have taken a lot more out of you than the others.”

Mukuro’s eyes followed as Kyouko reached behind her, bringing forward a water bottle. She tilted Mukuro’s head forward, just enough to drink from it. She didn’t realize how thirsty she really was until she finished the whole bottle, gasping for air.

“There are boxes of water bottles in the far corner of this room,” Kyouko explained, answering Mukuro’s unasked question. “It seems we’ve been out long enough for Junko to worry whether we would die of dehydration. No food, though.”

“Wh—” Mukuro opened her mouth to reply, but only a shrill wheeze of a sound escaped her. She winced, clearing her throat, before trying one more time. “W-Where…where are we?”

Kyouko breathed out slowly. “We were hoping you might recognize this place.”

She gave the other girl an odd look before truly taking in the scenery around her. The room was some sort of circular shape, with a high ceiling. Tall pillars of gold stained wood ran up the deep blue walls, creating an air of formality and professionalism. Even the red curtains draped over the room’s exits were lush and velvet.

Mukuro turned her eyes towards the floor, dragging her hands over the cold marble absently. It was checkered, the same way a chess board was. As if they were the pieces, and this was one big game.

It just took one glance at the center of the room, at the sixteen witness stands facing inwards, for her to realize where she was. Of course Junko wouldn’t let this room go to waste. It was her passion project, after all.

Mukuro closed her eyes once more, taking in a deep breath. “I do.”

“What is it?”

Mukuro opened one eye to look at the detective, her mouth pressed into a thin line. “One of Junko’s
plans. A courtroom. She never told me the details…she rarely told me anything. But this room…It’s somewhere below the school, I think.”

Kyouko nodded absently. “I see. At least we know our location. The doors still won’t open, I’m afraid.”

Mukuro didn’t respond. She felt a lull in her thoughts, as if she was still spinning and everything else was trying to catch up with her.

Suddenly, Makoto’s head swung into her view, peering over Kyouko’s shoulder. He seemed relatively unharmed, besides a rather nasty bruise on his left cheek. His eyes practically glowed in the dim lighting of the room, or perhaps Mukuro just imagined they were.

“Hey,” he said, his face lighting up into a smile. “You’re awake.”

Mukuro couldn’t help but smile back, her worry draining away as she momentarily pushed aside the protective instinct flaring up inside her. “It’s good to see you. Is everyone else alright?”

Kyouko hesitated, then nodded. Mukuro didn’t miss the reluctance in her voice.

“More or less,” the detective said. “We’re still waiting on Hajime, Soshun, and Nagito to wake up. Hajime and Soshun were still kicking at the door before I passed out, so they’ll probably feeling the same effects as you.”

Now that her vision was slowly coming back to her, Mukuro found it odd to see Kyouko with her hair still delicately held up with pins, but bruises lining her neck and bare arms. Mukuro noticed earlier that she had abandoned her yukata in favour of mobility, but she never noticed the bruises before. Had they been there earlier?

“What happened?” Mukuro asked, her eyes scanning Kyouko’s injuries.

Kyouko looked down at the purplish-blue splotches staining her skin. She shrugged. “Everyone has them. They must have developed when we were being transferred here.”

Mukuro hummed for a moment. Makoto touched the bruise on his cheek tenderly, frowning slightly. She had no doubts bruises just like Kyouko’s marred her own skin. “I don’t see why Junko would bother being gentle with us. And if we’re as far away from the reserve building as I think we are, then it makes sense. I don’t know how she managed to drag us here undetected.”

Kyouko remained in pensive silence, the gears in her brain turning full speed. “I wonder how long it has been since we were trapped. A few hours? A day? A week?”

Makoto hissed through his teeth, Kyouko’s words catching him off guard. “A week?”

“It’s possible,” is all Kyouko says in reply.

They fall into silence, thinking over the implications disappearing for a week would cause. Was anyone looking for them? Did anyone notice they were missing? Mukuro knew that if she suddenly vanished, there’s no family that would be looking for her. But Kyouko’s father was a very important man. Makoto spoke lovingly of his parents and sister. They would be looking for him.

How much pain has their disappearance caused?

Mukuro draped an arm over her eyes. “If we’ve been gone for that long, without anyone finding us…”
She didn’t need to finish her sentence for the other two to understand what she was trying to say. After all, it wasn’t a question of whether people were looking for them. Ten teenagers, vanishing without notice? It was now a matter of whether people would find them.

_If they’ve been gone for that long, without anyone finding them, they probably never will._

The stress of it all placed a heavy weight on Mukuro’s shoulders. She didn’t want to fall back into that loop of blaming herself, but how could she not? It was a familiar path to go down. If Mukuro had just stayed with Junko, then she would never have roped Makoto and Kyouko and god knows who else into this stupid mess. But at the same time, she knew it was their choice to follow her.

Mukuro’s responsibility now was to make sure they got out of this alive.

Makoto knelt beside her suddenly, taking her hand in his. “Hey, um…there’s actually something we should tell you.”

Mukuro pulled her arm away from her eyes, watching as Kyouko and Makoto shared a worried glance. “What happened? I thought you said everyone was alright?”

Kyouko hesitated. “I did…It’s just…It might be easier if you saw for yourself. We have no idea what to do to help him.”

Mukuro followed Kyouko’s gaze as she turned to look at a spot just out of Mukuro’s view, on the other side of the room. She pushed herself off the floor slowly, Makoto helping to lift her into a seating position, until she could catch sight of what had Kyouko and Makoto so jittery.

Yasuke was sitting against the wall, knees tucked up to his chest. His eyes were open, staring at the ground in front of him blankly.

He was awake.

_He was awake._

Mukuro’s breath hitched in her throat, relief washing over her. “How long has he been up?” Mukuro asked, her voice low. She wasn’t sure why she was whispering—Yasuke wasn’t even looking at them.

“Chiaki was the first to wake up, then him. That was a few hours ago,” Kyouko replied.

Makoto squeezed her hand in a reassuring gesture. “We tried speaking to him…but he wouldn’t speak. If you want us by your side while speaking to him, just let us know.”

Mukuro broke her eyes away from Yasuke, meeting Makoto’s worried gaze. She forced up a gentle smile, covering his hand with one of her own. If Kyouko found their closeness odd, she didn’t comment on it.

“He might be more open to speak if its just me,” Mukuro reasoned before standing up, letting Makoto’s hand slip out of hers.

She could feel their gaze on her back as she walked towards Yasuke. Her legs felt wobbly, and she couldn’t tell if it was the lingering effect of the drugs or something else entirely.

He looked so different than before. When Junko first broke him, Yasuke was shouting and screaming, thrashing against the nurses trying to hold him down. His manic laughter still echoed Mukuro’s ears. But now…he was quiet. Still. Folded in on himself. He looked so small, in a room
that felt too big. Mukuro wasn’t sure which was better, and she couldn’t be sure until she managed to speak with him.

Carefully, Mukuro knelt beside him. He flinched slightly, arms tightening around his knees. Still, he wouldn’t look at her.

“Yasuke…”

No response. Yasuke’s jaw shifted, like a key turning in a lock.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” she started. Mukuro could’ve sworn he flinched again at her words. “When she disappeared…I was so worried. I thought—I thought you were going to die, I didn’t know what to do, I just…I’m really glad you’re alive. I’m sorry you ended up here—”

His head snapped to look at her, eyes wide and glassy. He looked so afraid. “You’re sorry?”

His voice struck her, hard. She couldn’t help the spark of hope that lit up inside her. I mean, he was talking, right? He understood her, at the very least. He was so pale, dark circles under his eyes like shadows. She took a steadying breath, but it just shook her even more.

“Yes,” she said quietly.

“I…I’m the one who should be sorry,” he muttered, squeezing his eyes shut.

Mukuro tried to push away the worried stares of the others around her. It was surprisingly easy, to just keep her focus on Yasuke. “You don’t need to—”

“You have—” he interrupted, growling. He cut himself off for a moment, cursing under his breath. “You have…no idea, Mukuro. You shouldn’t be here.”

Mukuro flinched back at his tone. Instead of cowering back like she had always done, she took a deep breath, gritting her teeth.

“No.”

Yasuke paused, his eyebrows pinching together. “No?” he echoed.

“You helped me get out of there, away from her, and I couldn’t help you. Now you’re here. You helped me so much, Yasuke. And I couldn’t do the same for you. But I will get you out, and I will stop her. I promise,” she said firmly.

Yasuke went silent, turning his head away. His entire body was trembling, his pale hands clutching his legs so hard Mukuro was worried he would leave even more bruises on his skin.

He tilted is head forward, matted black hair covering his eyes like a curtain. She could just barely see the smile curling on his lips.

He’s…smiling?

A jolt of panic ran through her, bracing for that same manic laughter she heard in the hospital. For all she knew, Junko still had her grips on him. He could still be wallowing in the throngs of despair, even if he wasn’t acting the same as before.

He was silent for a long time.

There were tears in the corner of his eyes. “You’ve changed.”
Mukuro was speechless for a moment. “Yasuke…”

“It’s a good thing,” he adds quickly. His voice is so quiet, but it feels like Mukuro’s ears are ringing. “The old Mukuro…never would have stuck up for herself like this.”

Her heart clenched painfully. “Yasuke…”

“Your hair still looks like shit, though,” he adds, his smile shifting to a weak smirk.

In an instant, Mukuro threw her arms around him, pulling him into a tight hug. He let out a small huff of a laugh at the sudden movement, reaching carefully to hug Mukuro back.

“I missed you,” Mukuro mumbled into his shoulder, tears flowing freely from her eyes. “I was so worried…”

Yasuke laughed a little again, hugging her tighter. “When did you become such a crybaby, Mukuro?”

He was crying too, but Mukuro didn’t comment on it. “I thought I lost you for good, you idiot.”

Mukuro and Yasuke…they were never the hugging kind of people. Even as a child, Mukuro never hugged her parents. But she didn’t mind this. It felt like she had a real family. Yasuke tensed up for a moment, his arms curling around her shoulders a little too tight.

She pulled back, trying to get a better look at his face. “Are you…okay now?”

Yasuke’s expression closed off in an instant. He looked away, to the floor, to the wall, to anywhere but Mukuro. “I’m…not sure. Before, everything was so loud and overwhelming. But now…it feels…quiet.”

Mukuro paused, thinking. “Quiet,” she repeated.

“It’s so messed up, up here,” he said, gently tapping his own forehead. “In the hospital…it was like I could see myself doing those things, kicking and screaming, I could feel myself feeling those things, but it all felt like another person. And I just…didn’t have the energy to take control.”

“Or you didn’t want to take control.”

It wasn’t accusatory. Yasuke’s face flashed over with shame regardless.

Mukuro placed a hand on his arm. “It’s okay. You’re back now, and that’s all that matters. So long as I have anything to say about it, she won’t touch you ever again.”

Yasuke flashed her a weak smile. There was still this edge behind his eyes, in the way they darted around. There was something…off. Mukuro couldn’t tell, but it could easily be explained away by all that they’ve gone through, right? Mukuro pushed away her worries into a far corner of her mind.

“There’s actually some people I’d like you to meet. Before we’re thrown into whatever situation she has planned, I’d like for you to know we’re not alone here,” Mukuro said. “But only if you’re up for it, of course.”

Yasuke hesitated, taking a shaky breath in. He still seemed nervous about the prospect of talking to new people, probably why he stayed silent in the first place after waking up, but he nodded gently. “Sure.”

Mukuro smiled once more, before turning towards where Makoto and Kyouko are sitting. She
waved them over, both of them cautiously smiling at Mukuro, obviously sensing her elated expression as a good sign.

Kyouko and Makoto looked between the two hesitantly.

“Yasuke, this is my friend Kyouko Kirigiri and my…” Mukuro hesitated, because the word friend doesn’t quite fit Makoto in her mind; they feel like so much more. It must be a long enough pause for Yasuke to notice, since he gave her an odd look, enough to snap her back to attention. “And, uh, my other friend, Makoto Naegi.”

Makoto was blushing profusely, but Kyouko seemed far more composed. “It’s a shame we couldn’t have met under better circumstances,” she said, bowing slightly in his direction.

Yasuke raised a skeptical eye brow at her. He opened his mouth to speak, but closed it. He tried again after a moment. “You seem…familiar.”

Kyouko tensed, casting a glance towards Mukuro. That’s right. She did visit Yasuke when he was still in the hospital. It was clear the Ultimate Detective was unsure whether she should bring it up or not.

“Kyouko is the daughter of the headmaster,” Mukuro intervened quickly.

Yasuke narrowed his eyes before giving her a miniscule nod. He must have caught the omission but didn’t call her out on it. “Ah. I see.”

“Her’s my roommate and has been helping me a lot these past few days,” Mukuro explained, keeping her voice low just in case. “You can trust her.”

“It’s a relief to see you back to your normal self, Yasuke,” Kyouko added.

Yasuke shrugged. “More or less.”

Kyouko opened her mouth to respond, but before she can, voices pick up behind them. The four turned towards the sound, watching as Hajime slowly rose into a seated position, clutching his head. In an instant, Chiaki was muttering and rushing to grab him a bottle of water, not before Hajime proceeded to spill the entire contents of his stomach on the floor.

Kyouko winced. “They might need some help…”

Mukuro nodded once, and Kyouko rushed off to aid them. Hajime let the purple-haired girl help him stand, leading him over to the far corner of the room where Chiaki fumbled with their water supply.

Makoto sighed. “I hate that all we can do is stand around here, doing nothing.”

“Why not go help Kyouko clean up vomit?” Mukuro offered, a small smirk on her face.

Makoto blushed, embarrassed. “Hey, I was really tired after helping try to break down that door alright? I mean, did you see how I ran into that fog to help you? I should atleast get some recognition for that.”
Mukuro fails to stifle her laugh at his sarcasm. His eyes sparkle with amusement at her giggles.

“Ah yes, my brave knight coming to rescue me. How could I forget?” she said, purposefully overdramatic.

He stuck his tongue out at her jokingly, and she did the same back.

When Mukuro turned back to Yasuke, she caught him staring inquisitively at Makoto. He seemed like he has something to say, but he kept his lips pressed into a thin line.

“Is something wrong?” Mukuro asked gently.

Yasuke tilted his head to the side, glancing between Mukuro and Makoto.

“Are you two…together?” he asked, one eyebrow raised. It instantly left the two a flustered mess, both of their faces turning a brilliant shade of red.

It seemed that was answer enough, as Yasuke let out a snort of a laugh.

Makoto fiddled with the hems of his shirt, staring down at the floor. “Um…well, technically, we didn’t make it official or anything…” he said quietly, shifting uncomfortably.

Mukuro gave him a look, her lips pressed together. He wasn’t wrong. “Did you…want to? Make it official, I mean?”

Makoto’s eyes widened a little. “D-did you?”

Yasuke sighed loudly. “Jesus Christ, it’s obvious you both want to, just date already you losers,” he said while dropping his head in his hands.

Makoto and Makoto both looked sheepish, before a laugh bubbled up from both of them.

“When he puts it like that, I suppose we have to, huh?” Makoto said, nudging Mukuro with arm gently.

Mukuro could’ve sworn she heard Yasuke laugh along with them.

==SAYAKA MAIZONO==

Sayaka should have been at the festival.

She shouldn’t have let her friends go alone, especially after seeing the seriousness of their expressions. She knew something bad was going to happen, she could just feel it. For as much as Sayaka joked about being psychic, she didn’t need ESP to realize that her friends were getting into big trouble.

Maybe then her friends wouldn’t be in danger.

Maybe then she wouldn’t be wearing a stupid orange vest, holding a stupid flashlight, wandering around a stupid forest trying to find her friends who shouldn’t have gone missing in the first place. If Sayaka had gone with them, maybe she could have helped. Strength in numbers. Maybe nothing would have changed at all, and Sayaka would have been missing along with them.
But...at least she would be with them. At least she wouldn’t be here, uselessly pointing a flashlight through the bushes as if they were just playing a game of hide-and-seek.

Sayaka jumped a little when the walkie talkie in her hand let out a shrill beep. Aoi, her designated partner for the search, leaned over to listen to the static voice coming from the other end.

“Maizono, Asahina, have you found anything yet?” Ishimaru’s voice reached through. As class president, he felt responsible for making sure all his classmates returned safely, and had spent countless hours organizing the class into search parties.

Sayaka clicked a button on the walkie. “Nothing yet.”

Aoi gave her a concerned look, but Sayaka pretended not to notice. There was a beat of silence from the other side, before another beep resounded.

Ishimaru sighed into the walkie. “We should wrap up for today. The sun is already setting, and we wouldn’t want to lose anybody else out there. Report back once you reach your rooms.”

Sayaka hesitates before clicking the button once more. “I want to search for a little longer. We won’t go far.”

Aoi placed a hand on Sayaka’s shoulder, frowning. “Maybe he’s right, we should give it a rest…”

Sayaka brushed her hand off. “You can go back if you want to. I want to keep looking.”

There was another beat of silence before Ishimaru responded.

“I don’t like risking things more than they need to, but I have a feeling you would go out without permission anyway. Stay safe. Do not go off school grounds and stay away from the reserve course building. Contact the authorities if you notice anything of suspicion,” Ishimaru ordered somewhat reluctantly.

“Of course,” Sayaka clipped back.

The walkie beeped three times in quick succession, signifying the end of their connection. Sayaka took a moment to collect herself, holding the flashlight a little tighter. Aoi stood behind her. The Ultimate Swimmer didn’t move, as if Sayaka was a house of cards and just one gust of wind would send her crumbling.

Sayaka kept her eyes ahead of her. “It’s supposed to be cold tonight, if they’re out there alone with nothing to protect them—”

Aoi sighed “They’ve been gone for six days. There’s already been plenty of cold nights.”

“I know that,” Sayaka snapped, harsher than she intended.

Before Aoi can speak up again, Sayaka started walking. Aoi sputtered for a moment, before rushing to catch up with Sayaka’s quick pace.

Deep down, Sayaka knew that this wasn’t her fault. Even if it was her fault—in some obscure butterfly effect kind of way—she shouldn’t be taking it out on Aoi. But she was just so frustrated. Some of their classmates are already giving up hope. Sayaka could see it in the quiet way they treaded around her, always speaking in ‘if we find them’ instead of when.

“Sayaka…Ishimaru said not to go too close to the reserve building.”
Sayaka slowed down, just enough for Aoi to fall in step beside her. “It’s the most likely place to find them, isn’t it?”

“It’s also the most dangerous,” Aoi reasoned. “Besides, the police have already searched there…”

“Maybe they missed some things only we would notice. Y’know, like signs only our friends would leave.”

It was naïve optimism, Sayaka knew. Maybe Aoi was rubbing off on her.

Aoi grumbled some sort of complaint under her breath, but didn’t stall any longer. She followed Sayaka around some trees, before they reached the front of the building. The first thing that hit them was the smell.

Aoi groaned, clutching her stomach at the nauseating scene. Though Sayaka was maintaining a confident face (mostly to make sure Aoi wouldn’t force her back to the dorms) even she felt queasy at the sight before them, reaching up to cover her nose with her sleeve.

They had both seen the pictures from last week—most, if not all, of their class had—but there was something so much more real and worrying about seeing it in person.

The grass was stained red with blood, some areas slicker than others. Some spots were a dark brown, whereas some areas were littered with blobs of bright pink that spoke of a lot more than just blood in that area.

Well, Sayaka thought numbly, at least it would provide good fertilizer.

The thought was juvenile, but it was the only way she could cope with seeing evidence of so much death.

A chill ran down Sayaka’s spine when she thought back to when the scene was still fresh and new, and the horrors that were so innocently texted from student to student like a rumour.

The day after the festival, all participating students took to taking down their booths. When Sayaka passed by the campus on her way to class, even she could smell something off about the area. Back then, she passed it off for rotting food someone had thrown out on the sidewalk.

After a few hours of cleanup, one group of students sent to cleanup litter found something far more concerning that a discarded plastic water bottle or a candy wrapper.

That day, they found a trail of blood.

And it lead straight to the old reserve course campus

The police arrived pretty quickly after the proceeding 911 call, but that didn’t stop students from taking pictures and sharing it with the entire school.

Sayaka feels her knees wobble at the thought of those images.

Corpses, about ten of them (though it was hard to tell) were scattered across the lawn. Blood was everywhere, but that’s not where the horror ended. Each body was disfigured and mutilated, each one missing a body part somewhere. An arm over there, and eye over here. A couple fingers and toes scattered like flower seeds. Each corpse’s eyes were missing.

While the position of these bodies seemed random, the cuts on their face were definitely purposeful.
Whatever sick psychopath did this two straight lines across each corpse’s cheeks, forming a permanent smile that stretched from ear to ear. The lines were precise, not angry, but **practiced**.

Only two days later did they finally manage to find out who the corpses were. No one was able to identify the bodies in the condition they were in, so Sayaka couldn’t help but feel a little breath of shameful relief when it was reported from DNA testing that the bodies were no one she knew personally. Ten reserve course students, unremarkable in every way, were the victims of this case.

Sayaka couldn’t help but feel Mukuro, Makoto, and Kyouko were connected to this somehow. That whoever did this to the students, also took them away.

Aoi took a hesitant step forward, dodging wet spots in the grass. “Do you really think we’ll find ‘em in here?”

Sayaka tore her gaze away from the bloody scene, looking up at the building ahead of them. It was fairly tall, but old and battered. The windows and doors were sealed off with metal plates, everywhere except the front entrance.

It was close to the crime scene. So close, in fact, that it would make a perfect place to dump a body.

“I hope not.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this chapter! Just some notes...
+ FINALLY MY BOY YASUKE I’M SORRY YOUVE BEEN A PLOT COMA FOR SO LONG ILY
+ Aoi I’m sorry for dragging you into this hot mess, but we could use another ball of sunshine here
+ Six days without food. The human body is quite persistent, no?
If you have any questions/theories leave them in the comments below! What sort of game do you think Junko has planned? I'm curious to hear your theories =)
It took a while for Mukuro to realize why she was suddenly so tense after everyone had woken up.

The two awake student council members wouldn’t stop glaring at her, and even the other students gave her dirty looks. No doubt that was all thanks to Junko’s little ‘slip’ of letting everyone know they were related, but it seemed that everyone was somehow even more apprehensive in the time they waited for Junko to return.

In the corner of Mukuro’s eye, she saw Yasuke watching the rest of the room with a carefully measured look. Soshun and Nagito were still knocked out, and he kept his eyes pinned on them as if they would vanish if he looked away.

Still, that wasn’t why she was tense.

Mukuro’s hands patted at her clothes, the discomfort sitting deep in her stomach twisting with every second.

“Something wrong?”

Mukuro turned to look at Makoto. He was sitting beside her, watching her with gentle concern. She forced herself to take a steady breath, commanding her hands to still.

“The shard of glass I found,” she said, feeling the unsettling lightness at the hem of her waistband. “It’s gone.”

Makoto frowned, but didn’t look surprised. “After Karen’s outburst…”

“…Junko must have taken it away,” she finished for him, tipping her head back.

It’s not like Mukuro was betting on the glass shard to be her one line of defense. Junko knew her sister well, and it wasn’t surprising to Mukuro that she took away the weapon just to be safe.

Still, it confused her. Was Junko really that worried about a little glass shard, so much so that she’d go out of her way to dispose of it?

How brittle was her plan, if Mukuro being armed would tip the scales?

Her head was still spinning, both from the stress of the situation and the happiness she’d experienced in such a short time. It felt like she was stuck in a washing machine. Spinning round and round, feeling all the highs and lows.

Suddenly Makoto tapped Mukuro’s hand, bringing her attention back over to him. When she looked over, he wasn’t looking at her, but instead at the rest of the room. His eyes were blank, unfocused.

Before she could say anything, he tapped her hand again.
Finally understanding what he was asking, she unfurled her fingers, and he rested his hand in hers gently. She could feel the tremble in his touch, the little signs of nervousness that he tried to hide from the rest of the room.

There was something comforting about the simple contact. Mukuro didn’t realize how much she needed to feel grounded until they were holding each others hand, like balloons tethered to a post.

“I keep thinking about what comes next. About what happens when we get out of here,” Makoto mumbled, still keeping his eyes turned away.

Mukuro didn’t miss the *when* we get out of here, rather than *if*. His optimism was refreshing. She squeezed his hand reassuringly. “I wish I knew.”

Makoto paused. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” she replied smoothly. Mukuro was impressed at how little her own voice shook.

“Do you have any idea what might come next? About what she’s planning?” he asked.

Mukuro hesitated. The impulse to lie was a heavy weight on her tongue. Because yes, she could predict her sister pretty well. Especially in situations like these. Killing games, torture, psychological manipulation—they were all areas where Junko thrived. And they were sitting in her playground.

“A little,” she replied honestly. “But not enough.”

Mukuro could see glimpses of the path set out before them. Ten people. All trapped in one room. In an ideal situation, Mukuro would try to convince everyone to cooperate. Maybe that way, she could get most of these people out unharmed. Some casualties might arise, but that was simply par for the course.

However, there were already complications. Cracks in the foundation. Not everyone trusted her—she could only count on a handful who wouldn’t kill her, given the chance to. There was no way everyone would get out alive.

Junko would most likely be filming this. Broadcasting, maybe. They were to be examples, put on display to influence whoever sees the bright, shining, symbols of hope brutally turning on each other. She would target her manipulation on the weak first, picking off the slow ones. The reserve course would be an easy place to start. And with Hajime here? He would only serve to anger the students as they watch the rest of the Ultimate’s belittle him.

It would be a blood bath. It would complicate so much, in such a little time.

And then…there was the mole.

There had to be one. With Junko keeping her distance, she had to keep someone wound around her little finger to make sure things ran smoothly on this end of the scenario.

“Uh…Mukuro?” Makoto asked suddenly. He cleared his throat awkwardly. “There’s um… something glowing? Under your shirt?”

For a moment, Mukuro blinked at him in confusion. *Something glowing?* She looked down, noticing the little red glow that was just barely visible beneath the fabric of her blouse. Realization flashed over Mukuro, so quickly it almost gave her whiplash.

*The pager.*
Frantically, Mukuro reached around her neck, pulling out the pager from where she tied it. The small plastic object was still in one piece, perfectly intact. It wasn’t flashing anymore; Sayaka must have accidentally hit the button. But still, that meant they had signal. They could reach someone.

“What is it?” Makoto asked as he peeked over.

Even Yasuke seemed to take notice, as he turned to face them, frowning at the pager. He didn’t speak, simply watching the two with carefully guarded eyes.

“Sayaka gave it to me,” Mukuro explained. “We might be able to contact her…she might be looking for us.”

Makoto’s smile was brimming. “Can we use it to call her? Or maybe tell her to contact the police?”

Mukuro didn’t want to put a damper on his optimism, conflictedly turning the little pager in her hand. “Well…we can’t exactly call her, not in the conventional way. The pager works by clicking the button, which sends a signal to the pager Sayaka has. The red button will let her know it’s an emergency.”

Makoto tilted his head, puzzled. “Then…what can we do? How do we tell her where we are?”

Before Mukuro could reply, the opposite side of the room suddenly turned frantic.

“Those two are awake,” Yasuke muttered, narrowing his eyes.

Nagito and Soshun woke up mere seconds apart, both with the same lost expression on their faces as they blinked up at the ceiling. Chiaki rushed to Nagito’s aid, whereas Karen and the girl in the yellow hoodie (Mukuro still could not remember the girl’s name) ran to Soshun.

All three girls were armed with water bottles, keeping a slight distance in case the boys needed to throw up. Instead, they both waved the girls away.

Neither took a sip of water, insisting they were fine, just a little dizzy.

Mukuro watched them both with a frown on her face. Before she could think over their behaviour any further, the screens around them flashed to life.

“About fucking time! Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for Sleeping Beauty one and two over there?!” Junko’s voice shrieked through the speakers, causing everyone to flinch back.

Unexpectedly, Junko’s hair was back to the bubble-gum pink she dyed it to before school started. It fell in loose curls down at her shoulders, her bangs pinned back with a black-and-white bear pin.

Junko didn’t bother to put in her blue colour contacts. Her eyes were the natural red of freshly spilled blood, the red that drowned so much of Mukuro’s memories. The sight of Junko in this half-state sent mixed signals to her brain, trying to categorize who her sister was meant to be in this moment. Maybe she was doing this to mess with her head.

It certainly had an effect on Yasuke.

He was mumbling under his breath, wrapping his arms around himself.

Mukuro glanced at him nervously. She remembered what he said about Ryouko, when she was still a child, and when they first met each other. Yasuke had just lost his mother then, a mother with bright red hair and red eyes, just like Ryouko.
They became fast friends, finding solace in each other. Besides Mukuro, he was the only other person her twin ever confided in.

Mukuro didn’t want to know what seeing Junko’s previously red hair would have done to Yasuke, and is briefly grateful.

“Anyway~ Now that we’ve got everything nice and sorted, and everyone’s had time to enjoy the refreshments, lets get started! Everyone, please stand at one of the podiums at the center of the room,” Junko ordered cheerily, clapping her hands together twice.

No one moved.

Junko twitched.

“O-kay. Let me rephrase that…stand at one of the podiums, or I’ll kill you where you stand now. How does that sound?”

It sounded deadly serious.

Everyone moved into place.

Junko smiled. “Now that’s more like it.”

Mukuro looked down at the podium before her, noting several peculiarities. The first, was a small keypad embedded just below a small touchscreen. Aside from the screen, was a bright red button. What the button’s use could be, Mukuro had no idea. Junko never let her down into the courtroom before.

Mukuro looked back up from her podium, scanning her eyes over everyone as they examined their respective podiums for themselves. It felt like they were in a trial—a trial where every single one of them was the accused.

Nagito seemed the most comfortable, leaning on his podium in an exaggerated gesture. His eyes raked over the rest of the students, lazily flicking between the faces. When he caught Mukuro staring, his eyes widened in surprise. He smoothed over his expression quickly, throwing her a small wink before continuing to look around the rest of the room.

It only infuriated Mukuro further. She knew Nagito was playing some sort of mind game here, but for the life of her, she couldn’t figure out what it was.

Still half-distracted, Mukuro kept one hand behind her back. She held the pager in her hand, flipping it over and over frantically.

She needed to contact Sayaka without Junko noticing. And she needed to do it fast.

“Alrighty boys and girls, welcome to the first annual Hope’s Peak Academy Killing game!” Junko proclaimed.

The tension in the air was so thick, it could be cut with a knife. Still, even in a situation like this, Mukuro felt an odd sense of pride. Standing between Yasuke and Makoto—Kyouko standing not to far away—she felt that maybe, just maybe, they could stop Junko.

Her twin smiled on the big-screen monitor, staring down at the students as if she were in the room with them.
“What do you want with us?” Chiaki asked, the short girl somehow even smaller under the weight of the room.

Chiaki’s determination from earlier that night has all but vanished, now replaced with the same jittery unease that swallowed Mukuro’s reason.

“Why did you bring us here?” Karen added, gripping onto her podium with both hands, the skin over her knuckles paling white.

Junko clicked her tongue, tilting her head with a smile. “So many questions…”

Junko suddenly perked up, pretending to suddenly have a brilliant idea. Mukuro knew her better. Everything her sister said and was about to do was already planned in her mind.

“How about we make a deal? You get through this first round, and I’ll answer one of your questions. Anything you want to know about this place, I will tell you,” Junko explained, speaking with exaggerated gestures. “But only one question. Let’s not get greedy here,” she added hastily.

The students seemed to be weighing her words, Mukuro included. What sort of game was Junko playing here? One question wouldn’t help them, not in any way that would get them out alive, but why even give them that? Junko always left a way out. Mukuro just needed to read the cracks in her words.

“Sounds fair,” Nagito hummed, tipping his head back to glance at the monitor. “However, you said first round. I assume this means there will be more?”

Everyone’s eyes settled on him, watching the white-haired boy with apprehension.

Junko’s expression soured.

“That’s technically a question, but fine,” she said, glaring. “There will be as many rounds as needed,” Junko seemed suddenly very interested in her nails, putting forward an impassive façade as she examined them.

“What if we get through every round, and no one dies?” Yasuke asked, keeping his eyes pinned to the ground.

His voice seemed to cut through even Junko’s impressive defenses. She flinched for a moment, blinking in surprise. Almost as if she didn’t expect to hear Yasuke’s voice.

It threw Mukuro off balance. Junko was a savant at analyzing people. Analyzing actions, words, intentions. For her to be surprised was no ordinary event. For her to be surprised by someone like Yasuke, someone she loved and has known for years, that was even more worrying.

After a moment of terse silence, Junko quickly smoothed her expression back to something more palatable, twirling a delicate finger through her pink curls.

“Someone’s eager, huh? Or maybe just optimistic?” She sneered, the smirk on her lips not quite reaching her eyes. “I don’t suppose you think everyone will get out of this in one piece? Come on Yasuke dear, even you aren’t that naïve.”

Junko was clearly baiting him. Using the terms of endearment, speaking to him with such a tone—it was all her way of trying to spark some anger in him. Dangling the carrot right in front of his eyes, daring him to snap at her. Daring him to play the cards he held so close to his chest. The room watched him with cautious anticipation.
“No. I suppose not,” he said.

Junko flinched again, her red eyes widening in an unexpected show of vulnerability. The smirk on her lips had vanished, and all that was left was a small frown, her eyebrows pinched together.

She opened her mouth once, then snapped it closed.

“Whatever,” Junko mumbled under a heavy sigh.

Mukuro could only gape, watching the sister who suddenly felt like a lot less of a threat than before.

The others in the circle must not have understood how unusual this interaction was, all of their faces still wearing carefully guarded fear as the only thing they could think of was what comes next.

Mukuro cast her eyes over to Yasuke, but his face was shielded conveniently by his hair, hiding his expression by hanging his head. She felt the urge to reach out to him but wasn’t sure how to. She settled on turning back to the monitor, watch as her sister reassumed her persona.

“Well, now that your questions are out of the way, let’s get started,” Junko said with a manic giggle that sounded just a little too forced to be her genuine brand of crazy.

Something on the screen switched, the monitor now displaying a bright-red background with pale white text. Junko wasn’t on screen anymore, but as she read the words on screen aloud Mukuro could picture Junko’s twisted smile.

“Time for the first game of the night! Everyone in this room is going to be given a chance. It’s a very generous offer, so use it wisely. I know you all are just itching to get your hands on each other, so I’ve decided to give you that opportunity!”

Junko clearly understood the innuendo her words could be mistaken for but kept reading nonetheless. Mukuro didn’t think the room’s faces could look even more horrified, but somehow, they managed.

“There is a single slip of paper in front of you. On this paper, you will write down the name of a participant. Think of it like a voting game. In the end, whoever gets the most votes will be punished,” Junko explained.

The room’s air suddenly felt thick.

“Punished?” Soshun voiced, the brown-haired boy gripping his podium to hide the shake in his hands.

As if answering his question, the monitor switched again.

A picture appeared, of ten stick figures standing in a line. Suddenly, various numbers appeared above their heads. Most had the number zero, a few ones scattered, however one stick figure had the number five above its head.

The screen shifted once more. Nine figures stood in the row now. The tenth was on the floor, lying in a crudely drawn pile of blood.

“Whoever gets the most votes, will be executed,” Junko explained, though no one really needed the explanation. They could see the situation before them clear enough.

Mukuro expected some sort of panic. She expected frantic reactions, maybe a couple of protests.
But none of that happened. Because everyone in the room—except for perhaps one or two people—already knew who they were voting for. It was an easy decision. A way to kill the previously unkillable.

Mukuro felt the suffocating weight of six pairs of eyes digging into her flesh.

Makoto glanced around the room nervously, shifting closer to Mukuro as close as his podium would allow. “But…this is already so unfair…Junko knows exactly who’s the biggest target…”

Mukuro turned her head away from Makoto, looking over at Yasuke. He wasn’t watching her. He just kept staring at the monitor, his expression blank and unfocused.

“There’s a simple solution here,” Kyouko said suddenly, cutting through the silence.

Everyone in the room turned their eyes to her.

Chiaki frowned, her eyebrows pinching together. “What do you mean?”

“You’re not trying to say it’s an easy choice, are you?” The girl in the yellow hoodie stage-whispered, as if she were trying to hide it from Mukuro, even though the soldier was only a meter away. “That’s too cruel…”

Kyouko sighed, turning to Mukuro. “I’m saying there might just be a way that we can all get through this round alive.”

Mukuro gave her an unsteady nod. Kyouko took a deep breath before continuing.

“It’s risky. And dangerous…If I vote for you, and you vote for Karen, and Karen votes for Hajime, and so on…”

“…everyone will have one vote,” Makoto finished for her.

Mukuro didn’t miss the spark of hope in his eyes. Still, Mukuro had her reservations. It was a smart plan; distributing the votes amongst each individual so that way no one has more than one vote. It is a plan that relies solely on trust. Trust in each other, but also trust that Junko will uphold her end of the deal.

Her sister’s face was still hidden from the screen, shielded by the crudely drawn stick figures. The puddle of blood the tenth figure laid in seemed to coat the screen in a red glow.

Nagito narrowed his eyes, tilting his head to the side. “How do you know she won’t kill us all outright?”

Mukuro swallowed the lump in her throat. “Why don’t we ask her?”

She pushed away the pressing stares the rest of the room threw her, focusing instead on the checkered floor beneath her. Mukuro was hoping to limit her interactions with Junko to the bare required to survive the night, knowing how much her sister loves to toy with her, but if Mukuro didn’t show the room open opposition to her sister, they might still believe they were working together.

Within moments, the monitor switched back to the live feed of Junko. She blinked into the camera.

“Someone call for me?” Junko cooed, her smile thin as a razor.

“You said our reward is a question about this place, but can we still ask questions about the game
“Itself?” Kyouko inquired.

Junko rolled her eyes. “How much of a hard-ass do you think I am?”

“Is that a yes?”

Junko groaned, glaring at the detective. “Fine fine, can we hurry this up? I want to start the game already…”

The room went silent for a moment, none willing to take the first step.

Mukuro took the lead, holding Junko’s eyes. “What happens if there is a tie? You said the person with the most votes is punished, right? What if we all have the same number of votes?”

Junko clicked her tongue. “Well, I can’t say I wasn’t expecting this. Disappointing as always, dear sister.” Junko’s smile spread until it was a crescent moon glowering down on them. “If there is a tie, no one will be punished.”

Mukuro winced, nails digging into the wooden stand in front of her. While the rest of the room visibly eased at Junko’s words, finding a promise of safety in them, Mukuro knew better. The fact that Junko not only was prepared for them to figure this out, but also betting on it, that could only mean one thing.

Junko knew this wasn’t going to work.

Mukuro took an unsteady breath, the hand behind her back gripping onto the pager like a lifeline. “Everyone vote for the person to your left. That way, we will be able to tell instantly who didn’t follow the rules.”

Mukuro’s firm tone rang through the room, more of a threat than a promise. Still, Mukuro knew that wouldn’t deter whoever really had it out for her.

“If we do this…everyone can live,” Chiaki reaffirmed.

Mukuro felt like she had one less enemy in the room. Still, there was a tension in the air. Everyone nodded nonetheless, and slowly reached for the keypads in front of them.

“Let the voting begin!” Junko shouted gleefully. “Once you’ve typed your votes, I will announce the results. One by one.”

Junko raked her eyes across the room, staring at them with hunger a feral hunger in her expression. The tapping of buttons drilled into Mukuro’s brain, feeling the shifting gazes of her peers and enemies. It made her dizzy, weightless on her feet. It felt like Mukuro was wearing a big target around her throat, and Junko had just given every willing participant a dart.

Mukuro glanced over, slowly, slowly, slowly, looking to her left. Yasuke stood, fingers shakily hovering over the buttons. When he caught her staring, Yasuke threw Mukuro a half-smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

“What? Forget how to spell my name?” Yasuke whispered over, his grin like a ripple in a still pond.

Mukuro returned his smile. It was just as shaky, just as genuine. “I could never.”

Yasuke blinked at her, before letting out a small huff of a laugh. He turned to glance to his own left, where Karen stood, whispering in hushed tones to the girl in the yellow hoodie beside her.
Any one of them could vote for her, and Mukuro would be dead. Just one vote. That’s all it would take.

*Just one vote.*

“Do you think it would be rude to ask how to spell *her* name?” Yasuke mumbled in a half-sarcastic manner, cutting through Mukuro’s thoughts. There was something off about his tone, but Mukuro was too unfocused to truly focus on it.

She took in a shaky breath, glancing across the room. “I don’t think so. I mean, you wouldn’t want to make a mistake here.”

Mukuro entered a name.

After a few minutes of excruciating silence, Junko reappeared on the screen.

But…there was something off. Something manic in Junko’s eyes. She had this smile, a smile that told of suppressed laughter. Mukuro wanted to take a step forward, to slap a hand over her sister’s mouth. Junko knew what was going to happen next. And she was *laughing*.

There was something else in her red eyes, this glint of nervousness that counterbalanced every inch of fear in Mukuro’s heart.

“Wait here everyone, I’m going to count the votes,” Junko snapped quickly, lacking any sort of dramatic flair.

Flat. One-tone. Rushed.

*What is happening?* Mukuro wondered, waiting with bated breath.

And then the room went dark.

A few of the girls (and a few boys, if Mukuro heard right) let out a yelp of surprise. It wasn’t so dark that they were completely blind; Mukuro could still make out the vague features and figures of the room. But it was still unexpected.

“What happened?” Makoto’s voice called out. Mukuro felt his hand fumble for her own, and she gripped it tightly.

“Where did she go?” Hajime asked.

Someone was breathing heavily, letting out a small squeak of fear. “Is she going to kill us now?! Was this whole thing a joke?!”

There was a distant tapping sound in the distance, like footsteps, but too light and small to be Junko. Everyone remained quiet, staring up at the ceiling as they listened to the tapping as it slowly passed by there heads.

“What was that?” Chiaki asked in a hushed whisper.

“Do you think someone’s up there?” Karen added.

Nagito hummed. “If they were up there, why would they be tapping the ground?”

Hajime snorted. “Maybe its Morse code.”
Mukuro could practically feel Kyouko rolling her eyes. “Glad to see you are taking this seriously.”

Mukuro opened her mouth to add something, to say some one-liner to try and break the tension, to say anything to fill the empty silence, but Hajime’s sarcastic words rang a bell in her head.

Suddenly, Mukuro had an idea.

An idea to contact Sayaka, without having to use words directly.

If she worked quickly, maybe, just maybe, she could get ahead of Junko, and pull this off before the vote even starts.

Before Mukuro’s mistake could be revealed.

.Equals SAYAKA MAIZONO =-

“This place is a mess,” Aoi groaned, tip-toeing over broken glass and loose floorboards.

Sayaka kept her flashlight pointed in front of her, eyes scanning their surroundings. “I don’t think hygiene was their number one priority when investigating, Hina.”

Aoi rolls her eyes at the nickname, sticking her tongue out at Sayaka.

After nearly two hours of wandering through the maze that was the reserve course building, there was no leads to be found. And they were on the fourth floor. Only one floor left to go.

“Can I ask you something?” Aoi whispered, even though they were the only ones there.

Sayaka nodded, not willing to break her eyes away from the hallway, taking to scanning their surroundings instead.

“What do we do if we don’t find anything here?”

Sayaka knew the question was coming. She was hoping she wouldn’t have to answer it. Even Sayaka could admit that there was only a slim chance they would catch something the police didn’t. They weren’t detectives, and they didn’t have all the tools to do something that could really make an impact.

But Sayaka couldn’t find it in her to let go of that small sliver of hope inside her.

“If we don’t find anything here, they we keep looking,” she answered quickly.

Aoi looked at Sayaka, as if the Ultimate Idol were some wounded animal she had to put out of her misery. “Sayaka…”

She pushed passed Aoi, picking up her pace to hide the frustration in her face. “I told you that you didn’t have to come with me, you know. If you’re going to make fun of me, I don’t want to hear it.”

She could hear Aoi’s footsteps behind her, trying to catch up with Sayaka.

“Wait wait, I didn’t mean it like that, okay? I’m just worried you’re working yourself up too much.
You don’t need to push yourself so hard.”

Sayaka stopped in the middle of the hall, her hand tightening around the flashlight. “You remember the assembly we had a few days ago, right?”

She still wouldn’t meet Aoi’s eyes.

Aoi hesitated before speaking, and Sayaka didn’t miss the lull of silence in the air. “Yes, but…I don’t see what this has to do with—”

“Those two girls were just pushed aside. Forgotten,” Sayaka said firmly. She didn’t feel angry, and her tone didn’t sound upset, but there was a sense of finality to everything Sayaka spoke. “They died, and no one seemed to care. Except those closest to them. I don’t want to stand there and watch as our friends get pushed aside.”

Aoi didn’t respond, not for a long time. They just stood there, in the middle of the hallway, no sounds except for the distant creaking of aged wood. The building was old, and most likely shifted a lot. Sayaka focused on the sound, trying to distract herself from Aoi’s worried stare.

Aoi still didn’t answer.

Sayaka huffed. “I’m going to check the rest of this hall. You can go check the next floor. That way we won’t be wasting anymore of your precious time,” she snapped.

“Aoi—” Aoi tried to protest, but Sayaka was already marching past her, forcing herself to keep her head up high.

She needed some space right now, and Aoi graciously gave it to her.

Sayaka knew she was being just a tad unreasonable, but if she didn’t give herself some room away from Aoi she might end up saying things she really regretted. But still…how could Aoi not understand? Wasn’t Makoto her friend too? Even though Aoi didn’t know Mukuro or Kyouko well, she could at least show some more concern for the sociable lucky student.

Sayaka drifted down the halls, peering into classrooms, armed with only a flashlight. She could admit that it was a lot scarier investigating alone, but it gave her room to breathe.

Even if the dust in the room left her a little bit breathless.

Sayaka reached the end of the hall after a few minutes of meandering, slowly stepping into the last classroom on this floor. Sayaka pointed her light around the windowless room, taking in the disheveled state of the place.

Desks lied overturned on the ground, a few bearing deep cracks and chips on their wooden surfaces. Sayaka stepped past obstacles of chairs around her, barely avoiding the stuck-out metal legs as she stepped closer and closer to the back of the room.

The only thing there was a chalkboard, dusted with age.

Sayaka was just about to turn back to the hallway, maybe go apologize to Aoi, when she caught something in the corner of her eye.

On the bottom corner of the chalkboard, just above the ledge where a small stick of chalk sat, was a little handprint in white.
Suddenly, a shriek filled the air.

Sayaka jumped, spinning around towards the door, fumbling with the flashlight in the process as a strike of fear rushed through her.

“Aoi?” Sayaka called out, but there was only silence.

Adrenaline pumped through her veins as Sayaka darted out of the room, scrambling over the obstacles in her way as she hurried to where the shriek had originated from. Tears bit at the corner of her eyes.

*I shouldn’t have left her alone. We should have stuck together. My stupid pride got in the way. I’m so sorry, Hina.*

Murky black thoughts swirled around her head as Sayaka’s feet pounded against the ground, carrying her closer to Aoi’s voice.

She turned a corner, practically skidding, pointing her light down the hall.

Sayaka caught sight of a shadow, hunched against the wall, head buried down in their knees.

“Aoi! Aoi are you alright?!” Sayaka asked in a hurried whisper, kneeling beside her friend. She gripped the other girl’s wrists in her hands, searching her for injuries, for any signs she was alive.

Sayaka almost wept tears of joy on the spot when Aoi grumbled, pulling her arms away.

“I’m okay, I’m okay, relax little miss I-can-do-this-on-my-own!” Aoi huffed, but there was a slight relieved smile on her face.

“I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry,” Sayaka mumbled, pulling Aoi into a hug.

Aoi sighed deeply. “I’m fine, it’s okay.”

Sayaka pulled back after a moment, casting her friend an odd look. “But…why did you scream?”

Aoi flushed instantly, pushing Sayaka’s flashlight away from where it was pointed at her beet-red face. “I uh…I saw a…a ghost.”

Sayaka blinked at her. “A ghost.”

Aoi must have heard the utter exasperation in Sayaka’s voice, because the other girl rolled her eyes, rubbing her temple with one hand. “I swear it was, okay! A little boy, with spooky black hair. I saw him on the stairs. He didn’t say anything though. I think I scared him away.”

Sayaka blinked again. “You scared the ghost away. A ghost.”

Aoi swatted Sayaka’s flashlight away again. “I knew you wouldn’t believe me! Look can we just get out of here?” Aoi groaned. “I’m so tired, I just wanna go home and—”

Suddenly, Aoi stopped.

Sayaka froze too, both girls hearing the same thing echoing in the distance behind them.

Footsteps.
Sayaka shifted so she was beside Aoi, pulling her friend closer against the wall behind them. Shakily, Sayaka switched the flashlight off, tucking it behind her. It was dark enough that they could stay hidden if they just held their breath.

The footsteps got louder.

And louder.

Until they were stepping right down the stair case before them, and the two girls could just make out a pair of legs descending down closer and closer.

“Idontwannadie, Idontwannadie,” Aoi was mumbling, gripping onto Sayaka so tightly she half-expected her skin to bruise.

The figure held a flashlight in their hand, Aoi and Sayaka holding their breath as the stream of light moved steadily closer to where they sat.

And then it hit them, lighting the two girl’s terrified forms.

And then, the figure screamed.

“JESUS FUCKING CHRIST,” the figure shouted, her flashlight clashing to the ground.

Aoi and Sayaka jumped a little at the noise, but stared at the girl in front of them, blinking at the figure they were oh-so-terrified of before.

As it turned out, the figure appeared to be a mere high school girl—one aim of Sayaka’s flashlight revealed her hunched over form, as the girl struggled to regain her breath.

“Holy shit, have you two been here the whole time?” The girl asked, heaving. “I thought I heard noises, but I couldn’t be sure—"

“Who are you? Why are you here?” Sayaka interrupted quickly. She kept her expression firm, her tone level.

Aoi opened her mouth, as if to protest Sayaka’s rude treatment, but snapped it shut. She must have realized the implications of another person in the building with them. What if this was the murderer?

The girl raised herself to her full height, revealing her face to Sayaka and Aoi as the stranger peered down.

“I could ask you two the same question,” The girl challenged.

The girl had short brown hair, with a few highlights streaked through. Her bright green eyes were hidden behind a pair of thick red-framed glasses, the kind of eyes that seemed to glow in the darkness between them.

Sayaka and Aoi shared a look, before Aoi cleared her throat uncomfortably. “We…uh…are looking for our friends.”

Sayaka didn’t expect Aoi to go with honesty so quickly, but it seemed to put the girl in a good mood.

The girl smiled. “My name is Yui Samidare. I’m a rank eight detective, investigating the disappearance of the ten high school students.”

Yui reached into her pockets, pulling out a glittering silver badge that read ‘DSC 888 – RANK
Sayaka peered closer at the badge, tilting her head. “Rank eight…? What does that mean?”

Yui pulled out another object—a miniature notebook. She tossed it down at the two girls. Sayaka’s eyes scanned over the notepad, various words and sentences catching her eye and striking her with sudden fear.

**Hostage scenario?**

**Switching Locations? Reserve building -> ???**

**On school property?**

**Ten disappearances—no physical evidence, different times of disappearance.**

Sayaka shakily handed the notebook back. “You don’t think they were murdered.”

Yui nodded solemnly. “Rank eight means I specialize in kidnappings. I don’t suppose you’d like to help my investigation?”

Aoi and Sayaka nodded vehemently. With a grin, Yui held out a hand to Aoi, helping her up before doing the same to Sayaka.

“I didn’t catch your names. You’re in the main course, right?” Yui asked, noting the gold pins on each girl’s outfit.

Sayaka nodded once more. “My name is Sayaka Maizono, the Ultimate Idol. And this is Aoi Asahina, the Ultimate Swimmer. We share a class with some of the missing students and have been looking for them for days.”

Yui glanced between the two girls, her eyes narrowed inquisitively. She seemed to be filing and sorting every little word Sayaka said, though that must be how a detective works. Sayaka had seen the same behaviour in Kyouko.

As if reading her mind, Yui spoke up once more. “Do you know Kyouko Kirigiri, then?”

Aoi nodded. “Yeah. Sayaka was actually with her a few hours before the festival, where the rest of the students disappeared.”

Yui hummed. “Interesting…I’d like to talk to you two a bit more, if you don’t mind. Every piece of info helps, y’know?”

Sayaka smiled cheerfully, grateful to have found someone willing to finally listen to her. After days of slow, depressing trudges through a forest, they might finally make progress with someone who could actually help save their friends.

“Before we go, I need to take a few more notes…do you guys mind waiting at the front of the building? I’ll be down there in a few,” Yui asked.

Both girls complied, walking down the several flights of stairs to where they started. They made sure to keep away from the grass, standing on the concrete steps at the front of the building.

As promised, within a few minutes, Yui met them at the front of the doors. Her steps were somehow odd, almost clunky in a way they weren’t before, but Sayaka didn’t have time to dwell on it.
“Alright. I got everything I needed,” Yui said, holding up her notebook as if to prove it.

Aoi squinted at the writing. “Isn’t most of this stuff information the security team already investigated?”

Yui snorted. “You think I trust those Hope’s Peak Security idiots? Juzo Sakakura is too busy kissing his boss’s ass to do any real investigation work, so it’s up to me.”

“L-language,” A little voice muttered.

Sayaka and Aoi jumped at the new voice, Aoi no doubt remembering the ‘ghost’ at the top of the stairs. Maybe Sayaka should have given the swimmer a little more credit.

Yui didn’t seem bothered, only rolling her eyes. “Ah right. Forgot you were here. Why don’t you say hi to the nice girls?” she said, reaching behind her back to pat the figure hiding behind her. As the figure tried to dart away from Yui’s hand, Aoi and Sayaka caught sight of a small child, clutching to Yui.

Aoi was gaping. “The ghost?! Or…wait no, is he your kid?!”

Yui only laughed. “No, no, he’s not mine. Shuichi, why don’t you say hello?”

A small boy stepped out from behind her. He kept a little hand gripped tightly on the hem of her sweater, his eyes shielded by a hat that was atleast five sizes too big. When he tipped his head up to look at them, finally giving the girls a glimpse at the boy’s grey eyes, half his face was covered by his raven-black hair.

“H-Hi…” he muttered, shifting uncomfortably. The boy seemed to be painfully shy. Sayaka could see why Aoi mistook him for a ghost.

Sayaka gave him a bright smile. “Nice to meet you, Shuichi. I like your hat.”

Shuichi blinked at her, his face turning bright pink before he darted behind Yui’s legs once more.

Yui only sighed, rolling her eyes with a fond smile. “His uncle runs the detective agency I work for. He asked me to take him along while I investigate.”

“He’s so young though…” Aoi muttered gently, giving a little half-wave to Shuichi.

Yui sighed once more. “Which is exactly why he shouldn’t be here, if what you are saying is serious.”

She unclipped the walkie-talkie from her hip, before turning to kneel down in front of Shuichi.

“Can you do be a huge favour, Shuichi?” Yui asked sweetly.

The boy glanced from Sayaka, to Aoi, then back to Yui before nodding.

“I want you to take this, it connects straight to the police station, okay? Stay on the talkie with them, and don’t hang up. Go to the main office. It’s that big building with all the pretty streetlamps around it, alright?”

Shuichi cast a nervous glance behind him, staring at the empty path. The main office was only a couple hundred meters away, but to a little boy, it must seem like a lot more. “O-Ok…”

“Don’t get off the phone with them. Tell them exactly where you are going, and that we need help
over here. Tell them Yui needs backup. Can you do that?” she said, placing the walkie-talkie into his hands.

Shuichi wobbled a little under the weight of it but gave a determined nod. “O-Ok.”

Yui raised her hand up to him, and he responded by lightly giving her a high-five, before turning to walk down the path.

A few steps away, he stopped, turning back to face the girls. They gave him questioning looks as he blinked at them, his eyes wide and curious. He took in a deep breath.

“Good luck,” he said softly, his hat tipped down to cover his face once more.

Sayaka and Aoi smiled. “Good luck,” they said back.

Satisfied with their response, Shuichi started walking towards the building, pressing the button on the walkie-talkie. Sayaka could just make out his words as he walked away, slipping further and further from their view.

“Hello? Y-Yes…th-this is Shuichi Saihara. I-I need to talk to the p-police, please. It's…for Yui Samidare—”

The girls waited until Shuichi was out of sight before turning back towards each other.

Yui was the first to break the silence, taking in a deep breath. “So. I’d like to know how much you’ve been told regarding Mukuro Ikusaba’s…situation.”

Sayaka and Aoi blinked at her. “Situation?” they asked in unison.

Yui seemed disappointed, but at the same time relieved. “I’m guessing that means you haven’t heard anything…”

Sayaka gave her an unsteady look. “Is it something we should know?”

Yui contemplated this for a moment, breathing in slowly. “I’m not sure…it might be dangerous to—”

Yui abruptly stopped talking.

Sayaka blinked at her, only to find Yui’s eyes settled firmly at her neck. Sayaka shifted uncomfortably.

“Is something the matter?” Sayaka asked politely.

Yui tilted her head, pushing up the frames of her glasses. “A pager…?”

Sayaka’s heart dropped in her chest. *The pager. The pager the pager the pager.*

Sayaka had been wearing it every single day since Mukuro disappeared. There was never any response.

Slowly, Sayaka looked down, until her eyes caught sight of the little pager around her neck. It was flashing red, irregularly beeping in a way that somehow felt purposeful.

Sayaka unclasped the necklace, holding it out.

Aoi knew of the pager already, peering over at it. “It’s lighting up? I thought you said Mukuro might
Sayaka squeezed the little device tighter. “They’re alive. If its flashing like this…it can’t be a simple mistake. They’re alive.”

Tears were flowing freely down Sayaka’s cheek now. Her breaths came in unsteady and shaky, feeling like the entire world was spinning. Hope filled her lungs, swelling in her chest until she felt like she might burst.

Yui reached forward, carefully taking the pager from Sayaka’s hand. “Fascinating…”

Sayaka gave the detective a look. “What is?”

Yui’s grin turned wicked. “The flashing.”

For a moment, the trembling in Sayaka’s hands stilled. Realization washed over her, Aoi taking on the same expression as she covered her mouth with one delicate hand.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep Beep.

Pause.

Beep.

Beep Beep Beep.

Pause.

“It’s a message…” Aoi breathed out shakily.

Sayaka had to suppress the urge to jump up and down out of pure joy. They finally had a way to find them. And finally, Sayaka wouldn’t be so useless. She would be able to help her friends in a real way.

Yui waved the pager in the air, scrambling for her notebook.

“Alright girls. Ever translated Morse code before?”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed this chapter! It definitely was a long one, but well deserving after such a long wait, lol.

Some notes...
+ SHUICHI MY SMOL BOY I LOVE YOU. Okay i am weak for ndrv3, and had to work it in somehow, so voila--tiny apprentice detective shuichi. You are welcome.
+ Yui is here and ready to kick some ass.
+ HmMmMmmM wHATS HAPPENING WITH THE VOTING???? my anxiety kicks
up to level 5000 when writing these tense situations i love it
+ Asahina's fear of ghosts is my favourite canon thing about her personality, all hail the
donut queen
+ Also, a little side note, don't bother checking what the morse code means i was too
tired to properly translate so its random beeps, gomen
If you have any theories or questions leave them down in the comments! I'd love to hear
your thoughts ^u^
Until next time, my friends.
Shuichi was on an important mission. He held the walkie-talkie Miss Yui gave him with both hands, chatting with the guard on the other side.

“Are they still at the reserve building?” The guard asked. “Can you tell me where they are right now?”

Shuichi shook his head, even though the guard couldn’t see him. “I-I’m not sure…”

The guard was silent for a moment. “That’s fine, Shuichi. We’ll find them, okay? Just make sure to get back to the office as soon as you can. It’s dangerous.”

Shuichi nodded absently, his eyes trailing around his surroundings.

The Hope’s Peak Academy courtyard was completely empty at night, not a single student in sight. It was kind of pretty, in a way. Shuichi liked the tall street lamps and fountains that were sparkling with water, even as the moon shone down on them.

“Alright Shuichi, we’re about to dispatch back-up, okay? We’re going to have to turn off the walkie now. You’re close to the building, right?”

Shuichi frowned, unsure. The building was only a couple meters away, he could probably make it in five minutes if he ran.

“I-I don’t know…Miss Yui said to s-stay on the phone…” he said, his voice small and weak.

He could hear the guard sigh into the phone. “You’ll be fine. Just don’t linger around the courtyard, okay? It’s pretty late.”

Before Shuichi could protest any further, the walkie beeped three times and the little light flicked off.

Feeling more alone than he had ever felt, Shuichi forced himself to keep walking, clutching the walkie to his chest defensively. It wasn’t like he’s never walked somewhere alone before, but he felt a lot of pressure…Miss Yui gave him a mission. He wanted to make her proud, to make his uncle proud. He wanted to prove that he could be a real detective too.

He only walked a few feet before his eyes caught sight of something strange.

In the center of the courtyard, aside from the main path, was a large statue. It depicted a man wearing a large tailcoat, his grey skin smooth and devoid of any scratches.

But that wasn’t what was so strange. Shuichi noticed that around the base of the statue, there was a bright light. Almost like when he left the door to his bedroom open, and only a tiny sliver of brightness seeped through.

But the light was coming from the bottom. From below the statue.

He stepped closer to the statue, peering at the base of it. It seemed there was some sort of gap,
between the statue and the ground. Shuichi put the walkie down on the ground by his side, before squirming his fingers into the gap, trying to feel for whatever was below the statue.

But it wouldn’t budge.

He frowned, sitting down so that his feet were against the base of the statue, his back to the rest of the courtyard. Shuichi had never seen something like this before. He felt like something important was behind here, but it was difficult to do alone.

He had never solved a mystery before, not on his own. Miss Yui said that he could help her earlier that day, but all he did was walk around the spooky building and hold her flashlight.

Shuichi wanted to solve a mystery for himself. With all his might, he began pushing against the base of the statue with his feet, kicking as hard as he could.

Still, it wouldn’t budge.

He sighed, about to get up and go back to the main office, when suddenly a voice spoke up behind him.

“Are you lost, little one?” the voice said sweetly.

Shuichi spun around, only to see a girl standing a few feet away. She looked about Miss Yui’s age, wearing the same uniform that Shuichi had seen on Yui’s two new friends. The girl took a step closer, brushing her bright-pink hair away from her eyes. It looked kind of like long strands of bubble-gum.

“My name is Junko,” the girl said, kneeling down to be on Shuichi’s level. “What's your name?”

Shuichi hesitated. His parents always told him to not talk to strangers, and he shouldn’t even be alone at night. But he was on a mission. And besides, this girl must go to the same school as Miss Yui’s friends. Maybe she could help him.

“S-Shuichi,” he mumbled in reply. “Shuichi Saihara.”

Junko sighed. “I’m here alone too. But you don’t have to be alone, if you don’t want to be.”

He looked over his shoulder, staring down the path that would lead to the office, before turning back to Junko. Shuichi peered at the girl, noticing how her cheeks were just a bit too red, and how her eyes were shining in a weird way.

“Are you sad that you’re alone?” Shuichi asked timidly.

Suddenly, the girl’s face turned blank. She blinked at him, tilting her head to the side. “What?”
Shuichi shrunk back a bit, toeing the gravel path. “Um…is that why you’re crying? Cause you’re alone?”

Junko let out a small laugh, wobbling on her feet a little. Her smile seemed shaky. “You really are a detective, huh?”

Shuichi felt something strange settle in his stomach. Junko reached out her hand suddenly and grabbed his wrist. He looked at her hand strangely, unsure what to do. Did he say something wrong? Was she upset?

“Well, you could spend some time with me if you’d like,” Junko offered, smiling even though it didn’t match the rest of her face.

Shuichi tried to take a step back, but her hand squeezed tighter. “I r-really should go…I have to help m-my friend…”

Junko pouted. “Aw, c’mon. I have something much more fun we could do instead!”

Shuichi tried to distance himself a bit more, but the girl was leaning closer. “I n-need to go…”

“Hey hey, don’t you want to help your new friend?”

Shuichi could feel something was wrong. He took a step back, but before he could, Junko’s nails dug into his arm, holding him in place.

“Where are you going, Shuichi?” Junko said. Her red eyes stared at him, making him feel even smaller than he already was.

“I need to get to the main office…” he mumbled quickly, his breaths coming in quick and short.

Junko gripped his wrist tighter, tugging him forward. She had a smile on her face, but Shuichi didn’t think she looked happy.

“Trying to leave so soon? If you keep acting like this, I might think you hate me. You wouldn’t want that, would you, Shuichi?” Junko said with a giggle.

Shuichi blinked away panicked tears, still trying to wrench his little wrist free from the girl’s grasp. Her long nails were leaving dents in his pale skin. “H-hurts…”

Suddenly, Junko swung his arm around until she could yank him to stand right in front of her. She smiled serenely, delicately placing her free hand on his cheek. She wiped away a tear from his face.

“Don’t cry. We’re going to have lots of fun, okay? So, be a good boy, and listen to me okay?”

Shuichi wanted her to let go of him. He wanted to go home. He was scared. He just wanted to go back to Miss Yui. He wanted to run.

With all the effort he could muster, Shuichi turned his face and bit Junko’s hand, clamping his teeth down as hard as he could.

Junko let out a small yelp, yanking her injured hand back. She gritted her teeth and sneered at him as blood trickled down her fingers.

Seeing his opening, Shuichi began to run. His heartbeat pounded in his ears. He could taste blood in his mouth. He only made it a few meters before he heard the sound of footsteps pounding behind him.
“That wasn’t very nice, Shuichi,” Junko called out, chasing him with a scary look in her eyes. Shuichi was crying now, he couldn’t breathe. He was so scared. His walkie talkie was still by the statue, but he was only a few buildings away from the main office. He had to get there. It was his only chance left.

But his little legs could only run so fast.

Junko caught up to him quickly, slamming her foot into his back.

He stumbled to the ground, scraping his hands and knees on the pavement as he spiraled on the floor. He must have screamed, but all he could hear was Junko laughing.

Shuichi tried scrambling to his feet, but before he could, the girl swung her foot back and kicked him in the stomach. He coughed out onto the floor, the air knocked out of him in an instant. He must have bit down on his tongue somehow because the warmth of blood filled his mouth. Gravel pressed into the side of his face, little daggers jabbing his skin.

“S-stop…” he begged, tears blurring his vision.


The mean girl brought her foot back one more time, swinging it forward, and then the world went dark.

+= MUKURO IKUSABA +=

The tapping sound the students had heard earlier was all but gone now. Passed over their heads, leaving them in a chilling silence.

It had only been about a dozen minutes since Junko left, but the tension in the room was strung as thin as a wire. Mukuro found herself squinting through the darkness, trying to read the faces of everyone in the circle. Her left hand was squeezed tightly around the pager, rhythmically tapping on the button in a repeated message. She just hoped she was sending out the right one.

She felt Makoto squeeze her hand, silent encouragement. Through the dark of the room, she could only somewhat make out the shape of his eyes, their bright green colour lost in the darkness.

“Has she responded at all?” Makoto asked, keeping his voice low.

Mukuro shook her head, but quickly realized he couldn’t see her face. “Nothing so far.”

Makoto hummed. “Are you going to keep sending out the same message?”

After letting Makoto and Kyouko know what she was doing, and the plan she had come up with, they all agreed that settling on one concise message was the best idea for getting help quickly.


It was simple, straight to the point. Though Mukuro didn’t know the exact location of the courtroom, she did know that Junko had built it underground. The word ‘help’ made sure to let Sayaka know it was urgent, and ‘trapped’ made it clear they weren’t there of their own volition.
Mukuro sighed, her attention spread thin as she juggled remembering the Morse translation with surveying what she could of the room. “No reason to change it now.”

Makoto squeezed her right hand once more. She could feel him smiling at her, and she tried to not let it get to her head.

“You’re doing great. We’re going to get out of this together, I promise,” he said, still with that smile in his voice.

He wouldn’t be smiling for long. Not when he learned of what she had done.

The guilt wrapped around her heart, overpowering even the fear that still flowed through her veins.

What have I done.

Suddenly, the lights flickered back to life. The students blinked at each other, struggling to adjust back to the harsh, bright light of the room. Everyone was still standing at their podiums, no one straying from their positions when the lights went off.

As far as Mukuro could see, nothing was out of place. Quickly, Mukuro tucked the pager back under her shirt. As much as she would like to keep sending out the message, it would all be for nothing if Junko managed to get her hands on it.

When the monitor turned back on, everyone in the room held their breath.

Junko reappeared on the screen, slightly more dishevelled than before. Her perfectly immaculate hair was a wind-blown mess, her chest rising and falling with heavy breaths. As if she had just done some major exercise. Mukuro’s eyes scanned the screen searching for any more clues, but everything seemed locked away behind Junko’s tight-lipped smile.

“Sorry for the delay, everyone,” Junko explained quickly, seemingly distracted. “Just had to take care of a few things…I hope the power outage didn’t spook you too badly? But…lets be honest, it totally did, didn’t it? Damn I wish I could have seen that, I mean, how priceless would it have been to—”

“Why did you turn the power off?” Kyouko asked suddenly, bringing Junko’s elated rambling to an end.

Junko clicked her tongue. “Pushy, pushy.”

Kyouko didn’t waver. “You left suddenly with no explanation and turned all the power off. Were you hiding us from someone?”

Mukuro turned to her friend, watching her in surprise. Even in such a tense situation, Kyouko never broke her focus. While Mukuro was too busy panicking over the thought of her life on the line, Kyouko was playing Junko’s game, and playing it well. Kyouko was trying to get everyone out of here.

And Mukuro? Mukuro was a coward.

“Good for you! Solving mysteries like a good little detective! Do you want a fucking medal or something?” Junko said, clapping her hands together in a bout of mocking applause.

“Does that mean people really are looking for us?” Chiaki asked, her face pulled into pensive thought. “If you went out of your way to hide us…”
“From the looks of your left hand, it seems people have already found you,” Nagito mumbled with a tilt of a smirk.

A bite mark? Mukuro was surprised she hadn’t noticed it earlier…but there it was. A deep red semi-circle on the side of Junko’s hand, just slightly smaller than an adult-sized mouth would make.

Junko only snorted, bringing her hand closer to the camera. “Oh, this little thing? You should see the other guy.”

She then raised her fists in a little playful fighting gesture, pretending to throw mock punches at the camera. Though her sister was a great actress, Mukuro could read her like an open book. Junko was trying to cover up what really happened and didn’t want them to see that mark just yet—or at all for that matter.

“Where did you get that mark from?” Kyouko asked, not wasting anytime and getting straight to the point. “It’s small, did a child make it? Where is the child now—"

Junko rolled her eyes, groaning. “Ugh, I’m starting to get bored again, so instead of answering your stupid questions we’re gonna move on, okay?”

The room went silent, mulling over the implications Junko’s interruption left. A child…Junko was with a child. Did she kill them? Who are they? Why were they here?

Mukuro pushed those thoughts away, focusing on the challenge ahead.

Unless there was some sort of miracle in the next few minutes, Mukuro would be forced to face her mistakes. Either she lives…or someone else dies. Those are the only outcomes.

“You’ve all submitted your votes, so it’s time to read the results!” Junko said, reassuming her elated persona.

Mukuro could feel everyone’s eyes pressing on her, nearing closer and closer. She gripped the edge of the podium, trying to steady herself.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Makoto whispered from beside her.

Mukuro couldn’t meet his eyes.

“Alright…We’re going to go through each person, and I will read out how many votes they won!”

Mukuro wasn’t sure if win was the right word, and from the looks of everyone else in the room, they agreed. The fear on their expressions, the nervousness in their eyes, it only spoke of their distrust. They looked at each other with the kind of apprehension that made Mukuro wonder if they were afraid to be exposed, or afraid that someone else had just condemned them.

Mukuro felt both.

“First participant…Aiko Umesawa,” Junko announced, reading from a paper off-screen.

Everyone’s eyes turned to the girl in the yellow hoodie.

Ah. So that’s her name. Mukuro thought to herself, choking down a bubble of nervous laughter. Now wasn’t the time for stupid thoughts.

Aiko fiddled with the ends of her hoodie, ducking her head down.
“One vote. You are safe.”

Aiko visibly deflated, sighing a deep sigh of relief. This not only meant Aiko was safe, but it also meant Karen followed the rules. Without dwelling on results too long, Junko moved on to the next participant. It seemed she was following the order they were standing in, meaning Karen’s results would be last to be read.

“Next participant. Soshun Murasame.”

The student council president kept his face turned down, his jaw locked. He was trying to seem brave but was just as frightened as the rest of them.

Junko made a tch sound. “One vote. You are safe.”

He quickly threw a glance at Aiko, mouthing the words thank you. If she hadn’t voted, or voted for Mukuro, the room would have learned in an instant. She followed the plan. Aiko blushed at Soshun’s kind gaze, and Mukuro turned her eyes away, feeling like she was intruding on something.

“Next participant. Nagito Komaeda.”

A sly smile spread across Junko’s face. Mukuro’s heart dropped.

Nagito visibly tensed at the sound of his own name, his casual stance seeming forced now that he was trying to reign in whatever emotions he was battling. For as much as the lucky student tried to seem unafflicted and smarter than the rest of the room, he really couldn’t predict Junko either. Or his classmates for that matter.

Mukuro almost felt pity for him. But then again, it could just be the guilt talking.

If someone didn’t betray Mukuro like she predicted…Nagito’s blood would be on her hands.

She could only hope Junko would just keep her mouth shut. She knew. Her sister knew, and she was taunting her with it. When Junko read out the results, Mukuro couldn’t help but feel she was staring directly at her.

“Two votes.”

Everyone in the room turned pale. Especially Nagito. Mukuro kept her head down, silently cursing herself for being such a coward.

“Ah. I see.” The white-haired student said with a dark sort of chuckle. “I have to say…I kind of expected this…”

He wasn’t looking directly at Mukuro, but she could feel the disappointment in his gaze as he looked over the circle, lingering on her just a little too long.

“Someone betrayed the plan?!” Hajime shouted, clearly distressed.

“But…we all agreed…” Karen mumbled, adjusting then re-adjusting her glasses in a horribly nervous gesture.

“Aw, isn’t that just adorable. How are you all feeling? Do you feel that despair?” Junko asked with a manic giggle. “What happened to that precious hope-and-friendship garbage you were spewing before? Welcome to the real world kiddos!”

Mukuro couldn’t swallow the guilt in her throat. But she had to do this. She had to. If someone voted
for her…she would be dead. She would never be able to stop Junko. They would understand, wouldn’t they? They had to understand.

“I’m…I’m so sorry, Nagito,” Soshun said, looking over at the white-haired boy.

For a moment, Mukuro was confused. But then she realized. If everyone had stuck with the plan, giving one vote each, then it would have been Soshun’s responsibility to vote for Nagito. He was blaming himself for this.

“You followed the plan, Soshun. It wasn’t your fault,” Kyouko reasoned, her voice lined with an odd tilt that made Mukuro wonder if she had already figured it out.

“Let’s move on, shall we? After all…who says Nagito is the only one with two votes. Or three. Or four. Or ten! Isn’t this so much fun?”

“You can’t be serious…you can’t just kill Nagito! This is illegal,” Chiaki said firmly, and Mukuro only shrunk back further.

Junko laughed whole-heartedly, throwing her head back. “Holy shit, I didn’t think you people could get any more pathetic. Have you forgotten who you’re in that room with? I’m the least of your worries. Besides, It’s not my fault some of you didn’t want to play nice.”

Makoto clenched his fists, clearly catching the little insult to Mukuro that Junko threw in. “You’re sick! Nagito wouldn’t be in danger if you didn’t set up this stupid game in the first place! None of us would be!”

Mukuro winced, the guilt like a vice around her heart. “Makoto, please.”


Even as Junko continued to read out names, Makoto continued to whisper to Mukuro, the two of them locked in their own private argument.

“No, we can still stop this,” he insisted, turning to look at her. “We have to do something. We can get Nagito out, or maybe keep the one who betrayed us away or—”

“One vote. You are safe.”

“Makoto please stop,” Mukuro cut in, a little harsher than she intended. Tears were falling down her cheeks.

“Next participant. Hajime Hinata.”

Makoto’s anger drained in a second. His eyes softened, looking over at his girlfriend with a want to understand that Mukuro had seen in his eyes so many times before. He reached out for her hands, but Mukuro pulled away.

“One vote. You are safe.”

Makoto’s expression wavered. “Mukuro…what happened? You’re not acting like yourself…”

Mukuro flinched back, her fingers digging into her palms. “I’m…I’m so sorry…”

“Next participant. Kyouko Kirigiri.”

Makoto let out a small huff of a laugh, one that sounded more like a gasp or a wheeze than anything.
“Sorry? Why would you…you don’t have to be sorry, because you didn’t do anything wrong.”

Mukuro kept her lips pressed together.

He reached out again, but she stepped back further. She was leaning against the side of her podium now. If she tilted back a bit, she would fall right over the edge.

“I…I was so afraid, Makoto…I’m so sorry,” she choked out, tears running down faster.

“One vote. You are safe.”

“No…You didn’t do anything wrong, right?” Makoto pleaded, his eyes filling with tears. “Mukuro…please tell me you didn’t…”

Her silence was damning enough.

“Next Participant. Makoto Naegi.”

Makoto ran a shaky hand through his hair, his breaths coming out short and erratic. The rest of the room was too caught up with Junko’s announcing to notice the whirlwind that had kicked up in their corner of the room.

“No…No, just…how could you? We were going to follow the plan. We were all going to get out together,” Makoto said, and Mukuro could hear the break in his voice. She had broken his trust, and his heart.

“Makoto, I thought…I was so afraid…t-they were gonna…they all wanted to kill me, and I…”

Mukuro managed to get out between sobs, fruitlessly wiping at her eyes. The tears wouldn’t stop.

“One vote. You are safe.”

“I had to vote for him. B-but…what do I do? I don’t want anyone else to die…I was just…so afraid,” she mumbled before the sobs took hold of her throat, gripping her tighter than ever.

Makoto stepped down from his podium, rushing over to Mukuro. In an instant, he wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight.

“I’m so sorry…” she mumbled again, hugging him back.

Makoto pulled away slowly, looking into her eyes. He seemed so conflicted, holding her at a distance he wouldn’t normally keep from her. “Its…It’s going to be okay. We’ll figure something out.”

“Next participant. Mukuro Ikusaba.”

Even as her name was called, Mukuro could only focus on Makoto. She dropped her arms away from him, giving him room to step back to his own podium. He took a deep breath, the glisten of tears evident in his own eyes.

“We’ll figure this out…maybe we can take Nagito somewhere where Junko can’t harm him, I mean, you’re a lot faster than her,” Makoto suggested, still trying to find the positive in a situation where Mukuro utterly betrayed him.

She shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut. “Makoto, she will never stop. She won’t let him get away like that—”
“Two votes.”

Mukuro froze.

Junko began laughing, revelling in the sheer shock on her sister’s face.

“How?” Makoto mumbled, as pale as Mukuro. “Someone…someone else betrayed the plan.”

Two votes. I was right. I was right. Mukuro thought to herself, those three words repeating in her head like a mantra. She didn’t want to look at the rest of the room.

“Well, can you all really act so surprised? My dear sister has had quite the target on her back this whole time, did you really think everyone would be so forgiving?” Junko drawled, but Mukuro could hear the tightness in her voice.

Mukuro knew someone was going to vote for her. She planned for this. She didn’t want it to be real, but hearing Junko announce it so plainly made it so. Someone had betrayed her. Someone had tried to kill her. Mukuro couldn’t help but feel this was some sort of punishment. For all she had done, for everything she had hurt in this world, she would be hurt by one of the people she cared about the most. Even if this wouldn’t kill her, she felt a small part of her heart die anyway.

“Two betrayers…How could you people do this? We would have made it out just fine…” Aiko said.

Chiaki tilted her head. “But…doesn’t that mean both of them are safe? They tied. No one has to die. This is a good thing,” the pink-haired student pitched in. “You guys don’t need to be so upset.”

Junko laughed once more. “Um, did you forget the point of this? It doesn’t matter that they’re safe now, it still means you have people unwilling to cooperate in your group.”

Mukuro’s stomach was doing flips. She couldn’t breathe. Because…if Mukuro had two votes, there was only one person left who could have voted for her.

“How about we clear some things up?” Junko interjected. “Next participant! Yasuke Matsuda.”

Mukuro could feel Makoto holding his breath. It was as if he was still hoping, deep down, that Mukuro was lying. That she really didn’t break their trust.

“Zero votes. You are safe.”

Yasuke didn’t seem surprised. Neither did most of the circle, however that didn’t mean they were all content with the soldier at this moment.

“So it really was Mukuro who voted for me, huh?” Nagito mumbled, but it seemed less of an observation and more of something he simply needed to put out into the air.

Mukuro couldn’t breathe. All she could focus on was Yasuke, standing oh-so-innocently beside her. How could she have not seen this coming?

“If she didn’t, she would have died. Can you blame her for being paranoid? You’ve all been targeting her this entire night.” Hajime snapped.

There were a couple of nods of agreement from the rest of the group. The rest looked away shamefully, most notably the student council members.

“But…” Chiaki started, “If Mukuro voted for Nagito, then who voted for her?”
Makoto opened his mouth to say something else, but he stopped suddenly as the realization dawned on him.

Kyouko kept her eyes turned away, unwilling to voice her discovery. The detective had most likely figured out who voted for Mukuro a long time ago, but for Mukuro’s sake, she kept her mouth shut. Makoto was not as willing.

“Mukuro...?” he asked, but she had her back to him.

Junko cut in before she could reply. “And, finally, our last participant, Karen Kisaragi.”

Mukuro faced the man she had come to love as a brother.

“Yasuke...why?” she breathed out.

Yasuke kept his head tilted down.

“Zero votes. You are safe.” Junko announced. It sounded more like a death sentence than anything she had ever said.

“Yasuke, answer me, please. Why did you vote for me?” Mukuro begged.

Everyone waited in silence, watching Yasuke with cautious eyes. Even Junko had taken on a blank expression, watching the two people she knew as family play her little games.

“Wait, so...Mukuro voted for Nagito, and...Yasuke voted for Mukuro? I thought they were working together?” Aiko mumbled, half to herself.

“So did she,” Karen supplied.

Mukuro gritted her teeth. “Shut up. Shut up, all of you.”

The room obeyed. Makoto stepped down from his podium, joining Mukuro’s side. She could feel him pulling on her arm, but she ignored him.

“Yasuke...” she whispered, and finally, Yasuke responded.

He began to laugh.

Mukuro staggered back, relying on Makoto to hold her steady as they moved further away from him. No no no.

Yasuke raised his head, his eyes dark and swirling. “Do you feel it, Mukuro? I thought I was giving you a gift. You should be grateful.”

Mukuro wanted to throw up. He was never cured. Why would she ever believe he could fix himself so quickly? She was so stupid, just wishing she could have her brother back that she never wanted to open her eyes to what was really there.

“Despair...” she heard Makoto whisper from behind her, his protective grip on her arm tightening.

Yasuke let out another dark chuckle, stepping down from his podium. “How does it feel, Mukuro? Come on, why don’t you tell me? How does it feel to have someone back only to watch them slip right through your fingers all over again?”

“You can fight this, Yasuke. Don’t do this,” Mukuro said, her voice shaky.
“Fight this? Now, why would I do that?” he laughed, taking steps back, further away from Mukuro.

For a moment, she didn’t understand why he would be moving away. But then she realized he wasn’t moving away. He was moving closer.

Everyone was stepping down from their podiums, distancing themselves from Yasuke. Someone didn’t move fast enough. And Mukuro? Mukuro could only watch, numb to it all.

In an instant, Yasuke had pulled Aiko to him, spinning her around so that the frightened girl was facing the rest of the group. The girl was thrashing, screaming, a few other students tried running towards her. They all stopped when Yasuke pulled out a weapon from his waistband. A weapon Mukuro had been to stupid to see before. To stupid to feel stolen from her.

In his hands, Yasuke carried Mukuro’s glass shard.

“Stop! Please! Let me go, you bastard! Stop! Help m—” Aiko’s shrieks of protest were quieted as soon as Yasuke pressed the shard against Aiko’s neck.

“Now now, let’s all calm down, okay?” Yasuke grinned, a manic look on his face.

Mukuro couldn’t move. She glanced over to the monitor, only to see Junko watching them with a blank expression. Mukuro locked eyes with her sister, seeing the same numbness in them that she felt coursing through her bones. Mukuro should be used to this by now. Death, violence, and betrayal. She let all this happiness get to her head. This was the real world, her world.

But she didn’t want it to be her world. Not anymore.

“Yasuke…let the girl go. You…you don’t have to do this,” Mukuro spoke through her tears.

He sneered at her, the shard wavering dangerously close to Aiko’s skin. “You don’t see it, do you? She has a place for us, Mukuro. You left—I left—but we can go back.”

Mukuro tried desperately not to appear shaken. “We can’t. She will kill us. This pain you’re making me feel? She won’t stop until it’s the only thing we ever feel.”

Junko was uncharacteristically quiet. The pain was evident on her face, but so was her gentle smile. She really did love them both. Junko loved her sister, and she loved Yasuke with all her heart. That’s why Mukuro was so sure she couldn’t go back.

“Yasuke…s-she doesn’t love you the way you want. She can’t. Please, just listen.”

Junko would never let them go. After all, she never let him go.

Yasuke shook his head, thrashing Aiko around a bit as he did. “No. No, she loves me. She’s always loved me! Don’t say another fucking word!”

He pulled Aiko closer, pressing the shard against her skin. A small trickle of blood dripped across the clear glass, as Aiko desperately tried to pull back. Everyone in the room gasped at once, watching in horror as Yasuke became more and more erratic.

Mukuro tried to take a step forward, but Makoto held her back. She turned to look at him, confusion in her eyes.

“I have to stop him…I’m the only one who can fight him off,” she insisted, her gaze watery.

Makoto gently shook his head, keeping his voice a low whisper. “Mukuro…if you move, he will kill
She whipped her head back to Yasuke, watching his eyes dart between the students, still holding the whimpering Aiko hostage. Mukuro knew he was right. Yasuke wouldn’t hesitate to kill Aiko, just to make sure Mukuro felt the sickest feeling of despair possible.

There was only one way she could solve this.

“Junko,” Mukuro started, turning towards the screen. Her sister sat up a bit straighter. “Can you be honest with us? Just this once?”

To the rest of the room, it must seem like a stupid request. Why would their captor help them? Why would Junko even open her mouth. They’ve watched first-hand Junko’s indifference to their suffering, so why now would Junko say anything to Mukuro?

Mukuro knew the answer.

Junko’s lips curled like rotting bark, dry and cracked across her face. “When have I ever lied to you, dear sister?”

Junko wouldn’t lie to them, because she knew that sometimes, the truth hurts far worse than any lie ever could.

And Junko wanted to see them hurt

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Hope you enjoyed this chapter, sorry it's been a while. With exams, graduation, and prom all piling up, i found it hard to catch up. But it's here! I honestly wanted to make this chapter longer, but I decided to cut it short for now, Lol.

Next chapter...next chapter will be a painful one. Oh boy. ohhhh boy.

Some notes...
+ Shuichi my bby I'm so sorry
+ I was getting really tired of writing "the girl in the yellow hoodie" so yay, Mukuro finally learns Aiko's name!!!!
+ Kyouko is on top of this shit 24/7, my detective girl don't mess around
+ I wrote this while listening to Bare: A Pop Opera, and I highly reccomend it.

Here's a link to one of the songs: https://youtu.be/tL8ZA5nduY0


See you next time, where I continue writing this hetero tragedy.
Mukuro made a promise to herself when she left that apartment. When she ran out those doors, holding tight to the little belongings she had, Mukuro promised that she’d stop her sister.

She made the same promise, over and over, like a broken record. One promise. A thousand times.

Junko leaned closer into the camera, her head propped up by her folded hands. She was obviously eager to lead Mukuro into whatever hell-hole she was about to dig herself. Excited, even. As she tilted her head, pink strands of hair spilled over her shoulder. Mukuro couldn’t help but think she looked younger with her hair down. More like the little sister she was supposed to be.

Less like the monster she really was.

“So, Mukuro.” Junko spits her name like a curse. “Are you going to just sit there blinking at me like an idiot, or are you gonna make an effort for that poor little hostage over there?”

Mukuro tried to cover the tremble in her hands, tucking them behind her back. It was the least she could do. After all, Aiko was watching her closely. The girl was terrified. And rightfully so, considering just how close that glass shard was wavering near the pale skin of her throat. Mukuro should have never let it out of her sight. She should have never let him out of her sight.

But that was her weakness. For a girl so heartless, so cold, Mukuro gave out her heart far too easily. She gave it to Junko. She gave it to Yasuke. Mukuro could only pray Makoto was different—no, she knew he was different. The short boy had a grasp on her arm, and it took Mukuro longer than she’d like to admit for the gesture to register as protective.

“What are you doing?” Makoto whispered, his voice full of concern.

Mukuro steadied herself, keeping her face forward. “Trust me,” she whispered back.

He hesitated just a moment too long. “I’ll try.” His hand gave her a reassuring squeeze before releasing to remain barely a hover.

Mukuro brought back her focus to more pressing matters. Far more pressing than the waning trust that was threaded between her and Makoto.

Dividing her attention from the manic Yasuke to her equally manic sister was challenging. Darting her eyes between them didn’t help, making her head spin. Now, add to that maintaining a conversation with Junko? Near impossible.

“Tick-tock Mukuro,” Junko cooed, “we don’t have all day.”
The trick here wasn’t to out-play Junko. No, Junko was far better at manipulation that Mukuro would ever be. Mukuro needed to step back let Junko spin her own web. Or knot her own noose. Whichever came first.

Mukuro steeled herself, making her first move. “If we get out of here, what will you do with us? What will you do with Yasuke?”

Junko blinked at the question. Even Yasuke seemed thrown off, his teeth gritted as if bracing himself. Mukuro could practically see the gears turning in Junko’s head, her eyes narrowing ever so slightly.

“As incredible and super-amazing as I am, I will still need people to help me plunge the world into despair! So obviously, you numbskulls would be by my side,” Junko cackled, the answer seemingly satisfying Yasuke for the moment.

No, that would not do. Mukuro needed to dig a bit deeper. Junko was holding back.

“By your side?” Mukuro echoed.

Junko rolled her eyes, sighing deeply. “Yes. By my side. Am I speaking a foreign language, or did you hit your head somewhere?”

“And after?”

Junko blinked at her. “After what?”

Mukuro clenched her fists. Junko was playing dumb. She knew exactly what Mukuro was talking about. But Junko wouldn’t admit it. Not alone.

Yasuke growled somewhere deep in his throat, yanking Aiko closer. “You’re wasting your time Mukuro. Just give in already! What do you want from this?!”

As he spoke, his arm flailed around wildly. Droplets of blood scattered across the room as he moved, giving everyone full view of the aggravated red on Aiko’s neck.

“You don’t see it, do you?” he said with a laugh, the coils of his madness tensing every muscle in his body. “You don’t see how pointless this all is. Junko loves you. She loves us. She is doing all of this for us.”

Mukuro struggled to remain standing. “Junko,” she started, turning her head away from Yasuke. She couldn’t say this with him in mind. She couldn’t look at him when she said these words. “After you’ve finished with the world, you will get bored. I know you.”

Junko leaned even closer, the flickering of her eyes as they scanned the screen almost robotic. “Of course you know me. You’re my older sister, after all. Why don’t you tell them? Tell them what happens when I get bored.”

She almost sounded…angry. It was jarring. Mukuro couldn’t remember the last time her sister showed anything close to anger. But to see the flare in her cheeks, the tight lock of her jaw. Junko was genuinely upset. Genuine. Mukuro didn’t think Junko could even be genuine anymore. She thought that part of her sister was locked away deep somewhere, forever sinking to the bottom of a deep black ocean.

Now, in this moment, Mukuro had to do the opposite. She swallowed down her anger, burying it deep in her heart. This was no place for it. Not now. Not for Junko.
Mukuro bit the inside of her cheek as she forced the words out. The rest of the room watched Mukuro as she spoke, everyone remaining hauntingly silent as they anticipated her words. Simply waiting.

“You want despair. And the only thing that could give you more despair than watching the world burn, is burning those you love down with it.”

Yasuke was already shaking his head before she could finish, fury rising in his expression.

“You will kill us. Because you love us,” Mukuro finished with tears in her eyes.

For a moment, Junko almost looked remorseful. And then the thin line of her mouth curved upwards. Into a smile.

When Mukuro looked around the room, she could see the confusion on their faces. The pity. Mukuro wanted none of it. They all felt so bad for the girl whose sister wanted nothing more than to stab a knife through her heart. They felt bad for the girl who had been raised side by side with a psychopath.

But they felt no sympathy for Yasuke. No one shed tears for the boy who fell in love with Junko, who came in from the outside and still grew attached to their captor and came out the other end a decent human being. They could never understand, and they would not. Not after he had been so broken beyond repair. But Mukuro couldn’t allow herself to think that way. There had to be hope.

Yasuke was crying. Mukuro didn’t need to stand any closer to see the glistening tear tracks on his face.

“She loves us,” he mumbled, eyes focused on some point over Mukuro’s shoulder.

She shook her head, as if shaking out the sound of Junko’s laughter from her ears.

This is what you wanted, isn’t it? Mukuro thought to herself. You wanted to give her the despair she craved. Are you happy now? Don’t you see how far gone she is?

The pressure was almost too much.

With one last wave of conviction, Mukuro raised her head.

“Yasuke. Give up. You can still get out of this. We can still get out of this,” she pleaded.

Mukuro held her breath as Yasuke’s hand slowly lowered, pulling the shard away from Aiko’s neck. Smartly, the smaller girl didn’t try to move just yet.

Yasuke looked from the monitor then back to Mukuro. “B-But…I love her…” he mumbled.

Mukuro nodded. “I do too. We have to let go.”

Yasuke’s breath caught in his throat. The tears ran down his cheek faster. For a moment, it looked like he was going to let the girl go. It looked like he was going to drop his make-shift weapon and come with Mukuro to this hopeful future she promised.

But then he gritted his teeth. He raised his arm back to Aiko’s throat. His eyes raised to Mukuro, and she saw something break in them.

“I can’t,” Yasuke breathed out.
Somewhere behind the ringing in her ears, Mukuro thought she heard Junko say something. But then Yasuke pulled his arm back to swing.

And then…

…a gun went off.

It was loud. And so final. Mukuro had heard gunshots before, a million times. Even from her own hands. Had it always sounded this way? It was death. It was power. It was smoke and gunfire and everything that Mukuro forced herself to find comfort in. Mukuro knew guns. She knew death.

Atleast, she thought she did.

But then the bullet hit its mark.

And Yasuke slumped to the ground, the life draining from him in an instant. Draining from the hole right between his eyes.

In some distant part of the back of her mind, Mukuro heard screaming. She thought that it might be hers, but her throat felt empty. Hollow. Just like the look in Yasuke’s eyes.

Mukuro waited for Yasuke to get up. She had seen death so many times. It never felt this close. It never felt this real. She waited. And waited.

“He…he’s…” Makoto mumbled, but even he couldn’t finish the sentence. Somewhere in the chaos of background noise, someone retched onto the floor.

Mukuro couldn’t think. Impulse was taking over, spinning through her brain. Everything was moving in slow motion. She looked towards the monitor. Surely Junko would pop out and say surprise! It was just a joke! And everything would be fine. She was waiting for everything to be fine.

What Mukuro didn’t expect to see was Junko, with a hand over her mouth to drown her laughter, fighting off hysterical tears.

Her sister was weeping. Mourning for the person she loved. Mukuro should be doing the same. But all she could feel was cold.

After Yasuke hit the ground, his grip on Aiko also slipped away. The small girl fell to her knees, breathing heavily. She ran her fingers along her throat, as if making sure she was still all intact. She was no doubt in shock at a bullet being fired so closely to her head. Her hands were trembling, tears rolling down her cheeks. How many tears would be shed in this room before they were allowed to leave? Aiko probably felt a rush of gratitude for her saviour. The saviour who saved her life by putting a bullet through Yasuke’s head.

A jolt ran through Mukuro at that moment. She didn’t even think of who fired. Everything felt so numb, it was like she had to drag her thoughts through molasses to see them clearly.

Mukuro spun around suddenly, bumping Makoto slightly in the process. She had to look. She had to see who fired. That was the only thing she was good at, right? Fighting. Killing. Mukuro had to protect who was left. Eliminate the threat. Protect who was left.

But what she saw didn’t make sense.

At the back of the room, Soshun stood with a pistol in his hand. Small enough to tuck into his waistband. The student council president, their quiet and unassuming leader, held the pistol like it
was an extension of himself. Like it belonged in his hands.

Mukuro didn’t notice it before. How did I not see the pistol sooner?

Another thought came up from behind her, wrapping icy, cold, arms around her throat. How did you not see the glass shard sooner? It whispered back, challenging her. Yasuke took it from you. When you wrapped him in a comforting hug, lost in your little land of make believe, he stole it. And now he’s dead.

Movement snapped Mukuro from her thoughts. In the corner of her eye, she saw Aiko stagger to her feet.

“S-Soshun…” Aiko mumbled, a tentative smile on her face. She looked at Soshun like he was a saint. And she should, Mukuro supposed. He saved her life. Saved her life by stealing Mukuro’s brother from her.

Soshun looked down on Aiko, still weighing the pistol in his hand thoughtfully.

Aiko took a step closer, reaching out for him. “You…you saved me, you saved m—”

The gun went off again.

Aiko fell to the ground, a bullet lodged between her eyes.

That second gunshot seemed to suck all the air from the room. No one screamed this time. The shock was too much. Too much. Too much.

Soshun was smiling. Laughing. “Did you see the look on her face?” he asked, gesturing with the pistol as he spoke. No one dared move. “She’s always had a little crush on me…how cute. That expression as I raised the gun on her…” he let out another dark chuckle. “Priceless.”

The fogginess of his eyes was a clear enough indicator for Mukuro.

Despair.

Soshun laughed as the tile below them became swallowed in red.

“Soshun…why…what did you—” Karen started to say, but then Soshun turned the gun towards her.

He took a step forward. Karen took a step back. Her face was pale, her eyes watering as she stared down the barrel of his gun.

“I wonder how it felt to be killed by the person she loved,” he said with another laugh. His finger slipped down to the trigger and rested there. “Would you like to find out?”

Karen shook her head lightly. “P-Please…please don’t…I don’t want to die…”

Soshun laughed again. He didn’t break his eyes away from Karen as a terrible, threatening smile formed on his face. “Maybe I’ll save you for last. Wouldn’t that be fun?”

The gears started turning in Mukuro’s head once more, adrenaline flowing through her veins like floodwater as her instinct kicked in. Soldier’s instinct. She followed the tracks of Soshun’s eyes, following the lines of his body as he shifted slightly to the left.

That opening gave Mukuro the split second she needed, making her move before he could realign his aim. She charged towards him right as he shifted the gun away from Karen, aiming to another side of
the room. Right at Chiaki.

“Who’s next?” Soshun asked, right before Mukuro tackled him.

As they tumbled to the ground, the gun went off once more, and someone screamed in the distance. Mukuro pushed the sound away, focusing on her hands gripping Soshun’s wrists. He sneered and bared his teeth as they thrashed together, but Mukuro had him pinned.

Her hands squeezed around his wrists, and then firmly jerked outwards. Soshun screamed as both of his wrists cracked in tandem, the gun slipping from his hands as his fingers convulsed with pain.

Pain. Mukuro wanted him to feel pain.

The shock was starting to wear off, the full brunt of her anger finally reaching her mind. This man—no, this boy. He killed Yasuke. He killed her brother. And he would pay. He would pay for his weakness, for being so easily swallowed by the despair Junko fed him.

Mukuro could taste the thrill of power on her tongue. It was something new, something sparking against the numbness she felt everywhere else.

“Let me go you bitch—” Soshun snapped right before Mukuro pulled a little harder on his wrists, wrenching another painful cry from his throat.

Someone was calling her name. Mukuro ignored them. She shifted so that both of Soshun’s wrists could be pinned with one hand, her free one moving to grip his throat. But she didn’t squeeze just yet. Mukuro sat there, her fingers curled around this monster’s neck. His eyes flashed with some semblance of terror.

Good. Mukuro thought. He deserved it. He deserved every evil thing that Mukuro would bring against him. Her head was rushing. It was raw power. It was revenge.

A nervous crack of a smile wormed its way onto the boy’s face. “Upset I killed him? That’s rich coming from a fucking murderer—” he managed to say before Mukuro pressed down a little harder, blocking his airway for a brief yet horrifying moment.

Someone shouted Mukuro’s name once more. She pushed it away, ignoring it, even though she knew exactly who was calling her.

“He was your sister’s boyfriend, wasn’t he?” Soshun wheezed out, stubbornly trying to pull as much of a reaction out of Mukuro as he could. “

Mukuro carefully released her grip around his throat. For a moment, Soshun looked almost relieved. But then Mukuro reeled back, punching him square in the face. Hard.

“F-Fuck—” Soshun said, right before making a horrible hacking sound, coughing out blood. Huh. Mukuro must’ve knocked out some teeth.

She felt the sick need to punch him again. To feel something. To feel the bones cracking beneath her fist. To feel the sting of contact against her skin. To punish those who deserved it. To punish the evil.

She wrapped her hand around his throat once more but didn’t squeeze just yet. Soshun watched her with a hazy yet spiteful expression. He was so far gone in his despair it was as if he wasn’t registering the danger he was in. Or maybe he was too far gone to care.

“Is…Is this fun for y-you?” Soshun asked haughtily, but the effect was somewhat dimmed by the
fact his missing teeth made his words warped and slurred.

No. Mukuro didn’t say. *It makes me feel something. And that’s enough reason to keep doing it.*

“That guy... he was your sister’s boyfriend, wasn’t he?” Soshun asked. His smirk widened as fury crossed over Mukuro’s face, pulling the reaction he wanted from her. “Don’t tell me you actually *cared* about him? How pathetic—”

Mukuro cut off Soshun’s rambling by tightening her fist around his throat. “*Shut up,*” she growled, numbly registering the tears dripping down her face.

Suddenly, Mukuro felt a hand grip her arm. Mukuro didn’t look. She didn’t turn away from Soshun, focusing on keeping just enough pressure to keep him down. Mukuro didn’t look at who touched her, because she knew who it was.

“Mukuro, don’t do this,” Makoto pleaded gently, his voice soft in contrast to Soshun’s vicious heaving.

Mukuro shrugged Makoto’s arm off her, gritting her teeth. She opened her mouth to say something, but before she could, a sob wrangled its way into her chest, her grip weakening for a moment.

With the little airflow he was able to grasp, Soshun spat blood at her. His eyes were slowly narrowing, flickering open and closed like a movie projector. His consciousness was waning.

“*W-what’s it like... to be betrayed by your family... o-over and over again, always too fucking s-stupid to see it coming?’*

Mukuro lifted his head of the ground before promptly slamming it into the concrete.

Soshun was silent.

For a moment, everyone was silent. Mukuro didn’t move, staring down at some point in the distance that didn’t exist. Slowly, her surroundings came back to her. She felt the eyes pressed against her back, felt the fear radiating off of everyone in the room.

When Mukuro released her hands from around Soshun’s throat, his head lolled limply to the side. Karen let out a choked back sob.

But Soshun remained silent.

Makoto watched her carefully as she stood up, his eyes on the ground. He opened his mouth before closing it once more, struggling to ask the question Mukuro knows he’s too afraid to ask.

“Is he—”

Mukuro wiped the blood from her face with he back of her hand. “No. Just unconscious.”

Makoto’s shoulders sagged with relief. Mukuro pretended not to see it. Instead, she walked over to the gun she had knocked from Soshun’s hands. She could feel the nervousness radiating in the room as she opened the chamber, emptying the bullets onto the ground.

“I doubt any of you know how to properly load a gun,” Mukuro said in some dark attempt at humour. It didn’t ease any tension. Mukuro tucked the effectively harmless weapon into her waistband.

No one said a word.
Mukuro felt sick. It was as if she was moving, but she wasn’t really there. Like her mind was still floating in some reality where none of this really happened. Where Yasuke was still alive.

It was at that point where she sank back down to her knees, burying her face in her hands. She wanted it to stop. She wanted it all to stop. She wanted them to stop watching her. Her hands were slick with blood and tears.

She barely felt Makoto’s arms wrap around her, until her whole body was trembling with heaving sobs. He was whispering something to her, no doubt some sort of reassurances, but she couldn't hear it. She couldn't hear anything.

It’s all so empty.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Sorry it's been so long, this summer's been wild with graduation and prom and college prep and all that. But I'm glad to be back! And uh...I told y'all this chapter was gonna be a tough one. So uh. Welcome to the pain train.
But oh boy the pain train ain't done yet.
Until next time!

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