A Demon’s Pursuit

by smilingcrescent

Summary

Ciel Phantomhive is just what Sebastian was looking for. He needs a master to form a contract with, and Ciel seems to be just what he needs...however, Ciel is having none of that. Especially not when Sebastian breaks into his dorm room.

Excerpt:

"Heeh. So Mr. Perfect can cook but not use a computer." The boy practically bounced with curiosity. Ciel took the chair next to Sebastian's.

"I saw pictures of it being used. And the other teachers seem to use them frequently."

Ciel gaped. And then grinned. "Where have you been for the last twenty years?"

"In hell," Sebastian said blandly. "Show me how to 'turn it on.'"
I. Late Night Intrusions (Teaser.)

Chapter Notes

This story takes place from second semester (September) 2013 in Japan.

**Warnings:** There will be **no** smut/lemons/porn in this story. None. You are warned. :) Keep on reading if you’d like to see suggestive, humorous and kinda sexy Sebastian.

This story is LIGHT romance. Actually, some of you may not think of it as romance as all (hence the pre-slash tag...). Sebastian is reeeeally possessive, can be sentimental and be suggestively teasing. It is his nature. But Ciel and Sebastian are NOT dating...the Demon's Pursuit is not to get Ciel into bed, but to get Ciel into a contract. I like to think of it as a kind of **suggestive SebaCiel undercurrent, as found in the manga.** You don’t have to squint to see something there, but it's a stretch to call it full out "romance."

Dedicated to Carrie, my beta, and Kuroshitsuji friend!

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“My, my, but what a small master you would be...”

Too surprised to do more than think half a dozen questions, Ciel merely stared in open-mouthed silence.

The figure crouched on the windowsill, bent over in something like a bow. The first thing Ciel noticed was the white of his eyes, which seemed silver in the moonlight. Something in the tilt of his head, or the thin half smile jolted an idea into his mind. *He’s the young man from Takeshita Doori. The one who seemed to be searching for something. He seemed wilder than before, and far too pleased with himself.*

“What the hell are you doing in my window? Get down from there and go away,” Ciel snapped. Never before was he so pleased to be in a private dormitory with no roommate to wake up.

“A bit young, but promising, I think. Most people would want to know if this was a dream…”

Ciel decided not to voice his doubts. If he’s dreaming up stalkers now, he figured he ought not to let the stranger know he doubted his existence.

“Let’s make a deal.” The intruder sprung down from the window and landed silently next to Ciel. He made no more noise than the soft swish of his clothing. “If you pay the dues, we can forge a contract. I will be your loyal servant for the rest of your days, and you will have nearly limitless power.”

“Rubbish. Are you barking mad?” Ciel scoffed. “You’ll get me expelled. This is a private school, and you’re not allowed in after hours. Or even in the day, unless you sign the guest register. How did you get in here without setting off the alarm, anyway? It goes off if someone so much as opens the window.”

“Alarm? I heard no one sound an alarm.” The intruder’s brow furrowed. It would be comical if Ciel thought he might be less serious.
“The alarm system. Get out before I set it off myself.” Ciel threw a plush rabbit at the intruder.

“Mr. Phantomhive? Who are you talking with? Is everything all right in there?” Kujirai’s timid voice was muffled through the door. Ciel was never happier that his room was closest to the hall-master’s room.

Ciel shuffled out of bed, pulling the headphones out of his phone as he made his way for the door. He glanced behind him to see whether the intruder would be visible from where he stood, but he saw no one there at all. He cracked the door open.

“Yes?”

The third year student was still in nondescript pajamas, blinking even more owlishly than Ciel. He looked discreetly through the frame, but didn’t try to force his way in.

“Is there a problem, Mr. Phantomhive?” he said slowly, leaning forward just a bit. He looked nervous, as though confronting the international student in his hall was the last thing he wanted to be doing at just after midnight.

“No, Mr. Kujirai. I was just listening to some music. I’ll turn it down.” Ciel fidgeted with his phone, as though he might be turning the volume off.

“Is the window open?” Kujirai pushed up his wire-frame glasses, looking more troubled. “Did you open your window?”

“No, ah, no, it’s not open,” Ciel said hurriedly. And sure enough, when he turned around to glance nervously at the place the intruder entered, it was closed.

Having seen that window open just moments before, the sight surprised even Ciel. Both students stared at the now-closed-window. An awkward silence stretched on before Kujirai cleared his throat.

“Of course you didn’t. You do know that an alarm will be set off if you open the window after 22:00, don’t you?” He kept his chin tucked in, making his eyes appear larger and more earnest.

“Yes, I know. Sorry for disturbing you.”

“Good night,” the student said, and walked slowly back to his dorm room.

Ciel turned back to the window, expecting to see the image of a ghost or a monster, but nothing changed, even with his senior gone.

He was alone in his room, left to wonder if anyone was there to begin with.

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Chapter End Notes

* Takeshita Doori is in Harajuku, Japan. Harajuku is known as a famous fashion district/center for youth, especially gothic and outgoing styles. Which is to say, it has affordable fashion (especially Takeshita Doori, despite being located in downtown Tokyo). Just going there is a cause to dress up. Certain famous individuals have been discovered/scouted there.
* Any questions on Japanese culture? Just ask. I probably just didn't realize it needed explaining. XD

Ohhh, and comment? Please? This is worth continuing, isn't it? :D

"....comment!" says the devil(ish Ciel.) "You know you want to!"
II. The Challenge

Chapter Summary

This story takes place (more or less...some creative wiggle room allowed) from:
Full Moon: 2013 September 19 (Thursday) to Full Moon: 2013 October 20th (Saturday)
in Japan, somewhere half an hour or more from Tokyo.

Chapter Two: The Challenge

(...a few hundred years earlier...)

(Sebastian)

I remember…

It was the turn of the century, when I last made a contract with a brute of a man. Towards the end, I
rather thought I should have been more selective.

I gave another blow to the side of my master's victim's ribs. Something cracked. He screamed, and
the dark, dank room filled with an acrid stench. It was disgusting.

My master, a stocky, middle-aged man, always asked for the same thing.

"Sear the terror of below into their hearts. Terrify them into telling you everything," he demanded.
"We will have the confession!"

Everything he wanted to hear, that is. And to think, he told the judge, 'It is my duty to find the truth.'
A century ago, he would have made a wonderful witch hunter.

Ah, but the blood sprayed so. I shook my head and got the job done. I reminded myself of one
simple truth. All contracts must end. After cultivating the soul, my patience will be rewarded…

So I smiled, and my dull master's victim continued to scream.

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(The Present: ...a day earlier.)

After that substandard contract, I stayed away from humans, didn’t listen to their calling for some
time. Or perhaps I was away for a great deal of time. The company I kept didn’t bother keeping
updated with human doings.

“…are you even awake?” A low, unruffled voice interrupted my relaxation time.
“You’re getting positively lazy, even for an old one.”

I frowned, opening my eyes a crack. “Begging your pardon, sir. But what does it matter if one such
as I is engaged or not?”

“Hmm,” the other one said. He managed to make the single syllable into a disapproving litany. “I’m
willing to wager you’ve been out of commission for a time. Your last master was during the turn of
the century, London, wasn’t it? And you’ve waited to be summoned since then…”

"I prefer not to dine on the first blundering fool I come across." I turned away. "I find my preferences
are shared by everyone except for the very young...or the very greedy."

“Hmm.” Again. Long fingers tapped absently on a lean arm. “I’m bored, you know. And I’m sure
there’s some rule, or some custom of our aesthetics that, eh, recommend we venture out into the
world once a century at least. To tempt. To lead astray delicious morsels."

With one long considering look, I marveled at the state of his cloven hooves. It made my lips twitch
into an unkind smile. That kind of form is so expected...so cliché.

“And what of it?” Irritation slipped into my voice. It’s not often someone deigns speak to me like
that.

“A challenge.” Ah. Is that a horn poking out of his hair? “A game, if you will…” At my murderous
look, he appeared to hurry towards me. Doubtless, he’d have preferred to have a staring contest for a
few years to ‘pique my interest.’

“Go up to the world again. Do as the great Old Ones did, and explore the earth and its young...
innocent...souls. Find new lands and exploit the ones living there.”

I uttered a bored mmm. However, in reality, my curiosity was nearly tangible. How would That One
phrase it? “That hardly seems a challenge…” I sneered.

“Oh, but I’m not finished.” He smirked. I caught a red glint in his eye. “You have to do it before the
moon has finished her cycle. You must find a soul who fits your aesthetics...” His smile widened.
“Then, you win. In such an instance...you will earn one small favor from myself. The contract in
itself is a reward, after all.”

I draw myself up to my full height, and lean over him. “And should such a soul fail to present
itself...?”

“If you can’t find someone, then you lose.” His smile is wicked. “And I will have you as a slave for
one moon.”

It was an interesting prospect. To be sure, demons of old did indeed wander the earth searching for
souls. But in recent times, a demon must be summoned—promised a contract and bound to flesh and
blood chains. Without these precautions, our form and abilities are...unstable. Sometimes too much
for the humans surrounding us.

“New lands...” I murmured. “Anyplace I’ve never been should suffice.”

He nods slowly, eyes gleaming like fire. “Do you accept my challenge?”

I smiled, showing pointed teeth and a red, red tongue.

The stench of the World was enough to knock the breath out of even the most experienced demon.
But the old smell of horse, men and smoke had been replaced by the unpleasant smell of men by the
millions, unfamiliar smog and dust. What used to be muddy streets and cobblestone was a vast
stretch of poured stone and what appeared to be tar. Trees were thin, pitiable things lining these new
streets, and flowers were only growing from pots. The largest city in Japan was a conglomerate of
artifice and people.
My feet touched the ground amidst the confusion of a hundred people trying to cross the painted white lines on the road.

“Kiotsukero!” A young delinquent shouted in a derisive manner. He gestured for me to move forward.

I followed the herd to one side of the street, thinking as I walked. Metal carriages started up as soon as a light changed, expertly avoiding a few straggling humans.

I looked back to see a flashing light. “Ah,” I said to myself, “Electricity.”

It was a sight different from the electric grids they’d managed before. Before, only the rich had the benefit of electrical lights, and those were liable to go out any minute.

The speed of the vehicles surprised me—what other little tricks had the humans developed since the time of textile mills? The dangerous machines I remember from before, not to mention those cars my master longed after were hulking things, jerky and slow. More prominent in my memory were the clothing mills that caught girl’s hair and fingers in their inner workings, biting off hands and pulling off scalps. Such had been the fate of the low-born in those time. Why weren't these nasty little lowlifes comfortably out of sight in the present?

More phantom than physical at that time, I changed the image of my clothes as I walked, imitating the dubious fashion of a young man who returned my eye. The gabble of the masses was still strange in my ear; so very different from the traveling Japanese I met in the distant past. I puzzled over the unfamiliar sounds, and gazed at the wonders pressed to ears, and the gaudy colors the human’s clutched in the shapes of bags.

Thoroughly overwhelmed, I decided to follow less crowded streets and walk a while. I took to a rooftop to rest after a while, listening and watching. My Japanese was antiquated, and I only understood a third of what was going on around me. Finally, I lurched to my feet.

I peered into the crowd. I could make out the text on a girl’s paper bag—a cream thing with elegant copperplate. It read, ‘Fashionable Elegance for Ladies.’ A strange turn of phrase, so I followed her on a whim, taking care to put distance between us.

“Welcome!” Criers called from roadside shops. “Welcome!” Again and again, they took on a whiny tone, obviously trying to capture the attention of passersby. When I met one of the shop attendant’s gaze, she hastily looked away, blushing.

In hesitant, broken English, she called, “For your girlfriend?”

*Ah, so she has enough desperation in her to see me.* The familiar pang of hunger rose in me at that thought and I found myself stepping closer to the girl.

I wondered if I had the look of this century's well-to-do, wondered if she would give me license to act above her station. Two steps took me to her, and I reached out to grab her chin. Her lip trembled and she stood stalk still as I looked.

But all hunger lay forgotten when I saw those orbs, frightened and delighted at once. She had never tasted true agony or despair, and her soul would be as bland to me as cotton. All sweetness and only vain spice in this one. Her worst fault was jealousy and greed, hidden behind a painted face and glittering nails.

“I’m afraid not, miss.” And I let her go to continue the search.
I wandered down the street. Few people returned my gaze in this semi-corporal form. Humans could ignore the most blatant display of magic when it suited them—they would not see a monster in their midst if they did not wish to.

Bored, I allowed my thoughts to wander. *Is there any left among the sheep interesting enough to catch my attention? Perhaps I need to wait for nightfall…* But this inattention was precisely how I let a tall human stumble into me.

“Sorry, sorry!” The tall man apologized as he brushed himself off. His refined English accent and tall stature marked him no more Japanese than I appeared.

“Don't be absurd,” I snorted. “You seem to have come the worst.”

Indeed, his elbow and knee seemed to be skinned, all white around the edges and just beginning to seep blood among the small black bits of tar and threads from his suit. He must have been walking very quickly indeed for such a badly skinned knee.

I gave him a level smile, wondering if he had the right ingredients to him to make a feast.

“Oh,” he muttered. My hunger might have been written in my eyes, or on the play of my lips, because he took a step back. “Well. Are you lost?” He scrambled for words to distract us both.

“Just...exploring.” I smiled.

“Ah, yes, well.” The tall man coughed. “I'd best clean up a bit before returning to work...” he shifted painfully to one foot.

“Take care, sir. Truly sorry I have nothing better to offer you than an apology.”

And I might have been a bit sorry. Sorry to smell blood so early in the game, sorry to be so utterly distracted.

I watched him go, and tasted many scents on him. Complex whispers only, though. Perhaps he was a man who once had many experiences in him, but he has walked away from them all. And now…the scent is watered with the droll, humble humility of a servile man.

“Oy!” Someone called from behind.

I felt my eyebrow twitch. Being noticed is fine, being ran in to by a mortal, is excusable. They wouldn’t know any better, after all. I briefly entertained thoughts of snapping the caller’s neck. Or perhaps playing with his eyeballs.

Wild laughter interrupted my musings. “Aaah, that was funny.”

I turn to see a tall man, gray hair and dressed in robe-like clothes in a deep, charcoal gray. He had a presence about him that most mortals lack, and an age undefined by time’s passage. I recognized the aura then.

The Reaper looked at me with his yellow eyes, and smiled in a slow, leering sort of way. “Are you looking for something, demon?”
Chapter Summary

After making a bargain with an unknown demon (the Challenger), Sebastian returns to The World for the first time in centuries. He only has a month to make a contract, or will be in the Challenger's debt for a month.

Chapter Three: First Sighting
(Sebastian. Week One.)

The Reaper continued to smile, long gray hair spilling over his tell-tale eyes. “You’re not contracted, are you?” he shook one finger, as though I was a pet dog that’s run away.

I looked at him in surprise. Reapers typically wore suits, in my experience, and all wore glasses—sometimes stylish, sometimes strange. “Beg pardon?”

His smile widened. “Ah. Yes. An uncollared imp, are you?” Without warning, he was a foot closer. He leaned in farther still, tilting his chin and raising his voice. “Haven’t seen one of you in a while.”

His breath was sweet. Odd for a Reaper to be eating on duty at all.

I recovered quickly, sketching a bow. “And whatever is a Reaper doing, so plainly clothed and walking amidst mortals?”

His smile widened, and unexpectedly, he laughed. “What’s this? Me a…?” The laughter turned into guffaws. Men on the street turned to look. “Of course there are no reapers here.” He gestured up at the sign of one of the buildings—some sort of café? He beckoned.

I frowned as he continued. “Won’t you come in?”

Unwilling to leave the company of someone who spoke so plainly, I followed him. I suppose I expected him to attack me at any moment. But he didn’t, and my bloodlust went unsatisfied.

The inside of the café was…unexpected. Instead of highly polished tables and curtains to hide a lady from view, or a coffee shop with men and boys sitting idly, low chairs surrounded small tables. And around these tables, rows and rows of colorful books were lined from floor to ceiling.

Instead of polite conversation, it was eerily quiet. There were only a few odd pockets of conversation toward the corner of the shop. Other people were sleeping in little booths, ignoring the bustling world around them. Very strange, I thought, for so many people to flock together, only to spend their time alone...

“…what is this place?”

“It’s a manga café…” he stopped and looked up at me from under his fringe. “Have you a name?” He wandered to a counter made of some sort of black rock.
Feeling like a bird lost in the storm, I followed. The rock was hardly cool under my fingers. Not rock then, but more manmade material. “Manga?”

“Call me Undertaker.” He pulled out a tray of cookies and a small piping bag. He messily streaked the icing onto the cookies into a pictographic character. “Man…ga. It means comics, or if you take an old-fashioned look at it,” he pulled the cookies apart and gestured from one to the other, “aimless pictures. You might have known the old Chinese form.”

I raised an eyebrow at the vast collection of aimless pictures in his shop. To think of the librarians who would be scandalized at such promotion of eating near books. “Yes. I recognize some of the writing,” I muttered, distracted.

He gestured vaguely to the walls. “Pick out a few books…the phonetic readings are written to the left of most characters in that section.” He pointed. To be honest, I couldn’t see the difference between one and the other. “Should give you wonderful mastery of the language, wouldn’t you say?” He pushed a paper into my hands—a key to the cipher, perhaps.

I considered asking him more questions. But true enough; an explanation to the language would be beneficial. I pulled out a stack at random, and moved to a vacant table.

“Take your time,” Undertaker murmured cryptically.

Of course, finishing the series took no time at all. A great deal of grammatical nuance and play was hidden among comical gags. After moving them back, I selected another.

I flipped through it, absorbing the images and the words as fast as a demon can. Simplicity itself, it was…learning a new tongue.

At the end of another series, I laughed aloud.

A young woman looked up, startled. Her dark eyes were wide under her false lashes, and she blinked prettily at me. “Is it good?” she asked.

“A study on society,” I replied in kind, rolling my tongue around the accent.

She blushed furiously, and looked away, pulling at her mini skirt self-consciously.

Ah, yes. The contrast between the real and the depicted pictures seemed ridiculous. The bare skin in the comics brought to mind pornography from an age past. Looking at these, you might expect women to be scandalously dressed.

I looked around again. In reality, women trotted around in black stockings and multiple layers, keeping their birdlike legs mysteries to the men around them.

My attention was refocused by a soft sniggering noise. I turned to see the Undertaker with his hand resting at an awkward angle on a long-nailed hand, an idiotic smile on his face.

“Got the language down, then?” He grinned. “Tell me a joke, now.”

“Why?” I looked at him curiously.

His grin got wider. “I’ll give you some good information.”

It didn’t take a long look to guess that the Undertaker was a bit crooked, and perhaps a lot crazy. A joke? To a rogue reaper.
“A riddle then. What creeps in darkness with eyes of fire, and laps pain with a twisted tongue?” I returned carelessly.


Annoyed, I told him something cruel enough to make most men tremble, followed by a punch line strange enough to befuddle and amuse one of strange tastes. It worked. I doubt the customers would have guessed that the loud, not-quite-sane laughter was coming from the shop owner.

“In return,” he continued, “I will show you a place…a place where a delicious, thoroughly entertaining soul awaits you.” He twirled his hair around one bony finger, and the black nail caught on one strand. It snapped.

“On with it,” I demanded.

And then he leaned forward to whisper in my ear.

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I was looking for a boy. A child with a chipped heart, and sadness in him. Something fractured but not yet broken, and something that burned with ambition. And the Reaper believed—if his information was to be trusted—this young thing could be here, milling around the youth fashion district in Takeshita Doori.

Armed with more modern language and some vague idea of modern times, I left the café looking for a sweet morsel.

The street appeared to be a tide of plastic umbrellas. On ordinary circumstances, the crowd was probably even thicker, but on this rainy day, only the dedicated fashion-conscientious youths were out to play.

Undertaker suggested that someone who might suite my tastes would be here, after all. How he presumed to know anything of my tastes, I was never sure, but the hints he dropped certainly got my attention.

I wanted a contract, and I wanted it fast. If I could get a contract on my very first day, surely I could ask any boon from the other demon. In this swirling mass of humanity, surely I could find one soul willing to take me on.

I kept an eye out for the boy, eyeing the throngs. Young women and men walked the streets, even while it was mostly girls’ roadside shops. Some of them walked in couples, while groups of girls stood in gaggles eating something wrapped in carnival paper. Soft crepes rolled into a cone by the looks of it, but filled with ridiculously sweet cream and fruits.

I caught sight of a pair of boys, neither ethnically Japanese. One had the golden brown skin of an Indian, the other pale with dark hair. The smaller boy had the right feel about him. Something in him called me closer. I melted into the crowd near them.

“Ciel~” the Indian boy chirped exuberantly. “Let’s go look at that one next!” the older boy was saying. He waved a colorful hand in the other’s face, making rings and bracelets dance. The bright clothing suited him, though I found the jewelry a bit excessive.
I followed his direction. There happened to be a mannequin with a rabbit mask pulled over the head. The red eyes gleamed most appealingly.

“I wanted to see Closet Child,” the smaller boy replied reluctantly. “We’re here, right? We’ll go there afterward.”

But before either could make good on his desire, Ciel stopped walking suddenly, causing the crowd behind them to back up before they sifted around him. The boy fumbled with his bag and pulled out a slim black tablet. A phone, I realized belatedly.

Ah, and that would be a smart phone. Feeling particularly pleased at how quickly I was catching on, I allowed myself to move in a bit closer.

Those small pink lips twisted into a frown as he looked at the screen, reading something even I could not discern from this angle. “It’s father...” he grimaced.

The Indian boy sighed dramatically. “Go on. He gets grumpy when you don’t answer.”

He slid a finger across the screen and lifted the device to his ear. His face became a mask, smiling brightly and sounding infinitely more cheerful. “Hello Dad. Have you come home early?”

I strained my ears to catch words across the distance, but nothing so quiet as that buzz could reach me.

At last the pair moved forward. They meandered over to a shop with more black than any other color, but otherwise little difference from any of the crowded shops. But they didn’t enter. Instead, they went up the metal staircase, and headed for the second floor. A glass display of three frilly dresses was all I could make of this other shop.

I went to the staircase and considered following them. But the scent of the boy was in my memory, and he could not travel far enough to hide from me. So instead of watching him take his measurements and try for suitable colors, I decided to hunt the streets for a suitable look. The clothes make a man, they said to my master all those years ago, and he was fitted for robes of velvet and shirts of silk.

He was a vile thing anyway, but perhaps I could fool the boy.

When he came out of the shop, I waited for him in a suit as black as the night. My hair, I styled in the way I saw on a fashion magazine that girls screamed over, and let my gaze fall on the boy...Ciel.

He caught my eye on the way down the stairs, and I smiled.

Yes. I thought so. He had the right combination indeed.
Chapter Summary

The Present: Sebastian returns to Ciel's school the next morning after "the window attempt" failed. However, things are not as he expects...

Chapter Four: That Demon, Named.
(Sebastian. Week One.)

The fading moonlight of the first night faded even as I considered my options. Having chosen my prey, all that was left was to ensnare him in a contract within a lunar cycle.

Admittedly, leaving the boy before I had a chance to get him to take my bait may not have been my best plan. But really, how often does a slip of a child turn down limitless power? But I suppose tasty treats like him are a different quality all together. I must hunt him in an all together more subtle way.

That very evening when I was hiding among the empty classrooms and the eaves of the dorm rooms, I had the feeling that something was happening right under my nose…some other force tempting my human. I put the thought out of my mind.

“I will have you soon.” I said to myself. Morning was upon me, but still I must wait. Ciel’s school was nearly impossible to infiltrate during the day, so a visitor simply stood out too much when the students and teachers were in their classrooms or offices. However, changing my clothes into a school uniform, and coming in after the final lesson prevented even the most suspicious from noticing one extra student among the masses.

I slipped in like smoke, feeling the pulse of the dry earth leave me as I stepped into the stone walls of the building. But here, there are shadows, and loneliness of mankind in saturated a place such as this. There are simply too many humans for it to be otherwise…happiness, group unity are too fleeting to leave an impression on the stone.

I walked the halls until I found Ciel. I stood in the door a moment, taking in the sight and scent of him. Finally, I spoke, “You’re not going to join after school activities then?”

He was currently studying like a pretty picture in his homeroom. His hair fell over his eyes, his small shoulders hunched over a notebook bleached white in the fashion of all modern things. Too bright and artificial.

“Ciel,” I tried again.

He looked up, startled at his name. “What?” His soul shone through his eyes, bright and blighted as a wilted flower.

“Aren’t you going to join the others?” I stepped through the doors, making my way closer at a sedate pace. Curiously, Ciel did not react as he did before—no exclamations of sounding the alarm or commands to go away. Yet. Was he willing to listen this time?
“I’m not in a club.” He drew back his shoulders. “And I don’t want to join one, if that’s what you’re after.”

I stopped at the desk in front of his, smiled and drew the chair out slowly. No need to rush. I’ll have him in the end. “Last night was most entertaining. It seems as though you were able to get a good night sleep after that?”

This got Ciel’s attention. A long moment passed, without him saying anything before he resumed his studies. It was almost as though he had completely written it out of his mind.

“Nothing to say?” I reached over and cupped his cheek. It was smooth, and warm to my cold hands. Our eyes locked, and Ciel gave a small shudder and drew back, startled. Did he remember?

But no. The words that came out of his mouth revealed as much. “What are you talking about?” Confusion and mild distaste flavor his aura. He viewed me with suspicion now, but the feeling was not based on our midnight meeting—just my actions this moment.

I shrugged his reaction off…Maybe it was the school uniform. “Last night. Much went unsaid.”

“What are you getting at?” Ciel scoffed. He looked much more mature than his handful of years, glowering at me like that. “I’m sorry, but I don’t know you. I haven’t seen you before today”

I decided to ignore that comment. “Let’s make a deal, Ciel Phantomhive. I can be your power. Grant you any of your desires or dreams. Let us mark the contract upon one another’s bodies…”

Ciel straightened up. “You’re laying it on a bit thick, don’t you think? Anyone would think you a pervert.” His voice was on the edge of giggling.

Giggling. I hate that part of young teens. “There’s darkness in your soul,” I told him. “I could compliment it. Match it. We could do great things together.” I allowed the fires of Hell to shine through my eyes…but that boy was not moved.

Ciel snorted. His disbelief in the evidence of the occult before him outweighed the subtle spell I wove around us. “Does someone have a camera? Is someone waiting for me to say something funny? Or blush and confess my undying love?” He couldn’t keep from smirking.

It was at once charming and irritating. This child would test my limits with his cocky attitude, rather than endless demands.

“I’m afraid not,” I said, wondering why anyone would want to bring a camera here. The things are entirely too slow, large, and undisguisable. Perhaps he just convinced himself it was all a dream after all…maybe the boy is more thick than I thought.

He closed his notebook, shuffled with his papers. When he looked at me again, there was no trace of recognition in his eyes. “Well. This is about clubs, then, isn’t it? I told you. I’m not entering. Whether you’re drama club, art club or orchestra, I’m not joining any of them.”

“I’m not here about after school activities,” I murmured, my thoughts whirling.

I took a sharp breath. Something happened to Ciel after I rather abruptly left his window. Something that made him forget my offer. Who has his fingers in my plan? I supposed I’d have to rethink my plan, if there’s competition or some other unknown threat…

I can always show him what it means to contract a demon. The power I hold. I thought of what to show this boy, so unwilling to be swayed by seductive words of power. Perhaps sweetness, then? Or
something truly terrifying, some display of the old violence that previous masters loved to inflict on
one another.

Before I could make a choice, the door opened. It was the man from before—the klutzy fool who
bloodied his knee after walking into me. “Excuse me,” a low voice intoned from the doorway. “We
need to close the classrooms.” He caught sight of me in my young-human form. “…Mr.
Phantomhive, if you could move to the library with your….friend?”

Ciel sighed. “Yes, vice principal Agares.”

Ah, Agares is it? Something pulled at my memory, but I had no time to examine the thought. I’ll
have to consider the mater later.

“And what are you called?” Agares eyed me with tentative curiosity.

Before I can think of a proper response, something odd happened. The cheeky little brat I’d marked
as mine took a step forward and tucked his chin in, lying as easily as the best of them. “Michaelis, sir.
Sebastian Michaelis.”

A pleasant shiver ran over my body, flooding my senses with new energy. Ciel looked more
tantalizing by the minute; already I felt I knew him better. He may not have accepted the contract
mark yet, but with that thoughtless lie, he made things that much easier to exist in the physical sense.

I flexed my fingers, reveling in the sensation of having a corporal body on earth once more. The
windows rattled at the sudden breeze from outside, a low groan from the earth that echoed my
anticipation.

_No more of that being half ignored nonsense, not with a proper name. I still have time to talk him
into the contract…_

And what a pleasure it will surely be.
V. That Demon, Infiltrating.

Chapter Summary

Even after Sebastian offers his demonic abilities to Ciel, Ciel persists in avoiding the contract. The situation is not quite right, and Sebastian watches from the sidelines...but not for long...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 5: School Life with Ciel.

It was only eight in the morning, and Ciel Phantomhive was bored.

“Ciel, are you listening to me?” Edgar Redmond raised a perfectly sculpted eyebrow.

Ciel, who hadn’t been, quirked an eyebrow back at him. For a minute, he held a serious, ‘I am so better than this’ expression. Then his face cracked into a boyish grin. “Sorry. What?”

Redmond smiled thinly. He dropped his gaze to look at the custard cream and tea on his plate. “Do get us another cup of tea. Clear your mind for a minute, and I will organize today’s events in such a way that it makes more sense to a sensitive child like you.”

Amused, Ciel got to his feet and nodded his ascent. If it kept Redmond happily in the dark, he was more than ready to run a few errands. “I’ll be right back.”

It was Aoki Kei(*1), nicknamed Bluer, at the counter. As a seventh former—or a school senior—he was extended the opportunity to have a part time shift at the school café, the Swan. If Redmond was right, Bluer had been coerced into taking a shift there a few days of the week. Judging by his brisk manner, he wasn’t pleased to be taken away from his studies.

“To see if he can learn to actually speak in English and not just read all the damn time.” Redmond had said waspishly.

“Morning, Bluer.” Ciel smiled his shy smile; trying to look like a third year junior-high-school-student ought to look when asked to run an errand. “Could you make us two more English style teas?” He let his eyes slide away from Bluer’s stern gaze, playing at shyness expertly.

“Of course.” Bluer glanced at the display case and gestured. “Will you be having anything with it?”

Ciel shook his head, wishing he knew how to blush on demand.

“As part of the morning special, English style teas come with service,” Bluer continued.

“You mean to say,” someone drawled from behind, “‘it comes with a free sample,’ Bluer…we don’t say ‘service’ like that in English.” Undertaker—the eccentric café owner and trainer of all baristas, laughed to himself. He peered over the counter at Ciel from under a curtain of fringe. “Hello Ciel.”
“That will be six-hundred yen.” Bluer pushed a silver tray toward Ciel, who fished out the change. “Thank you so much. Please wait at the eastern counter.”

Undertaker clucked disapprovingly, and then ruined the effect by sniggering. “‘Please pick up your beverage,’ hmm?” But instead of lecturing Bluer more, he followed Ciel to the opposite end.

Ciel, unnerved by the attention the resident ponce was giving him, didn’t say anything. He shifted nervously.

“What did you name him?” Undertaker asked slowly, rolling the sounds in his throat.

Ciel looked down. Then he looked back at Redmond. “What do you mean?”

“The one you met.” Undertaker leaned over the counter, his long, silver hair touching the countertop even though he was easily the tallest in the room. “He couldn’t tell me before…” He put black-polished nails to his lips, as though to keep the laugh back.

Ciel decided on a prim retort. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Come now…” Undertaker procured another two teacups. The two dainty ‘samples’ were macaroons, by the look of it, but in the shape of skulls.

A cold sweat went over the boy’s back, and he wished fervently that he had not tried to cover for the strange student earlier.

Where had that name come from, and why did it feel like he had some responsibility for the naming, rather than he remembered it?

Instead of replying, Ciel took the tray, nodded apologetically, and escaped back to his table. When he sat down, it was to a calmer, friendlier Redmond. As he picked up the cup with one hand, Redmond slid his phone across the table.

There was a picture of a blond boy, Maurice Cole. The expression, instead of a soft, cute one he favored in public, was not a nice one.

“What’s this?” Ciel asked, interested. “I thought you stopped—”

“Yes, I did. I remember what you found out Ciel…he’s really not the kind of person we should be acquainted with.”

And yet you have his picture. Ciel thought, bemused. He said nothing, though. Instead, he pursed his lips in a concerned sort of way.

“I heard he was going to the prefectural contest,” Redmond remarked with an equally displeased frown. “So disappointed in him…”

Ciel waited.

“I wonder, Ciel, do you know if he cheated to get into that? I heard there were some troubles with the English Speech Contest last week…”

Ciel checked his notebook. “The teacher in charge, Mr. Clark, hasn’t been to school in a few days. I don’t know that there’s anything we can do about it, anyway. The paperwork has all been filed.” He picked up his own cup of tea. “Anyway, he probably needs that sort of reference to continue on to university. We can’t begrudge him that, can we?”

Redmond nodded, apparently convinced. He looked at the macaroon curiously. “Hm. As usual, our
café has strange confectionaries…”

Ciel nodded hastily. “Taste alright though.”

“Oh, have you heard about Doll…?” Redmond asked cheerily. “On the Dance team and Gymnastics team. I heard she was going to a high-level competition too…”

Ciel settled in to listen, filing away those seemingly random bits of information. In his experience, you could never know too much.

Redmond parted ways with Ciel with a little wave. McMillan slid into place next to Ciel, starting to chatter almost immediately.

“Good morning, Ciel! Did you see on the schedule board this morning? I checked with Suzuki and class 3-2 doesn't have study hall for World Studies today!” His eyes shone brightly behind his large glasses.

“Really?” Ciel glanced up from his bag.

“You think Mr. Clark is back from hospital?” McMillan persisted.

Ciel shrugged and headed into their homeroom class with his head down, studying the chairs and desks in front of him with detached interest. “We don’t have gym today, do we?”

McMillan made a confused noise, and sat down at his desk across from Ciel. He seemed confused about Ciel’s lack of a real reply. He was busy rummaging in his bag for the day’s materials.

Ciel got his desk together in a much slower fashion. He let his gaze wander lightly over his classmate’s spaces, and a few nodded or greeted him a few times, whereas most just ignored him. Ciel, satisfied with this response, quietly congratulated himself. No one looks twice at a quiet, studious kid, do they?

Just then, the door swung open, revealing a teacher Ciel hadn’t seen before. Tall, with dark hair and a long, pretty face.

“Wha—” Ciel started, but cut himself off before anyone besides McMillan noticed.

It's the boy from before—only he can't be a boy, not if he's subbing for homeroom. I named him...or remembered his name... Sebastian Michaelis. What is he doing at school?

“Good morning class,” Sebastian took the platform with grace unnatural in a teacher. “My name is Sebastian Michaelis. I will be filling in for Mr. Clark while he recovers…”

Long fingers opened up the roll book. “Now, since this is our first time meeting, please answer roll. Correct my pronunciation if need be, if you would.”

“Excuse me, sir,” McMillan raised his hand. “But what happened to Mr. Nakamura?”

Sebastian looked up, nonplused. “He is otherwise disposed.”

Sebastian smoothly went on with the morning announcements. Finally, he closed his book and offered a tiny nod to the students. “That concludes the day’s announcements. I'll see you all later in class.” And he stepped back, preparing to leave. Before he did, his eyes fell on Ciel. “Mister Phantomhive. If I could see you in the hall for a moment.” He smiled faintly.
Ciel was extremely confused and more than a little wary. “Yes, sir.”

There was a quiet mutter in the class. Various people looked at him, some with surprise, some with something like suspicion.

Ciel felt his cheeks redden. This new teacher was going to ruin his good-boy image!

The hallway wasn't more private than the classroom, but the homeroom teacher coming in late was enough to distract most students. Also, Sebastian had a way of speaking low and quiet that it was difficult to make out what he was saying, even as close as he was to Ciel.

But no one could mistake the look in Sebastian’s eye, or the formal posture he took—especially considering that he was addressing a fourteen-year-old boy.

“Have you thought about my proposal?” Sebastian put a hand on Ciel's shoulder, causing the smaller boy to bend his head down.

He hurriedly straightened up, realizing that it would look like he was talking about something serious. Getting advice, perhaps.

“I can't go making a contract with a member of the staff, now can I? I don't know what you're talking about.” He scowled. “When did you become a teacher here, anyways?” Ciel turned away from Sebastian, showing his cheek and effectively breaking eye contact.

Sebastian laughed. His voice was low, musical, and unfortunately for Ciel, rather distinct. And noticeable. Whatever classmates had missed their leaving to the hall had definitely noticed by now.

Ciel felt his blush deepen.

“I would follow you to the end of the earth, Ciel Phantomhive. If I couldn’t become a member of this school….” He lifted his gaze and smiled pointedly. “…I wouldn’t be worth my salt.”

Ciel stared at him, not sure what that meant. He shivered. That smile, and that voice...could it be...

“I do enjoy a challenge, Ciel Phantomhive. But I have the feeling you could use a better advantage here. Think about it, won’t you? We could do great things, together.”

Ciel sighed with relief when Sebastian removed his hand and straightened into his formidable height.

“…no thank you.” Ciel said simply, and strolled back into his classroom.

Sebastian smiled, and watched him go.

Chapter End Notes

Footnotes:
(*1) Lawrence Bluer. Lawrence, coming from French, means “crowned with Laurel.” As a boy’s name in Japanese, you can say Kei or Katsura (the kanji meaning is laurel). Aoki literally means Blue tree...so this name is a bit of a pun going off of his original English name. Literally it’s “Blue tree: laurel.” I didn’t want all of the characters to be ethnically non-Japanese when they live in Japan. Seems fair that way. But he will be referred to as Bluer. :)
(On Japanese Schools) There are two homeroom teachers. One main one (Mr. Nakamura in this story). The second teacher is the deputy homeroom teacher, or the assistant homeroom teacher. Sebastian is the assistant.

Also, the homeroom is the base unit for your school year. You take all of your classes with the same students in your homeroom. Ciel is a senior in middle school, so all his classes are with the same people.

...so! Thoughts?
What'd you think about Sebastian being a teacher? How'd you find Ciel's 'friends?' does that boy have friends, or only allies?
VI. New Faces, Old Ties

Chapter Summary

Remember: The night after Ciel turns him down a second time. Sebastian realized that Ciel’s memories have been tampered with…and closer observation may be necessary to protect his food…

Chapter 6: New Faces, Old Ties

(Week One. That day at school, The Butler’s perspective)

I reentered the school with a more optimistic mindset. What a wonder a change of clothes and brilliant idea will do for such things.

In the old days, a whisper or hint of the dark arts would have been enough to get a glimpse into the herd’s mind, to read their expectations or to convince them that I did indeed belong. But times have changed and people don’t believe in the unknown enough for those tricks. I needed…proper identification. Or at least a plastic card with my name on it.

“Ah, Mr. Michaelis. Thank you so much for coming.” A thin, balding man bobbed up and down at me, offering a harried smile. “Have you been to this city before?”

“I’m afraid this is my first time, Mr…?”

“Ah, ah, sorry, sorry.” He smiled uncertainly. “I’m Nakamura Junpei. Follow me, please.”

For a school with as many students as I’ve seen, it wasn’t too much of a surprise that there were enough teachers to fill a sizable room. They sat at two long rows of gray desks – half of which had papers stacked high.

“This is your desk. But today, you can sit by the vice principal. Could you make a short introduction?”

The desk he gestured at was as cluttered as the rest. I barely suppressed the urge to raise an eyebrow.

“Mr. Clark was in an accident,” Nakamura explains. He paused meaningfully, as though to say ‘so he didn’t have time to clean his desk.’

Ah yes. Dear Mr. Clark found an unexpected landing on the stairway the other day. He needed a bit of a push, but he found more free time than he was expecting minutes before.

“He told me on the phone what his classes are doing, however. We can talk after the meeting.”

I gazed upon the teachers, ethnic Japanese and others alike. I only half listened to the Vice Principal go through the day’s announcements—dull reiterations punctuated by individual teacher’s reminders. Bored, I watched their faces, curious at their personalities and how things were done in an age with so many students. Belatedly, I saw an abbreviated list of announcements in English. Ah.

Suddenly, mention of my assumed name caught my attention. “Today is Mr. Michaelis’s first day
substituting for Mr. Clark. Go ahead, Mr. Michaelis.”

I stood, looking over the rows of desks. I quirked a half smile before beginning smoothly. “Good morning. I am Sebastian Michaelis, of England. Although we meet under less than pleasant circumstances, I am happy to fill in for Mr. Clark here at Yamamura International.” I offered a Japanese style bow, and repeated my introduction in Japanese.

A quiet murmur went over the staff, and they clapped politely.

The vice principal, the clumsy Agares, stepped aside to let me pass, but he overestimated the distance. He knocked his elbow into the files precariously stacked by the whiteboard, sending papers and pens flying. The mess landslided onto my neighbors desk, and even a little onto my predecessor’s.

“Oh dear.” Vice Principal Agares sighed. He straightened his glasses, and untangled his feet from a foldable chair.

Never one to make a bad impression, I quickly righted things. Papers were reorganized into their files and alphabetized, pencils, pens and erasers put in their proper compartments and post-it notes neatly condensed into the class roll book. Finally, I scrubbed the surface of the two desks for good measure.

Around me, the teachers held their staff meeting for each year, seemingly oblivious. Thinking I might have to assist with the short homeroom before classes, I stood behind Mr. Nakamura.

Mr. Nakamura came back a few minutes later and laughed nervously. “Ah, it’s very clean! Very clean, Mr. Michaelis,” he frowned in confusion, clearly at a loss. “Ah, ah, you don’t need to come to short home room,” he said uneasily.

I nodded, and headed back to the desk. Mr. Agares, however, had some form or other to check my “teacher’s license,” and wanted my “official seal,” whatever that was. I didn’t see any wax or metal insignia anywhere, so I could only imagine that he meant something else. He was just starting to explain the computer login system when he tripped for the second time, scattering papers out of the in box all over the floor.

I sighed. “I suppose I’ll organize it again...”

A student seemed to have an accident the other day, and Mr. Nakamura stayed in the corridor getting the details out of the student as though she were some criminal suspect. I took the opening, and went to the short homeroom. He wouldn’t miss me.

Homeroom was interesting. Of course, Ciel didn’t say yes immediately— something I’d expected after observing the child. I could hear him making his way back to his seat amidst the catcalls and other comments of his classmates.

“Who was that? Phantomhive, do you know him?”

“Oh. My God. Wasn’t he the—” a high pitched, overdramatic voice continued.

“He’s bilingual!” Someone else said excitedly. “Like, really bilingual. Do you think he’s half…?”

“No way, he’s British! Didn’t you hear—”

Hmmm, no matter the ages, humans are ridiculously easy to please. A pretty face, good manners, and they fall all over themselves. Any one of them would likely form the contract, but...
It’s not just any overly sweet, untested soul that I want. Such easy meals were beneath one of my experience. No, only Ciel Phantomhive would do. He’ll come to my beck-and-call…soon enough. He just needed a little nurturing.

I smiled to myself and left.
Chapter Notes

A/N: Curious as to how a demon teaches? Read on! If you’re looking for more one-on-one Ciel and Sebastian interaction, look forward to the next chapter. I thought it would be mildly interesting to look at the lesson part of a school fic, but I thought maybe a lot of you would prefer only to think about school at school, so you are warned.

Now. For a Hell of a History Lesson. >D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Chapter 7: That Demon, Teaching.**

I had been disappointed to find, on that first day, that I did not share a class with Ciel. I would have to wait until the following day to see him, but still had lessons to teach to various school children.

I knew that students were already talking about my lesson. Without much experience in modern public schools, I did take it upon myself to read a few books before my first class. But apparently I had done something different than my predecessor.

I could hear them from down the hall as I approached the classroom. “We’ve got Michaelis next!!” mixed in with “Oh. I think I might die if he asks me a question…what if I’m wrong??” and other ridiculous chatter.

When I came to Ciel’s class with an armload of posters, magnets and scrolls, the class quieted, though the bell had not yet rung. As I began unrolling the drawings and fixing them to the board, they began to talk excitedly.

I ignored them, waiting for….

The bell chimed musically.

I turned around to face the students. They preformed their quaint Japanese custom of rising and bowing at me, and I smiled at their eager faces.

“Good morning, class.”

Oddly enough, the Japanese students chorused this back at me, while the other nationals simply smirked. I glanced from the seating chart (posted conveniently on the podium) to the students.

“No absences then. Shall we begin?” They looked at me oddly, anticipation written in their posture.

“Mr. Clark’s notes said that you have completed the reading of chapter seven for homework. So let us begin with a quiz…”

There was a collective moan from the class. One student had the gall to mutter, “Not a *quiz,*” when students in the past would have gotten their hands slapped for such a statement.

“Today’s topic is: The Industrial Revolution and the Gilded Age. Working conditions. Textbooks closed.”

While they put their things away and took out a clean sheet of paper, I wrote another title on the
“The worst jobs of the 18th and 19th centuries.”

“Let’s see which team can guess one of these unfortunate professions, and then guess the job description.” I smiled at the sudden murmurings of the class. They exchanged confused or satisfied looks with one another, depending on their information.

I went on to explain the rules. “Each team will have a cumulative total for the end of the semester, or the end of my time at this fine school. A percentage of that total can be added to their homework score. As for this game, if you can guess without an illustrated hint, you will get ten points. If you can guess the description, but not the work title, you will receive five points.”

“You have 20 seconds to discuss among yourselves. Begin.”

“Professor Michaelis!” (*1) A Japanese student called Masuda began. “We’re supposed to guess the name? Then the definition?”

“Just the professional title first. If you guess that much, you may guess the definition. If you guess incorrectly, we will move on to the next team. If you cannot guess a title, I will give an illustrated hint.”

Without further ado, we began.

“Teacher?” One student guessed, grinning foolishly at me.

“Garbage man,” the next guessed.

“Hangman.”

“Ah... Farmer!”

“Peasant!”

I leveled that student with one eyebrow raised. Then I addressed the class. “Sadly, there were no garbage collectors. And your ‘hangmen’ were executioners; teachers and farmers would not have so difficult a time, baring pay.” Seeing some confused faces, I simplified. “No. These jobs were not so bad. Also, peasant is not a clear occupation, it is a class. Please remember the premise of the game: what are the worst occupations?”

“If you can guess the conditions most teachers, farmers and executioners worked in, however, I will count them for two points each,” I added.

The students exchanged nervous glances.

I flipped over five illustrations. “Or try these for two points. You have 20 seconds to discuss. The second row students now have a chance to answer.”

The first illustration was of a boy holding a long-handled broom of sorts used for cleaning tight places, skinny and well under the average height of modern children his age. The second was of a grimy boy swimming in the Thames holding a long pole with string attached, carrying a bucket. The third was a boy with a knife next to a rat. The fourth was a man pushing a heavy load in a wheel barrel, while the final picture was a woman and child carrying a sack of something next to a line of soldiers.
Five minutes of happy chaos passed, and three jobs were guessed. They guessed the name and description of Chimney Sweep, Navy Man, and Rat Catcher, but could guess neither title nor description of the second and fifth image. I supplied the occupational titles for these remaining two: Tosher and Powder Monkey. I snickered. Their closest answer for the second picture had been fishing.

“You may guess the description for either Tosher, or Powder Monkey. Row four and five, it is your turn. 20 seconds. Begin.”

“Let’s work with what we’ve got,” Ciel said to his teammates, after a flurry of discussion in half coherent sentences. “Conditions of the Tosher, Professor Michaelis—can we answer now?”

“Go ahead.”

Ciel straightened, stood up, and answered in a clear, imperious tone. “Clearly, he is not fishing for food, or he would be a fisher. Toshers are, then, looking for something in the dirty river. Conditions are bad. He can catch a cold, and probably earns little or nothing every day. It is probably only a job for the children of the poor who couldn’t get employed for anything else.”

I smiled, and awarded his team five points. The game continued. When they had started guessing wildly, I called the game to a close, reminding students to look up any information they wanted to know. “Now that we have finished the warm-up, we will continue with what is called the ‘Industrial Revolution,’ and the ‘Gilded Age’ in the Americas.” I unfurled more illustrations and three large photographs. Thin and gaunt children sand before machines, their faces stark white, and the machines monstrous next to their small frames. I wrote the title on the top of the board.

Industrial Revolution 1760-1840: Life in Great Britain
Cotton Factories Regulation Act 1819
Child Labor in the Mills

“These are photos of working conditions in the mid to late 1800s, later than what we discuss today, but perhaps easier to grasp. The others are copies of illustrations in newspapers.”

The spoilt, pampered children of these modern days were silent.

“Mass Production leads to more productivity, but also produced poor living standards for those working in the factories.”

While the children began to take notes, I called to the losing team, “Kindly move the bins, row one. Yes, those. Over by the window will do.” While they dragged their feet, I stepped into the hall. Ciel’s eyes followed me out, incredulous.

“Professor...” McMillan said hesitantly, his eyes large and scared behind his glasses.

“This,” I began, ignoring him, “is a bobbin.” I held up a wooden spool. “This is cotton.” The students laughed uncertainly. “And this,” I gestured to the machine behind me, “is a spinning frame, a smaller piece of an Industrial Revolution machine that spun cotton into thread.” I moved it on top of the podium. “It is smaller than a great many of the machines would have been in the past...and many of the more...dangerous...parts have been removed.”

The students continued to stare.

“Professor,” Ciel asked, amusement showing despite his attempt to look innocently reprimanding, “is that thing allowed in our classroom?”
I smirked back at him. “Of course it is. The principal fully endorses use of realia in a class-context. Studies show that students remember more when they can touch the past.” I schooled my expression. “Now. Who would like to be a doffer?”

McMillan’s eyes shot to Ciel. He looked interested, if a little panicked. “Professor?” He said.

“When these spools are filled, a doffer will clear them so that the process may begin again. It requires dexterity and speed. Which is to say, you must be quick and clever with your hands. Instead of a large water-powered wheel, I will operate the machine, and when it stops, you may take the cotton. If you are not fast enough…”

Ciel lowered his eyes.

“Your fingers may be caught.”

Silence in the classroom.

“…in a web of cotton thread, and I shall mark a red ‘x’ on any fingers that might have been removed, were this an actual machine.”

Students visibly relaxed, and chatter filled the air again.

I raised an eyebrow. They quieted. “We have time to do two demonstrations…so…ten students total may volunteer. I shall mark the individual points within your team, but it is not required…should we lack enough volunteers, the demonstration shall occur only once.”

Privately, I wished that I were allowed to remove their fingers, but somehow, I thought that wouldn’t win me any points with little Ciel Phantomhive. But I’m quite certain they’ll remember the Child Protection Laws of the early 1900s, and the conditions that continued through the Industrial Revolution as a result of this…somewhat simplistic…demonstration.

I wonder if the principal would allow me to put the students in stocks when we get to the punishment section…

It’s a pity they already finished the French Revolution. I could think of quite a few good demonstrations for that. Many of which involve a guillotine…

I smiled to myself, and the lesson continued.

Chapter End Notes

* Sebastian would probably be called Mr. Michaelis, but Professor is just so much cooler...
VIII. Sebastian and the Computer. A battle?

Chapter Summary

Sebastian, in an effort to secure a contract with Ciel, has made an effort to seem mysterious and all-knowing. After all...What problems could a computer possibly cause for such an experienced demon...?

Chapter Notes

It's my birthday tomorrow. ♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8: Sebastian and the Computer. A battle?

Login via the computer. Sebastian frowned. He stared at the glossy screen, and the tray of keys, not unlike those on a typewriter. Hesitantly, he added his smartphone to the mess. He may have read manga with people using these new contraptions, and even seen them used in person, but even still, he was no closer to using one for himself than was one of his new students up to teaching history class.

“Mr. Michaelis,” a voice called from the door, “I brought 3-5’s history notebooks.” Ciel shifted unsteadily on his feet. “Where do you want them?”

Sebastian smiled and gestured for Ciel to come over. “I’ll take them.” He slid the computer odds and ends away.

Ciel eyed the freshly cleaned History Office. He seemed to notice the new cabinet, from the surprised (and slightly suspicious, if Sebastian didn’t miss his guess by the way he frowned… that delightful frown was definitely a sign of confusion or suspicion.) the look he gave it all. Just wait until he finds out what’s inside he thought with satisfaction.

Apparently he’d seen the dusty surfaces, cluttered organization, and spotted floor before Sebastian had thoroughly scrubbed it.

To distract him, Sebastian asked him a question. “Ciel, do you have a moment? I’d like to ask you about how Mr. Clark evaluated these notebooks. They’re a kind of copy of the textbook with some comprehension questions, aren’t they?”

Ciel didn’t respond. His gaze was fixed on something, the frown replaced by a smirk. Sebastian followed his gaze and realized Yoku wakaru shoshinsha no tame no pasokon nyumon (“introduction to computers, an understandable guide for first time users”) was still in plain sight.

“How you having trouble with the Japanese system, Mr. Michaelis?” Ciel asked sweetly.

“...”
“You had trouble with that cellphone in class, too.” The smirk had returned. He apparently had been quite amused by Sebastian’s reaction...he’d not taken kindly to a beeping noise, or another student who dared to play games while he was speaking. The result had been...memorable.

“Are you offering to explain this... computer? You should be free for the afternoon.” Sebastian smiled, and the tips of his teeth showed.

“I have to go.”

“You said you weren’t part of any clubs. Furthermore, you’re a dorm student. What’s keeping you?” Ciel considered what to say. “Exactly how long are we talking about here?” He folded his arms.

“An afternoon. I’ll even make you something nice for dinner. Something better than what you can get at the school cafe or conbini obento,” convenient-store lunches).

“Heeh. So Mr. Perfect can cook but not use a computer.” The boy practically bounced with curiosity. Ciel took the chair next to Sebastian’s.

_Hm, perhaps it will be that thirst for knowledge that will break him._ That thought pleased Sebastian enough that he forgot to pretend to be more knowledgeable (appear human, some might say) all together.

“I saw pictures of it being used. And the other teachers seem to use them frequently.”

Ciel gaped. And then giggled. “Where have you been for the last twenty years?”

“In hell,” Sebastian said blandly. “Show me how to ‘turn it on.’”

Ciel did so. “Someone must have told you the teacher login and passwords.”

“Who do I tell them to?”

Ciel stared. “You’re joking.”

“Quite.” Sebastian’s lips twitched. “Show me how to enter the words.”

“You need to hit CTRL ALT Delete.”

“I see them. Show me where you would hold your hands were you typing, if you would.”

A half hour later, Ciel had explained the most commonly used programs and the Internet. Sebastian caught on with such speed and accuracy that Ciel was getting suspicious again.

“You’re having me on. There’s no way you couldn’t _not know_ all of this and catch on so fast,” he accused, his lips curled in a frown that Sebastian found charming.

“Teach me about _sumapho_ now.”

Ciel rolled his eyes. “They’re called smart phones in English.”

The concept of tapping keys and icons instead of using a mouse and separate screen was, if anything, easier. By now Ciel was no longer surprised, however.

“You know, ordinarily, teachers confiscate cell phones when they ring in class, not throw them in the bin,” Ciel remarked. “Besides, you put it in with the burnable garbage.(*1)”
“Everything burns,” Sebastian replied.

Ciel nearly laughed. “Um. Anyway.” He pulled out his model. “You know how to turn it on?”

Sebastian didn’t answer, amused with Ciel’s ‘lesson.’

“So, this is the internet icon. We just went over that on the computer, so it’s basically the same, except that this is how you get the keyboard out.” He gestured. “And this is where you type the URL, and that’s the back button.”

“And the student was sending a...mail.”

“Email. I already told you about email.” Ciel looked at Sebastian, thoughtful once more. “There’s no way you can’t know this stuff...”

“I merely got the languages confused. In Japanese it is mail, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess...” Ciel pursed his lips and leaned back into his chair. “So, why haven’t you asked all of this to a teacher? You know, someone your age...”

Sebastian shrugged. “You were here. I mentioned it to Mr. Nakayama.” Sebastian observed, prodding the screen delicately. “But he was not interested in explaining...and many of the other teachers professed lack of proficiency with modern technology.” He looked up to meet Ciel’s curious gaze. “They said the only ones who can use it successfully are the youth.”

Ciel fidgeted a little, trying not to look too superior. “Mm, maybe for the teachers here. But my Dad can use them all right. Actually, he can use smart phones to track runaway kids.”

“Your father works with the law enforcement, then?” Sebastian asked, his voice silky.

“He’s an investigator. Private, though, he works with the police sometimes.” Ciel pulled out his own smart phone, glancing over the apps he had installed. “He knows a lot of people...”

“You don’t seem to be lacking in that department.”

“You mean friends? Of course I have friends. Sort of. Acquaintances...” Ciel said casually. The boy’s eyes flitted to his teacher.

Ah, how eager the young are to impress others...

“Do you now?” Sebastian purred. “But are they of any use?”

“O-of course,” Ciel stuttered. “I don’t waste my time.” He felt the sudden urge to open his phone camera, flip through the pictures, and prove exactly how well-positioned he was. But he stopped himself, barely. He remembered then, one particular picture... an image of Maurice Cole.

He swallowed. “But sometimes you don’t know what use they’ll be until later. Not until you have enough background to put their talents to use.”

“And how could a child of fourteen do any such thing?” Sebastian observed. He turned the screen blank on his own phone, and leaned back.

Ciel, predictably, leaned in to make his point. “Oh, I have experience. But I’m not just going to tell you.” The boy wrinkled his nose.

“You’re bluffing,” Sebastian remarked. His gave a wry smile. “I don’t think a child could do any
such thing.”

Ciel paused. He knew he was being pushed, and his first instinct was to resist. His second, to push back. But he smoothed his expression and went on.

“Anyway, look at the apps on your phone. This is the Gallery— you can see the photos you take with it.
And Japanese phones have this infrared thing, called sekigaisen that you can transfer data with. Without an email, I mean.”

“But mine doesn’t have that. I have an iPhone...” Sebastian frowned in concentration.

They talked for several minutes discussing the finer points of apps and differences between their model phones of choice.

“What do you suppose the good of this is?” Sebastian wondered. He seemed amused. “What could we use this app for?”

Ciel shrugged. “I don’t know. But there are all kinds of people. Someone has to find it useful, even if a high schooler or a teacher doesn’t.” He paused, reflecting. “I mean, I heard a friend of mine has some interesting problems. I don’t carry that much cash on me, you know,” he glanced at Sebastian surreptitiously, trying to gauge if Sebastian was too dense to think why that could be. “It’s not safe.”

Sebastian’s lips twitched. He doubted very much that Ciel thought of his safety that often.

“I dunno what to do about this one situation though...what do people usually need 30,000 yen for, anyways? That’s like, hm almost 200 pounds...” he carried on. “But I brought it to him, and that was that.”

Sebastian looked at the boy, lowered his eyes, and waited. “I see.” He made a mental list of the people Ciel had talked to in the past few days, and immediately pinpointed which friend Ciel could be talking about. “I suppose Redmond needed a new outfit? I doubt someone of his standing would need it for...less pure reasons.”

Ciel nodded distractedly before shooting a look at Sebastian. “I never said—”

“No,” Sebastian’s mirth left him in a quiet hum of laughter. “You didn’t.”

Ciel sniffed. “If that’s everything, Professor Michaelis?” he declared.

Ah, Sebastian’s eyes flitted to Ciel’s tense shoulders. He’s realized the danger of conversing with me...

“Thank you for your assistance, Phantomhive.” He smiled. “I will have dinner prepared by six p.m. We can’t have you eating too late...” The boy stiffened. “Or you won’t be able to sleep.”

“I...” Ciel began.

“I will see you...yes, here would do. Or if you prefer, there is a park nearby. We could make a picnic of it.”

Ciel, at mention of this, reddened visibly. “No, no thank you...I think I have time to catch the cafeteria. You can...return the favor at another time;” he said faintly.

And with that, he left, leaving Sebastian alone once more.
Footnotes: (*1) Garbage is sorted in Japan. Unfortunately, the sorting system is different in every city. But basically, it’s sorted into burnable, nonburnable, glass, PET bottles (it is a plastic bottle labeled “no.1” in many countries), aluminum cans, steel cans etc.)

The book in kana: よくわかる初心者の為のパソコン入門

So! Sebastian has showed his less-than-perfect side. :heart: And watch Ciel open up to him...things are going smoothly.
IX. His Would-be-Master, Cornered.

Chapter Summary

Ciel's senpai (senior classman) approaches Ciel about a rumor. Redmond thinks Ciel has spoken to Professor Michaelis about something. What will the consequences be?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 9: His Would-be-Master, Cornered.

(Ciel. Week Two.)

“There’s something important I need to tell you,” Edgar Redmond had said. He leaned casually against the door frame, cool and confident as always.

Ciel had only nodded.

“Good.” Redmond smiled, seeming pleased by this. “I’ll see you after class, then?”

Ciel put the entire thing out of his mind until much later. It was, after all, a common occurrence. Ciel helped his upperclassmen in a variety of clever ways…from running small errands to following up on the information network Redmond thought he was in charge of.

“Redmond?” Ciel called out. They’d agreed to meet behind the computer lab, sheltered by the out-of-doors hallway connecting this addition to the main classroom buildings. It was quiet, and not nearly as looked-in-upon as the school grounds, tennis courts or such.

Redmond coughed briefly. He wasn’t burdened by school bags or books, but stood at ease. “Hello Ciel.” A smile played at his lips.

Ciel’s eyes softened vaguely in return. “I thought we’d meet in one of the dorm common rooms,” he admitted slowly. “Is there something you needed…?”

Redmond’s expression was curiously blank for a moment. He surveyed Ciel severely. “I thought, surely, that you would realize by now,” he murmured.

Ciel paused. “Sorry, what?” He was a bit unsettled by Redmond’s words.

It wasn’t as though they never argued…but Redmond never seemed to allow anything to get past his regard for the proper, beautiful society he wished to live in. But Redmond was detached, disregarding the friendly demeanor he customarily adopted with his classmates.

“Ah,” Ciel breathed, “is it about dinner yesterday? I thought I told you. I was helping Professor Micha—”

“It isn’t that.” Redmond closed the distance between them with a few long steps. He looked down upon Ciel, his expression unreadable. Gently, he brushed Ciel’s hair away, straightened his collar, and untied the knot of his tie.
Ciel smiled faintly, amused at his senior’s methodological readjustment of his school uniform. “Thank you.” He paused, trying to think of what could possibly be bothering Redmond so.

“Have you forgotten already?” Redmond bent slightly, and his fair hair brushed against Ciel’s cheek. As it was impossible to read Redmond at that proximity, he nearly missed the dull, uninspired tone. “I thought better of you, Phantomhive. I can no longer overlook these games you’ve been playing. Did you think I wouldn’t notice, that I wouldn’t have my own sources of information?” Redmond scoffed, and tossed his hair back.

Ciel stared, utterly surprised. He had thought, in the back of his mind, that no one would guess his game. No one would be able to see what he was doing with student information. For Redmond to guess the alliances he made or the gambles he managed, astonished him.

“Sources tell me that you dropped my name to a certain teacher. I over estimated you, Ciel. I didn’t think you’d be such a brown noser.” Scorn mixed with Redmond’s approximation of disappointment.

Ciel was indignant. “I did not,” he declared. Then he stopped. He might have said something in reference to Redmond. But surely that wasn’t the same thing. “I would never tell a teacher something to incriminate you. But you haven’t done anything to be worried about, though, have you?”

“You said enough for a teacher to suspect me of something distasteful. Me! After all I’ve done for you.” Redmond grabbed the younger boy's shoulders, squeezing a touch too tight.

Ciel flinched away. He was starting to back away, when Redmond looked at him with a cold smile. His fingers bit into his shoulders through the uniform, and he pushed Ciel roughly against the wall. To anyone passing, it would look like they were talking. But there was surprising strength there, and Ciel felt panic mounting in his chest.

“You disappoint me, Ciel. I can't let you wriggle out of this unpunished.” Redmond toyed with Ciel's hair, and lightly put his hand on the back Ciel's thigh. “Do you remember all the times we've spent together? You've shared my heart, but I too have tasted yours....” He smiled softly then. “I know what would shake you up. I know what you're afraid of.”

Ciel shook under that gaze, but he managed to disguise it with the tilt of his chin and a small scowl.

“Do you now?” he frowned. “That isn't something you say to a friend, Redmond. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but...”

Redmond shook his head. “You would have been better at my side, Ciel. Better to stand by me, don't you think?” He paused. “After all, I know how some people look at you.”

Ciel froze. “What?”

Redmond's smile was disconnected from the pleasant passions that so frequently took him. He was no longer concerned with the appropriateness of the act. “I can find some...willing people...to punish you.” And at last, he withdrew. He gave a tiny little bow. “Watch your step, little Phantomhive.”

And then he withdrew completely, leaving a cold, sinking dread in Ciel's stomach. This could only be the beginning of Redmond’s move against him. Ciel wondered how far his standing would drop, how much his peers would suspect him of.

Ciel’s breath came difficultly, stress and anxiety aggravating his asthma. He'd leave now, before any passing student got the nerve to ask him what that conversation was about.
It was time to make a counter plan. Ciel wouldn’t play *victim* for anyone.

Ciel had never felt so alone in his life. Classmates and students he thought were—well, not quite friends, but informants at the very least—were ignoring him. Redmond had influence, all right. Ciel had only ever been on the fringe of any circle.

McMillan and his yearmates spoke to him some, but their curiosity at the sudden number of notes shoved into his shoe locker (*1) and the discrete stares from upperclassmen kept Ciel from talking to them either.

Talking with Redmond had been awful. He implied that Ciel couldn’t keep a secret, and that he was a gossip and a sneak. Worse he made it out like he was a child trying to impress his father and his teacher with degrading stories about his peers.

Ciel clenched his fist and hid behind his notes during classes. He skipped lunch in the cafeteria in favor of staking out in the library. On his way there, Sebastian stopped him.

“Mr. Phantomhive, if I could have a word?”

Ciel skittered out of the way. “I’m busy right now, Professor,” he said curtly. *Like hell I’m going to give them more to gossip about by talking to Sebastian.*

The teacher made a move to catch Ciel’s arm, but the boy evaded that easily and half ran to the library.

45 minutes to kill...Ciel thought about browsing the shelves, but disregarded this in favor of sitting at a table farther out of sight. His cellphone was in his hand without really thinking about it. Fleeting thoughts of showing Sebastian how to use it came to mind. Ciel scowled and decided to use a computer after all. No one but the computer club members would be there, after all. And they hardly ever spoke to anyone.

He’d find someone to talk to...He wasn’t completely alone. *Maybe some friends from England will be online.* Ciel resolutely typed something into the web browser.

(Sebastian)

I watched the child from close behind him, taking care to hide my presence from even him. Quickly, I copied the web address into my school-issued laptop.

Ciel found the chat room by accident, I thought. He was checking the browser history, like he was trying to see what the previous user had been looking at. Probably it was a frustrated attempt to have a hold over someone. I can relate-- there's nothing quite like having power over someone to make you feel a little better.

But his hand paused over the history. He accessed the page and actually created an account. I'm mere seconds behind him, except that I also modify my User information to make it look like I joined months ago and have multiple “friends.”

Ciel typed into the group chat.

Ah, I was correct in assuming he wanted to talk after all. He's found a forum and started watching someone’s conversation. The best he could hope for was a similar situation, but I can do better than that. I peered at the screen in contemplation. Now...what card ought I play?
Was he looking for comfort and sympathy? No, of course not. Someone to vent to, perhaps...or maybe some advice, if he thought the other party to be capable of giving anything intelligent enough to consider.

The teens (if that really was what they were) that frequented such sites were not always helpful. I recalled warnings from my school-issued internet guidelines that hinted of that predators often could inducing get personal information from our young, naive students and that we were to strictly suggest students refrain from such activities.

Which gave me an idea. Ciel might have been unwilling to confide in me in person, but he may yet open up to “Demandols.”

Chapter End Notes

Footnotes:
(*1) Shoe Lockers. As you (may) know, you have to take off your shoes when you go into a Japanese house, and even some buildings. Schools are one of these places. So, there is a small locker that's whole purpose is to keep your coming-to-school-shoes in while you wear your indoor-sandals (sigh. I hate these.) Once a year, somebody’s shoes (usually the “going home” shoes) goes missing. O.O It’s a ghost! (Actually, teachers tell students that they suspect another student mixed up the shoes and wore someone else’s shoes home...) As implied in this chapter, notes may be left in the shoe locker.

(*2) Sebastian’s screen name. I dare you to find out what it’s referring to. (goolge?)

A/N: So!! Er, how do you like this chapter? Interesting? (*Fidgets*) I know Redmond's character isn't entirely revealed in the manga, so I'm taking a stab in the dark here.
Chapter Summary

Ciel makes his move against Redmund (with the help of Desmandols). Will is result in scandal, or will Redmund back down?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Texting-in-the-story. It's only half of this chapter. Those of you who who find yourself thinking, "get on with the plot!" may be happier skipping to the next half of this chapter. Those of you who like lots of detail and foreshadowing, stick around.

A/N: Is the Line app (usually just called Line), which is kind of like an IM from phone-to-phone, bypassing cell-numbers etc. I imagine Ciel has a Line account for private stuff, and another for public "classroom" stuff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 10: In the Hands of a School Aged Sadist

Ciel texted briskly on his phone between classes, more eager to talk to his new acquaintance using Line (*1) than trying to talk with his somewhat estranged peers.

BitterRabbit: so, what are your hobbies?
Demandols: Computers, I suppose. But only recently.
BitterRabbit: oh? how do you mean?
Demandols: I'm using the internet to explore the computer's functions. It's...a hobby.
BitterRabbit: so what's your purpose?
Demandols: I'm looking into many things. But, right now I'm looking at servers.
BitterRabbit: Why?
Demandols: I wondered if I could access my school server from home.

Ciel leaned backwards in his seat, contemplating the other’s words
BitterRabbit: Like a hacker?

Ciel waited impatiently for the reply. It took a few seconds longer than usual...

Demandols: No, not a hacker. I'm just using my phone.
I don't want to destroy anything.

Ciel decided to reserve judgment and continued texting on Line.

BitterRabbit: But it would be theoretically possible to hack the school system remotely.
Ciel thought to himself, *But why would anyone want to?* Instead, he typed,
But not from a phone…

**Deamandols:** Why can't I access it from my phone?

**BitterRabbit:** It's protected through wireless security.

**Deamandols:** In what way?

**BitterRabbit:** Well, you have to know not only the passwords, but the addresses also. If you don't know or can't guess those...you can't get in.

**Deamandols:** Interesting.

And how about you? What are your hobbies?
Do you find world domination sound interesting?

**BitterRabbit:** lol...

No more than any other kid my age.
I'd be happy to get through high school atm...

**Deamandols:** look at this picture.

Ciel opened the .gif only to be assaulted by a video of a small, fluffy cat climbing a curtain. He rolled his eyes.

**BitterRabbit:** uh-huh. Nice cat.

**Deamandols:** isn't she darling?

**BitterRabbit:** Is she your only family or something?

**Deamandols:** if she would deign call herself that, I would be most pleased.

Ciel snorted How could the *cat* decide?

**BitterRabbit:** you don't have family in Japan then?

**Deamandols:** I don't. And you?

**BitterRabbit:** boarding school. My dad enrolled me after my mom died...

Ciel looked at the light green bubble of text and fidgeted uncomfortably. He wasn't accustomed to telling people about his family, and that admission especially cut close.

**Deamandols:** My condolences.

Ciel pursed his lips. He racked his brains for a way to lighten the conversation.

**BitterRabbit:** you sound so formal…

**Deamandols:** Would you prefer if I wrote, “is ur dad horrid 2 u?”

**BitterRabbit:** uh, no, thanks.

he's....
not that bad
sometimes he can be demanding
and I think he thinks I like everything he likes and hate everything he dislikes
But he thinks I'm a little kid
he doesn't realize I'm a teenager.

**Deamandols:** maybe you should show him that.

**BitterRabbit:** How?

**Deamandols:** well....

Ciel leaned in unconsciously closer, peering at the screen intently. He was so enwrapped in the conversation that he nearly missed the teacher coming close. He barely managed to hide it from view, and smiled faintly when the teacher tapped his textbook and gestured for Ciel to read aloud.
Ciel knew that whatever Sebastian proposed would be in neat lines of text whenever Ciel glanced back, Ciel assured himself, and participated in class. Reluctantly.

“Yes, sir.” He stood up, hastily dropping his cellphone into place. He read aloud and glanced sullenly at the teacher, who smiled tightly.

When he looked back at his phone, he sighed with relief.

Demandols had produced some interesting advice. However, Ciel wasn’t sure how his dad would react. But it seemed Demandols was quick on his feet, so Ciel was tempted to ask the other's opinion about this new situation with Redmond.

**BitterRabbit:** actually, there's this classmate of mine....there's a misunderstanding.

He texted tentatively. Then he erased it. That was far too transparent. He’d come up with something better.

Demandols might offer the perfect solution as a third party. Some of Ciel’s anxiety faded, as he concentrated on composing his message.

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**oOoOoOo**

“Ciel.”

Redmond’s call came when the boy least expected it. He thought it would start immediately after class, with the least amount of intrusions as possible, but instead he’d been left alone after short homeroom. It wasn’t until Professor Michaelis had left them to their cleaning duties that he’d been headed off.

Before, there had been two upperclassmen loitering around near his dorm room whenever he tried to sneak back. Whenever he tried to go anywhere private, there was always someone in the way. So he had no place to seek refuge except the café. The school library closed at five, after all.

Undertaker smiled slowly. “Ciel Phantomhive…your friend is calling you.” He laughed quietly, and pointed at his blond classmate. “I don’t think he's so patient today…”

As if to confirm that statement, Redmond brushed a strand of hair out of his face. “Ciel, a word if you don’t mind?”

Ciel swallowed. He thought about the plan he and Desmandol had constructed, and his heart began to race. He wasn’t entirely certain, no—he wasn’t a fool. But it was a plan he could count on for the most part, especially when Redmond wasn’t about to let him avoid the issue altogether.

He looked Redmond in the eye and offered a tentative smile. “Of course, Redmond. Would you like to discuss it over tea…?” he asked hopefully.

Redmond shook his head. “No, it’s about what we were talking about a few days ago. The situation has changed, and I’m afraid it can’t…resolve until you’ve seen the exact circumstances, we can’t really afford to let things be.” His words were just as aristocratic as ever, and his elegant speech pattern was only slightly off.

Under those pretty phrases, Redmond’s gaze was cold. He smiled only when Ciel looked away. It was as though he took pleasure in Ciel’s discomfort.
“Shall we go to my room or yours, then?” The older boy led him away by the elbow.

“I see your two thugs have given up on stalking my hallway,” Ciel said sourly.

“Thugs?” Redmond’s lip curled. “Hardly.”

“I don’t want to go anywhere alone with you like this. Redmond, this is a big misunderstanding—” Ciel kept his tone pleading, showing just a hint of fear. Enough to make Redmond think he still had the upper hand. Enough to practically give permission to a hesitant predator.

*It has to be like this. He has to see me as weak. It won’t get far...Redmond actually believes all that rot about honor of his family’s name.* Ciel’s thoughts were jumbled, almost fuzzy as though he had a fever.

“Well, I don’t want to air my laundry where anyone can see it. It has to be private. But I think your dorm isn’t the right place after all...” He fixed a shrewd eye on Ciel. “Who knows, the rumors about you having illegal weapons in there might be true.”

Ciel swallowed hard, and made a show of putting on a brave face. But he let his anxiety show just enough to make Redmond sloppy.

Sure enough, Redmond chose the study room on Ciel’s floor. Ciel would have sagged with relief, had the two thugs not been holding onto his arms. “I don’t want to be alone with you—” Ciel insisted, widening his eyes wider still.

“Well, I don’t want to air my laundry where anyone can see it. It has to be private. But I think your dorm isn’t the right place after all...” He fixed a shrewd eye on Ciel. “Who knows, the rumors about you having illegal weapons in there might be true.”

As if I’d want to, Ciel thought scathingly. His lips had pursed unbidden, and he had to work to smooth his face.

“I warned you,” Redmond whispered softly. “You should have recanted.”

“And said what?” Ciel bit out. He shook free of one of the older boys and half-turned to face Redmond. “I didn’t say anything to begin with!”

“Lies!” Redmond seethed. “You must have said something. No one could make an assumption that potent with just a veiled hint, like you seem to think you gave.” He stalked around the study, his hands clenched and his pretty face stiff with discomfort.

He looked sad for a moment. “I may have ears in the wall, but even a master can’t catch every word. That little girl...just didn’t hear the part where you talked to a teacher about something as scandalous as my love life.”

Ciel guffawed. He couldn’t help it. *Redmond thinks this is about his...romantic endeavors?* He almost collapsed with relief.

But Redmond didn’t share his views. He did, after all, like to be seen as a free agent—never tied down to any one admirer. And whatever he thought Ciel said had done something to jeopardize that. Yes. Things were starting to make sense. “Is something funny, Smile?”

“I didn’t say anything about your love life.” Ciel lifted his chin. “I don’t know anything about your private affairs, Redmond. I don’t know where this rumor started, but it wasn’t with me.” He wasn’t smiling. His face was pale, his lips set. He wanted Redmond to back off, after all.
But he’d let this much of the conversation be overheard by the other boys. He’d let half the student body see them together after Redmond’s brutal isolation. Redmond couldn’t afford to back off now without proof of Ciel’s innocence…

Ciel suddenly wondered if his ‘informant’ hadn’t embellished what they heard to make for a juicier story. Redmond certainly had the wrong idea.

“Trust in me, Redmond. Have I ever let you down before?” Ciel murmured softly. He raised one hand as though to reach for him.

Redmond faltered. He’d spent years cultivating a magnanimous reputation as a senior who favored tidy appearances as much as intellect. He was posh, trustworthy, and decidedly a ‘safe’ option for girls to consider.

He might be well known for being unattached, but Redmond didn’t have a playboy reputation. He’d be damned if he got one right before he left for university, and then employment and marriage. Ciel Phantomhive would pay. And then he’d make things right. A gentleman had to uphold his honor, after all.

“Ciel.” Redmond sighed. “You disappointed me.” He turned away. “But we will have you back, nonetheless. We can make amends. Start here, with these two…show them how sorry you are. And we’ll have the school back on our side in no time.”

_Does he honestly believe that?_ Ciel wondered. He swallowed hard.

One of the boys came forward, a lecherous look on his face.

_Overeager, _Ciel thought, _to carry out this punishment._

The other was hesitant and kept looking to Redmond for permission to continue. No, it was the first one that posed a threat. Four hands were on him in but a moment, rough and briskly pulling at his clothes.

Touching him.

He shied away, closing his eyes tight even as he tried to pull free.

Would it work?

Buttons came undone. The shy one was getting out a small container of paint and a brush. His face was ghastly white.

“Redmond—” Ciel breathed. “Please—” he couldn’t help it. He really sounded panicked then.

_What if they—_

The other one had him firmly by the pants. A hand loosened his belt.

Ciel bucked away, but he was held fast. He was shoved against the wall, putting his hands out in front of him to keep from colliding headfirst with the plaster. His hands were trapped beneath his own weight as two rough hands held him down by the shoulders.

The last two buttons tore out from under his belt, and he was wearing only a t-shirt and the school-issued trousers. Something faintly cool and scratchy was against his back. He struggled under the older boys, but he couldn’t get away.
He was facing the other way now. The boys could see his face, and he theirs. Now the hands were pulling at his belt and shoving his pants down while Redmond slowly extended a razor knife.

His smile was soft, gentle. “It’ll be all right, Ciel,” he murmured.

Lips against his neck, sucking too hard. The teeth grazed his skin.

Redmond took the knife to Ciel’s shirt. The fabric ripped.

One hand against his back now. And the other moved down, slowly.

*It won’t work. It’s in my pocket. How can I do it, when the remote is in my pocket?*

But it worked anyway. A half dozen lights flashed—and an ominous electric red light glowed eerily from the opposite side of the room, hidden among the potted greenery. Studio lights glowed again before going off a second time. This time catching four faces turned up in confused alarm.

Ciel Phantomhive smiled.

His seniors dropped everything and ran, their composure suddenly cracking at the thought of a counterattack. Even Redmond. Ciel had thought, dazedly, that he might have stayed behind. Tried to destroy the equipment or negotiate with Ciel. But he didn’t. He just…ran.

*Thank god for Demandols.* Ciel sank to the floor. *I couldn’t have thought of all that and got it done by myself.* He began to laugh slowly. Tears of relief started to brim in his eyes, but he brushed them away fiercely.

The door opened. Ciel froze. He hadn’t even gotten his shirt—

“Quite proficient, Mr. Phantomhive. Expertly carried out. I trust you’ve come to no harm?” The voice was a soft as Redmond’s had been, but filled with a different kind of emotion. Satisfaction, maybe.

Ciel sputtered, whipping around. He was utterly at a lack of words.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance in person, BitterRabbit.” Sebastian gave a mocking smile. “Demandols at your service.”

Ciel sank to the floor, uncertain all over again, who his allies and who his enemies were.

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Chapter End Notes

(*1) Line: a global online messaging service access (primarily) via cell phone or smart phone. You can make groups to contact many people at once, or you can have one on one conversation. It’s an app which started in Japan after the 2011 earthquake after people couldn’t contact each other because the phone lines were jammed.
XI. His Would-be-Master, Unconvinced

Chapter Summary

Trust does not always follow rescue. Especially not with Ciel Phantomhive. Ciel discovered that his online help came from none-other than the Contract-Pursuing Sebastian. How will he respond now that Sebastian has seen him in such a vulnerable position?

Chapter 11: His Would-be-Master, Unconvinced

(Ciel. Week Two.)

“Demandols was you?” Ciel felt his breathe leave him in a rush, and he was dizzier than ever. He could barely keep his gaze trained on Sebastian.

That concerned look did not waver, though Ciel was certain Sebastian must be feeling smug indeed. Outwardly, Sebastian showed anxiety—an emotion Ciel was nearly certain the teacher did not feel. “Mister Phantomhive, I still think it’s best to report this incident. Are you quite all right? Nothing...intimate happened?”

Ciel shook his head, mute.

He saw. He came in. I can’t believe he saw me like this… Ciel’s thoughts collided. If he saw, why is he asking that question? He’s making calculated move, saying just the thing to win my trust. It's. not. real. He began to shiver, and he pulled his arm away.

“I see. I’ll step out for a moment and get you a spare school jacket.” Sebastian’s voice was calm, soothing. His gaze did not waver, and he stood easily. “Calm yourself. No one will enter while I am away.”

Ciel closed his eyes. He couldn’t stop his hands and limbs from shaking. He hadn’t realized what kind of danger Redmond would put him in, and then this sudden betrayal by Sebastian? The more logical part of him insisted that it was not quite betrayal…not when Sebastian had helped him. He just acted under the pretense of being a concerned stranger, rather than a teacher.

Ciel was no more composed when Sebastian draped the white shirt over his shoulders. The jacket he handed to Ciel, and then he’d turned away, busying himself with other small chores. “Where did you get these?” Ciel asked numbly.

“There’s a supply for such occasions here at the school.” At Ciel’s disbelieving glare, he added, “When middle school students graduate, if they don’t want their uniform, they donate it back to the school. For foreign exchange students, or...accidents… with a student’s uniform before a replacement can be bought.”

“Oh.” That almost sounded logical. “So you didn’t sneak into my room?” Ciel bit his lip, surprised at his own accusation. Where had that come from?
Sebastian gave him a long, steady look. He opened his mouth as if to ask something, but then thought better of it.

“No, Mister Phantomhive. I did not.” His voice was quiet. “I took the liberty to bring some lavender and chamomile tea. There’s only paper cups here, but I think it best you stay away from the cafe, or your room for a bit. Rumors can be vicious.” He raised an eyebrow meaningfully.

Sebastian was up, stealthily taking film from the cameras, checking both photograph and video. He was silent as he handed the items of importance to Ciel. “These are yours.”

Ciel stood up shakily, moving much slower than he had when the older boys had threatened him. He was drained of energy, and his whole body felt like lead. Except for where the marker had touched his skin. That felt…like fire and ice, etched too deep…

“Where did you get these?” Ciel asked numbly.

He dressed mechanically, considering the pile of things. Ciel held out his hands, trembling at first, but then stiff and motionless as he set his jaw.

All of this unasked for evidence was certainly thorough, if baffling. As far as proof went, it would do. Really, the Polaroid alone would do. The old fashioned film, on the other hand might be a problem. Where could he get it developed without questions being asked? The video recording was a surprise, as well. Ciel had only set up the digital camera, it being the only equipment he had a working remote for.

“How did you get this.” Ciel demanded quietly. Unconsciously, he mirrored his father; he stood up straight, his shoulders back, and he tilted his chin just so.

Sebastian smiled. “Demandols told you he’d offer any assistance he could…I told you. It was not so difficult to procure these things. Far less trouble than finding some of the history lesson props…”

“I set them up here…and in the bathroom. I wasn’t sure which room they would use.”

Ciel looked up, his eyes sharp. That last part sounded…off. Calculated, or perhaps fictitious. But why would anyone intentionally make it out like they didn’t know something? “You set them up here? But I didn’t notice them when I came in…they’re hidden and everything, but there’s four pieces of equipment here that all four of us missed. How could anyone—”

“Mr. Phantomhive, you’re being hysterical. Do you prefer lavender and chamomile tea?” Sebastian put a steadying hand on Ciel’s shoulder.

Ciel took several deep breaths. “This doesn’t mean anything.” He said at last. “I don’t owe you anything.” He glared.

Sebastian handed him two cups with a bemused smile. “If you shall not choose, than perhaps you are in need of both…”

“I’m not a child!” Ciel burst out.

“I never said you were. And I don’t expect to be repaid for doing my duty. What did you expect a teacher to do, hmm? Wait and see if the little children work things out?” Sebastian’s voice held just a hint of mocking amusement.

Ciel gave a great sigh of frustration and sipped his tea. His cheeks felt warm, and there was a prickly feeling in his throat. He didn’t want to cry, so he’d best calm down and drink his tea.
After some minutes, he said, “That’s what most teachers do. Let us solve our own problems, unless it’s in the classroom.”

“Oh come now, that’s not entirely true. Student Discipline is fairly strict in this country…and there’s to be meetings with all of the parents soon. You all are hardly left to the wolves.”

Ciel closed his eyes. When he opened them again, Sebastian was looking at him coolly. He sipped again—lavender, he thought vaguely—and considered what to say.

“I was the victim here.” He said slowly, hating the words that bit at his tongue. “So I get to decide their punishment.” He raised his gaze slowly.

Sebastian’s eyes were lowered. His dark hair disguised most of his face. “Oh? And what do you propose?” He moved forward, energy radiating from his lithe form.

“Nothing.” Ciel said boldly.

Sebastian considered the boy. “As you wish.” The smile was gone, and then Sebastian was regarding him coldly. “But it is not what I would have expected of you.”

Ciel frowned. “You don’t know me, then.”

“I know you desire power above all things.” Sebastian countered. “And I could be that for you, Ciel Phantomhive…” he looked into Ciel’s eyes and did not falter. “With me as your dagger, I could see to it that you’re never hurt again...”

Ciel’s eyes flashed. “Stop it.”

Sebastian raised an eyebrow and continued. “Don’t you realize? I could punish anyone who dares lift a hand against you.”

“Don’t!” Ciel warned.

Sebastian paused, his smile calculated and calm. Instead of yielding, he pressed the advantage, coolly issuing logical suggestions that Ciel didn’t want to hear. “You have your evidence, if you change your mind. Don’t dispose of those clothes, either. And we should take a photo of your back...”

Ciel shied away. Heat rushed to his face, and his stomach seemed to fall to his feet. The dizziness returned, and with it, some achy panic. “Don’t touch me—” he hissed.

“I won’t. I trust you can remove your shirt without help. I will simply take the photos.” Sebastian’s tone was light and calm.

His heart hammered in his throat. All the same, he knew what Sebastian said was logical. “I…” he shook his head furiously, and in his frustration, felt tears brimming in his eyes. Angrily, he wiped them away with the back of his hand.

He took several more deep breaths, and then held them. Slowly, as the dizziness began to blacken his sight, he nodded. “All right.”

Sebastian nodded gravely. They sat in silence while Ciel sipped his tea. “I think we can take the photo in your room by now. You can relax afterwards, and there’s no chance anyone will interrupt.” Sebastian announced, and stood up. “I’ll bring you a light meal, afterwards Mr. Phantomhive.”
Ciel nodded dully. He stood up, and when he wavered on his feet, Sebastian took his arm and steadied him. The short walk was a blur.

Sebastian nodded and did as asked. “Very well, little lord…” his lips pulled upward in a mockery of a smile. “What would you like for dinner?”

“How?” Ciel snarled.

Sebastian cocked his head. “Something light then for an uneasy stomach.” He turned and walked away.

Ciel flopped onto his bed for a half hour. Finally, there was a knock on his door.

When he opened it, no one was there. Instead, he found a silver tray. He lifted the lid.

“How.” Ciel took the food inside, and closed the door. So Sebastian could cook...

Unbidden, he looked up at the window. For some reason, that spot pulled at his memory. But he had no special reason to think why that should be so. So his gaze drifted back to the silver tray, and he considered his options.

Seeing that Redmond wouldn’t be his partner in information gathering, he probably ought take whatever help he could get.

If he could use Sebastian instead of the other way around… but no. That was dangerous. An adult had more connections and more strength than he himself. Ciel decided to keep an eye on the teacher, and see what cards he revealed. If he just waited, Sebastian would hand him the information.

He would do that. Watch and wait until Sebastian made a fatal move.
XII. That Demon, Conferencing.

Chapter Summary

It's parent-teacher conferences in Ciel's school, and wouldn't you guess that the resident demon would manipulate things so that Sebastian has the chance to get informashun!! meet Ciel's dad.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 12 (Sebastian): That Demon, Conferencing

(Sebastian)

The following days were filled with Ciel’s quiet footsteps leading to and from his classroom, seeking out quiet students who saw things. He asked around, in vain, but few people seemed to realize what he was doing. I had to give the boy that: he could be subtle.

Ciel was trying to uncover who sold him out to Redmond. If only he thought to ask me, the silly child. But now was not the time to ponder the boy’s actions or my next step. I must fulfill my duties—or rather, Mr. Nakamura’s duties—as a homeroom teacher and participate in the parent-teacher conferences. Or rather, the parent-child and teacher conferences, as is customary in Japan. I can’t keep the satisfied smile from my features. ‘Subtle insult’ is a fine art. It was all too easy to play on Mr. Nakamura’s insecurities to ensure the Phantomhives and I were to be quite alone for this little meeting. I allowed myself a smile.

Voices sounded outside my door coming from the end of the corridor, if I didn’t miss my guess. Mr. Phantomhive and Ciel were talking. Vincent was sure of himself with his slightly condescending, authoritative way, and Ciel countered that with a surprisingly sweet tone, considering his true nature.

“You’re not nervous, are you?” Vincent asked.

“No, father.” A brief, calculated pause and then Ciel added, “Do you think it will take very long?”

It was a not-so-subtle-attempt at seeming young and innocent, but Vincent certainly bought it.

“No, not long at all, I’m sure.” Vincent knocked at the door.

I stood up from my seat. “Thank you for coming, Mister Phantomhive.” I smiled at him, bowing at the waist.

“Yes, of course…”

When they came to their seats, I sat too. It showed real restraint that I managed to keep from looming over them, exhorting demonic influence from every corner...

Vincent Phantomhive looked distracted, glancing at all parts of the room before his gaze finally landed on me. “You’re not Mister Nakamura,” he mused and leaned in to tousle Ciel’s hair. “Got a
new homeroom teacher, have you?” His expression and tone suggested teasing, but something in his pause recollected a warning. This father expected to know things. To have control, maybe?

Well. Perhaps the boy would like to be removed from his father’s chessboard…learn to play for himself, with me as his best piece.

“Sebastian Michaelis.” I performed another seated bow. “Recently I’ve come to teach world culture and history…” I trailed off and looked at the boy.

Ciel smiled thinly. “He just started after another teacher—”

“Mister Clark,” Vincent mumbled his interruption from behind two fingers. Apparently he’d memorized the course list and corresponding teachers.

“Shall we begin?” I asked softly. I rather noticed Ciel’s irritation at the tangent in conversation.

Vincent’s gaze wandered back to me. He’d been studying the leaflet of papers on his son, stacked and ready for filing. “Yes. Of course.”

“I’m certain you’re aware of our school’s system. The third year junior-high students will test into our high school at the end of third term. Providing your marks are high enough, I presume you are planning to continue your education?”

Vincent straightened. He nodded. “I…yes, we’ve decided to stay where we are.”

I looked at Ciel.

He blinked, surprised for some reason. “Er,” he said. “Yes. Yes, I want to continue.”

Vincent’s eyes flickered from one of us to the next. “So…if there are no problems, perhaps you could discuss Ciel’s current position and—”

I only smiled, but Vincent stopped talking to look at me closely. “What course are you interested in for your high school level curriculum? Humanities or maths and sciences?”

Ciel snuck a glance at his father. “Humanities…” For the record, he also looked rather startled that we had no disciplinary actions to discuss. “I was thinking of the Special Course, actually. With my core classes in English.”

Vincent frowned. “Didn’t you tell me that you were ‘quite fluent’ these days? What classes will you be taking in Japanese?”

Ciel fidgeted. “…we don’t pick our schedule until next year after we get our marks back. And I haven’t got any bad marks this term.” Ciel spoke in a quick, earnest voice. He seemed content to let his father think of him as an innocent child…when it suited him.

I nodded and politely pushed a bleached sheaf of papers. It was a complete summary of Ciel’s standing in each subject. The very brilliance of the paper surprised me, but there’s a nice contrast there with a fountain pen and copperplate lettering.

“…that’s…” Ciel looked amused. “My report card? Most people just print it, you know.”

Vincent looked as though he was thinking the same thing. “…good to see your average hasn’t slipped.”

I folded my arms. “Have you anything else to suggest to your son?”
Vincent smiled faintly. “No, he can take his time deciding. He’s a shy boy, you know…just give him time. He’ll decide on his own schedule.”

“Ah.”

“There’s no need to rush.” Vincent seemed keen on defending himself and his son’s position of laziness.

“You’re not trying to get me to choose a university now, are you?” Ciel demanded.

“If you’re not keen to discuss that, I suppose we could move on to your family life.” I smiled faintly. Ciel blanched, throwing a look at me and then his father. A charming boy. “What.”

“I’m sorry,” Vincent’s eyes were dangerous. Hmm. He thought to threaten me? “But really, Ciel is emotionally fine. We talk on weekends, don’t we? Is there any particular question you had in mind?”

“How are you feeling without a mother figure, Ciel?” I enjoyed the look of surprise Ciel cast me, and the annoyance Vincent displayed.

“That was a long time ago,” Ciel muttered. “We’re fine now. I have my aunt, my dad…I miss her, but…we’ll be fine.”

Vincent put one hand on his son’s knee, as though to guard him from me. “If you’re concerned about his staying here over winter break, it’s to help him study for the exams,” Vincent said evenly. “We agreed to have a proper family vacation come spring holiday.”

“Of course.” I smirked. Defensive, definitely.

“Now, Mr. Phantomhive, we do not have any disciplinary actions to discuss…Should such an occasion arise, you will be informed at that time. Thenceforth, the teachers will discuss whether or not it is to be placed on his permanent file. But have no fears, Mister Phantomhive.” I looked at him from under my lashes, paused.

“You said…” Ciel scowled and bit his lip, cutting off whatever he was to say.

“I think Ciel can stay out of trouble,” I finished. If he does what I want him to do, that is.

Vincent nodded curtly. “Yes, I understand. I am sure Ciel will do his best.”

Ciel nodded and stood up. He looked vaguely frightened for some reason. But I suppose it’s the thought of a demon punishing him. Or maybe the thought of ‘father dear’ finding out about his recent assault...Ciel did not like appearing weak.

I smirked.

“Have a good evening, Mister Phantomhive.”

And they stepped outside. Ciel sounded most agitated as he bid his father goodnight. It seemed they promised to talk in private afterward…alas, I could not go spy on them just yet…The last thing I needed was for Ciel to have reason to tell his father he thought I’m spying on him. He’s rather....sensitive about the whole Redmond confrontation.

No, best to not provide him with an opportunity to even mention me. Instead, I will impress the child in private. Convince him of my expertise.

All that’s left to do, then, is to bring him out of his comfortable web...and show him what a demon
can do.
oOoOoOo

Chapter End Notes

Cultural notes...

*Parent-teacher conferences. As Sebastian noted, it's "parent and child and teacher conference." (The Japanese is actually 3 person conference, 三者面談 / sanshamendan.) Teachers conference with 8 or more parents (from their homeroom class) a day for a week. The students have a week of half days (morning lessons), but the teachers are very busy.
XIII. Exploring Tokyo

Chapter Summary

Ciel finds himself being taken on a whirlwind tour of Tokyo as Sebastian tries to seduce (in a non-romantic/only-hintingly flirty way, guys ;) ) Ciel into making a contract.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13: That Demon, Exploring.
Second Weekend.

“Good evening, Phantomhive. If you're trying to avoid Redmond, you might want to stay away from the hallway. I'm afraid you're rather obvious loitering here.” Sebastian kept his voice quiet, but Ciel still nearly jumped. He looked up suspiciously at Sebastian, as though expecting him to do something tactless.

“I'm going to have dinner,” he said stiffly.

“No, you weren't,” Sebastian corrected with a prim gaze. “You saw who was there, and were about to turn away. But growing boys need their nourishment...

“How about a nice cup of hot cocoa in the study room?” Sebastian smiled his most charming smile.

“I'm not a child. I don't want cocoa.” Ciel pursed his lips.

“That's a shame because I do.” Sebastian chuckled. “I might be able to find something for you to eat as well...to repay you for helping me with the Internet the other day.” Sebastian turned without watching Ciel's response, certain Ciel would follow.

Ciel stared after him, debating his choices. He could follow Sebastian...and attempt to get information...or he could wait.

After all, going with Sebastian might further ostracize him. But Redmond had dropped a lot of the pressure he'd been holding over Ciel...so it wasn't much of an issue any longer. No one's here to see me go, anyway. Ciel thought to himself, and went after Sebastian.

“What kind of food?” he asked carefully. His stomach growled.

Sebastian chuckled; a dark sound that sent shivers down Ciel's neck. “Cocoa for now. We'll see...I was thinking...Well, why don't you come with me.”

Ciel frowned. Is he trying to sound ominous, or mysterious? he wondered.

Ciel hesitated before the entrance; reluctant to go into the same room Redmond had cornered him in. He peered through the door before going in, and even then he hesitated on the threshold. He noticed the heavy ceramic cups—stylish but not overly decorative. It was a far cry from the delicate Victorian style cups he imagined Sebastian would favor, even for hot chocolate.
It was this detail, perhaps, that drew him in. *Watching him in close proximity would be good. And aside from that...if I don't have the nerves to go in a room, how am I going to succeed my father? Being by his side, watching him...I could learn his habits. I wonder how much he knows about what's going on in the school? And if I can't make it past one door...I'm hardly good enough for the Phantomhive name.* Ciel chided himself.

“Make yourself comfortable. It will be just a moment.”

Ciel watched as Sebastian made hot cocoa. Rather than simply add hot water to a powdered mix, however, he added some melted chocolate to some hot milk, and stirred briskly.

“Go ahead.” Sebastian handed him a cup.

Ciel took it, lifted it up to catch the scent, and smiled faintly. “Nice.” He sipped, and considered his words. “...So. Why here?” He asked eventually.

“Would you prefer to go elsewhere?” Sebastian asked.

Ciel made no reply. He took another drink of cocoa.

“You handled things well enough, Mr. Phantomhive. They won’t try anything like that again. At least...not when you’re expecting it or have time to plan a counter attack.”

“Is that supposed to be comforting?” Ciel scoffed, feeling more annoyed than anything.

“You don’t seem afraid...are you in need of comforting, Ciel?” Sebastian smiled slowly.

Ciel couldn’t think of a coherent answer. He sipped his cocoa.

Sebastian cleared his throat. “As it turns out...I had a question about one of the *apuri*...”

“An app?” Ciel asked, his interest sharpening.

“You mentioned Jorudan the other time. What exactly is it for?”

“Oh, that's easy. *Jorudan*, is like the Google maps for trains in Japan.” On his phone, Ciel typed in the local station name as the start point and Shinjuku as the destination.

“So this tells me the distance, time, and fare to travel to downtown Tokyo. Hmm…” He seemed to consider something. He set down the dishes and took Ciel’s mug, leaving it on a tray. “Let me take you for a ride.”

Ciel quirked an eyebrow. “Um. No thank you. You said—”

“An afternoon.” Sebastian interrupted. “I’m afraid you can’t convince me to take no for an answer.”

And the next thing Ciel realized was that they were standing before the train station. He gaped, his young mind unable to explain the teleportation-like speed. “What?”

His eyes moved wildly from the ticket gates to the walking passengers, checking the station clock. No one seemed to find anything amiss, though, so he quickly shut his mouth.

Sebastian eyed him with a pleased expression. “This, Ciel Phantomhive,” he said dramatically, “is going to be the beginning...let’s test that website. Test if it costs the exact fare, and if the directions are correct.”
Ciel felt faint. He wondered how far he’d get if he sprinted for school…not very, he decided, not when Sebastian has decided you’re prey. A wave of cold dread washed over him and settled in his stomach.

“We buy tickets from the man in the booth?” Sebastian asked leisurely.

“No, there’s an automated machine.” Ciel pointed. “You probably ought to get an IC card or electronic pass. They’re more convenient, sir.”

Sebastian nodded absently, and five minutes later, they had boarded a train heading for Shinjuku. Ciel was beginning to wonder if he should phone the police.

“There aren’t enough seats.” Sebastian sounded surprised.

“It only takes twenty or so minutes.” Ciel put scorn into his voice, hoping Sebastian would stop talking to him. And that maybe he could sneak out the doors at the next station and double back… “It’s only something like fifteen kilometers…”

Sebastian blinked, and then took hold of Ciel’s shoulder, maneuvering him out of the way of a boarding passenger. “So we’re to stand.” Ciel thought Sebastian might look disgruntled. “Why do they sell more seats than they have available?”

“It’s not full.” Ciel protested. “Look at all the hanging surikawa.” He raked his head for the English to that, and came up blank. “Those hanging things. If everyone has one to hold onto, we’re fine.”

“Being shuttled off like cattle…” Sebastian definitely sounded miffed. Or maybe amused.

They stopped at the next station. Ciel moved a step toward the door—and found Sebastian took hold of his shoulders and turned him around smartly.

He waited the rest of the time in sullen silence.

“Do you want something to eat?” Sebastian asked once they’d arrived in Shinjuku.

“I need to study,” Ciel said, wondering if this counted as a date. And then was immediately mortified to be thinking it. “So you’ll be taking me back soon,” he added hastily, trying to act like this was his entire agenda.

“Fish and chips have been popular in London for an age. What is it you young people in Japan like?”

“Er…” said Ciel, unhelpfully.

Sebastian, undeterred by Ciel’s reaction, started walking.

Ciel looked after him, thinking that this just might be his chance to bolt.

“Why don’t we check out some shops? You can get a new suit or some casual clothes for after class…” he stumbled over his words, too busy to be careful since he was planning on escaping as soon as Sebastian headed for the dressing rooms.

Sebastian considered the street before them and raised an eyebrow. “When I asked the other teachers…they recommended sushi.”

Ciel scowled. “Sushi? That could take a while…”
“Ah, well isn’t that quaint. There’s a restaurant offering carry-out…octopus…in a cup.” Sebastian stopped in front of what looked to Ciel like a fast food restaurant. He appeared to be looking past the crowd at an advert.

Ciel sniffed. “Yes. Well. ‘Octopus in a cup’ is called takoyaki. I suppose we could try it.” (*1)

They lined up in silence. Ciel tugged at his school uniform self-consciously. Sebastian procured a wallet. Ciel’s heart pounded in his throat. He looked up at the dim lighting and down at the counter, and was amazed to find Sebastian was somehow feet ahead of him in line.

“Hey,” Ciel tugged at Sebastian’s sleeve. “You’re supposed to cue up from the back…” he muttered.

But when he looked around, sure he’d see disgruntled looks or even anger, the rest of the groups—couples, mostly, he noted with chagrin—didn’t seem to find anything out of the ordinary. They had a sort of…complacent look…that Ciel found immediately suspicious.

“What ever do you mean?” Sebastian said slyly, handing Ciel his fried food. “Enjoy.”

“....” Ciel took the cup hesitantly, and they began to walk. Sebastian casually swung his arm around the boy’s shoulder, steering him out of the way, and successfully detouring any plan for escape.

Ciel’s cheeks colored. Someone seeing them would either assume they were family (oh. hell.), or that it was some kind of compensated dating...(*2)

Ciel looked up into the night sky.

The cityscape was not so very different from the one Ciel was familiar with. There was perhaps more smog during the workweek, but the looming buildings were just as cold and distant as ever. Impressive, but not comfortable. Ciel found himself missing his usual haunts…the winding streets and cramped roads. It was so much less…corporal…than this.

Ciel stuffed the last battered ball into his mouth, chewing thoughtfully.

“You seem distracted,” Sebastian observed.

“...it’s nothing. The corporate world just reminds me of family is all,” Ciel muttered. “Or, of my dad at least.”

Sebastian *hmmed* absently, and touched Ciel’s cheek.

And when he blinked, the scene changed again.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) takoyaki are considered a kansai food. Kansai is the area of southern central Japan (Osaka, Hiroshima, Kyoto, etc). As Sebastian described it, it is a bit of boiled octopus tentacle chopped up and baked into a small round ball. It's basically bite sized battered food which is eaten with a sweet-and-salty sauce and topped with shavings of onion and mayonaise. I enjoy a similar recipe, but I use vegetarian fake meat or shitake mushrooms instead-- I fully recommend it. Google for an image.
(*2) Enjo-kōsai (援助交際) (shortened form enkō (援交)) means “compensated dating” and is when a person (typically a high school girl) is compensated via gifts to date an older person (typically a man.) It's not technically prostitution, but it comes very very close.

Thank you again for reading!
Chapter 14: What is your desire?

Sebastian was standing against the fading light, his face cast in shadow. But Ciel knew the smile when he saw it. It could almost be a mask, hiding some deeper intentions, or a clever distortion of them. Ciel swallowed, and attempted to look unimpressed.

“Is this what you want to see, little master? The entire city for your taking. Power that only a demon could place in your hands…” Sebastian’s heels clicked on the cement. “You would wear the victor’s crown in any game of your choosing.”

Ciel eyed Sebastian with mild curiosity. “Uh-huh.” He wondered if Sebastian was alluding to the yakuza(*1)...some non-native teachers seemed obsessed with them, despite dwindling numbers. And despite people like his dad.

He continued trying to ignore the horizon line, which had moved considerably since he’d noticed it last. It was distinctly lower than it would be if he were on the ground, where he was supposed to be. Not to mention, it was rather windier.

“Form a contract with me, and you will never have want for riches, power and influence.”

“I don’t think you can offer me anything that my family hasn’t already,” Ciel scoffed, turning up his nose.

Sebastian frowned, not expecting to be turned down so easily.

He changed his surprise into an advantage, though, and purred, “Ah, so you think such things can be passed down from father to son.” His teeth glinted in the low light. “Your father cannot give you everything. You hinted at it yourself...you suggested as much on that day...” he leaned in close, his gloved hands a breath away from Ciel’s cheeks. “...your father does not trust you. And so he could not give you everything he has.”

Sebastian’s eyes were luminous in the sunset, reflecting a violent red.

“And how do you propose to give me anything?” The words tumbled out of his lips, less cross than he intended.

“I am a spirit.” Sebastian’s tongue was just a touch of red against the shadow of his mouth.

Ciel laughed outright.

“And a demon,” Sebastian said carefully.
Ciel gaped. “You’re joking.” Ciel started looking more seriously for a way out. Where were the police when you needed them? Or even a particularly talkative salesperson would do. Anything to distract Sebastian from him long enough for Ciel to slip away.

Sebastian’s gaze was steady. “I am not.”

It dawned on Ciel then, that Sebastian was not tipping his cards. He was flashing them quite on purpose.

*If this is a plot,* he thought, distracted, *I don’t know what the stakes are. I don’t know what game we’re playing.* Ciel started to move out of Sebastian’s direct line of sight. He walked toward the building’s edge, glanced down, and thought hard and fast.

Sebastian Michaelis had arranged for Edgar Redmond to be caught at his own game. He procured things at speed. He learned…if he was learning…monstrously fast. *Is he…could he really…* Ciel thought.

Sebastian caught Ciel’s hand as he moved away, gently restraining him. His hand was hot—burning.

Ciel yelped in surprise.

But when he looked at his hand, there was no mark of a burn…only a strange numbness. He stared.

“I would have you, Ciel Phantomhive. Join me in a Contract, and I shall give you all the power you want.”

Ciel opened and closed his fist. His expression flickered between confused and curious. “There’s a trick,” he muttered, as though he hadn’t heard. Ciel scoffed. His irritation had returned, and he stopped looking like a fragile boy. He leaned over the balcony. “There’s a trick to this. I haven’t figured it out yet, maybe, but I know there’s a trick to this.”

The way Sebastian stood, near looming over Ciel, had a hint of malice, and no small amount of greed. Sebastian was tall, slender, and darkly amused. Against the light, his features were blurred and cast in shadow. It was as though he had no true form at all. Ciel looked on at his smile, transfixed as Sebastian began to speak.

“I could give you the secrets of life, and death.” Sebastian arched an eyebrow. “You could stay young and healthy for an eternity.”

Then something of the shock of the situation fell away. Ciel shook his head and snorted again. “I won’t even spend time in private with you if you say obvious lies like *that.*” He made a face.

Silence stretched between them. Sebastian looked vaguely annoyed for a second, but his face was quickly a smooth mask again. Ciel wondered then if he saw anything at all…or just imagined it.

“If you were to be my servant...” Ciel said slowly, making sure not to agree just yet. He wasn’t stupid enough to bargain away his life or worse without knowing more details.

Sebastian’s eyes flashed a burning red once more. He continued smiling, if that’s what you could call the subtle tilt of lips.

Ciel’s heart was in his mouth. “Don’t lie to me. Don’t betray me. Do not do anything that goes against my plans.” He looked from Sebastian to the cityscape, and a blush stained his cheeks. He wanted to grin all the sudden now he was in on the joke, but that lack of decorum would not speak
well of him.

Sebastian frowned, and then smiled slyly. His eyes glittered. “You want knowledge and power, then. I could tell you your friends, teachers and parents’ secrets, Mr. Phantomhive. Your plans would be greatly improved by such knowledge.”

Ciel felt his interest pique, but kept his expression carefully wary. He had the feeling that if he showed a hint of greed, a hint of interest, it would be like admitting a fatal weakness to a predator.

Sebastian’s hands were usually still. By his side or calmly clasped, as though he were at attention. But now, he leaned in again. While they were alone, Sebastian would use subtle gestures, soft movements, and other ploys to get close. It was as though he gained something…

Some kind of…pleasure? Power? Ciel wondered. From being so close.

“How could you know these things?” Ciel demanded. “I won’t be tricked into making a bargain. I have too much to lose. Now take me home, or I’ll never—do—never make a contract with you.” Ciel faltered, but he didn’t need a contract to boss anyone around.

Sebastian’s composure slipped. At first he only chuckled. Then his eyes closed, and he laughed. That smile— wilder and wider than before—split his face as he laughed, and soon he was bent over, clutching at his stomach.

Ciel stared, surprised, uncomfortable, and a little shocked.

Then Sebastian stood up straighter. He let his features fall into blank acceptance, and nodded once. “As you wish, my lord.”

Ciel turned imperiously on his heel, determined not to show his confusion. “Then get me off this building. We need to get back, or the cafeteria will close—”

Sebastian reached down, and pulled Ciel into his arms.

When they leapt off the building, Ciel was sure he had made a terrible mistake. However, the scenery flashed by, and before he knew it, they were running on a train. Running atop it, racing across the scenery faster than humanly possible. There was a new chill to the air, and a desperate beating in his chest that matched the pressure of the wind. They really were moving.

What trick could allow for this inhuman speed? Thoroughly spooked, Ciel said nothing. Maybe it’s not real. Maybe this is a hallucination…he didn’t like that thought. Losing control of his perception would be a quick way to lose his “innocent schoolboy” reputation. If it was still there at all, after Redmond’s rumor mill.

He swallowed and waited, torn between impatience and awe, for the journey to end. He turned his face against the biting wind, and closed his eyes, counting the beats of his heart.

Once properly on the school grounds, Ciel felt faint. He clutched at Sebastian’s arm, weaving backwards. He was about to test his footing, look at his electronic pass or something to tell him it’d been real, when someone cleared his throat in the dark.
“It is past curfew, Mr. Phantomhive,” the voice rang out dolefully.

Ciel’s untrusting eyes flashed toward it in the dark, and his eyes immediately stung. He wanted to look away, wanted to sit down. It was as though his few minutes in Sebastian’s grasp had left him weaker, and his eyes certainly sorer.

But that soon passed, and he could discern the figure frowning before them. Vice Principal Agares swung his flashlight to the pair of them.

Ciel privately thought that a lantern would look more appropriate, considering the old fashioned clothes the Vice Principal preferred. He swayed as he tried to distance himself from Sebastian.

Mr. Agares continued. “You are quite out of bounds. We will have to discuss this matter of student discipline among the teachers.”

Sebastian offered a tiny, formal bow. He looked as though he had several things to say at once, but could not decide on what he wanted to say first.

Agares turned his gaze to Sebastian, then. “I take it you found him wandering around the grounds?”

Sebastian nodded. “I’m afraid so.” He merely smiled when Ciel turned to glare at him, colorful protests already on his lips. But he seemed to think better of it; instead he fell back on his role as an inconspicuous Junior High student.

“I was only trying to get some fresh air…cool air helps my asthma.” Ciel chewed his lip.

Sebastian bent down, his eyes shining in amusement. “That’s a rather obvious excuse, don’t you think?” He murmured. “As his assistant-homeroom-teacher, I will escort him to the dorms…”

The Vice Principal nodded gravely. “I will go record the offense.”

Safely out of hearing range, they headed back to the dormitory. Annoyance and anger kept Ciel’s steps brisk as he pondered the best course of revenge.

Oh, yes. Sebastian Michaelis, you should know better than to mess with me. Innocent reputation or not, Ciel Phantomhive knew how to get even.

…but this was the first time he tried anything against an adult… No matter, he thought. He wants something from me. I’ll use it against him, and he’ll fall so hard…

He tried to forget his teacher’s role in blackmailing Redmond. He tried to ignore that inhuman speed, and the strange events that always seemed to follow Sebastian Michaelis.

“Have a good evening, Ciel.” Sebastian’s face was calm, but humor danced behind his eyes. “You’ll find a boxed-lunch on your desk. Eat it…and I’ll treat you to warm, French-style foods next time.”

“There won’t be a next time,” Ciel sniffed. “Good night, Professor Michaelis.” He sincerely doubted Sebastian would have the ability to sneak into his room now. There were too many people watching, and teachers stood out.

Sebastian smiled, mysterious as ever. He watched Ciel enter the dorm, and when Ciel turned to look back, he was already gone.

And sure enough, when Ciel flung the door open—perhaps letting it slam shut a bit too loudly, but he was annoyed—there was a lunch set on his desk, a glass and bottle of something suspiciously
wine-looking, and a note in Sebastian’s antiquated hand.

*Enjoy the evening meal, Ciel. I will collect the dishes when you have finished.*

Ciel crumpled the note and threw it in the bin.

Demons and teachers be damned.

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Chapter End Notes

*(1) a secret organization of criminals in Japan that is similar to the Mafia (This definition is from Oxford American dictionary online).

As some of you may know, feedback to fanfic authors is really valuable. We drink it like tea and get energized...!! So, please do drop a review.
Chapter Summary

Ciel now knows what Sebastian is, but who can he tell? Worse, he was seen returning after curfew by the vice-principal Agares. Now his peers gossip about Ciel's impending punishment...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 15: Rumors

(Ciel. Third Week)

Ciel couldn’t stay in his room any longer. He’d already left the cafeteria without breakfast twenty minutes before, once he realized what the morning’s topic was.

The number of eyes fixed on him just before homeroom should have warned him, before he even caught some of what they were saying.

“—a Junior High student in the 3-5—”

“—in trouble with Mr. Michaelis—”

“Oh, I know him! He’s the boy who—”

It turned out that some student had been standing outside of the Teacher’s Office during the student discipline (*1)) meeting. Ciel felt his stomach flip. Junior High students don’t usually garner so much attention. Perhaps it was his reputation… Ciel drew out his chair and sat, trying not to look dejected.

“They held a meeting? What did he do? It must have been bad—”

“I heard there was a teacher with him…”

“That was Sebastian,” Undertaker chuckled, startling the students. He seemed to appear whenever least expected, despite his long silver hair and bony fingers poking into everything. He managed to brush between Ciel and his surrounding year mates, senior classmen, and other potential customers. Needless to say, this frustrated everyone.

“But look so depressed; it’s just a detention.” Bluer leaned in close, putting his formidable height between Ciel and most of the onlookers. With Bluer blocking Ciel from view, Ciel could relax a little. When he turned his guarded gaze to Ciel, he offered a tiny smile. “You never get into trouble,” he soothed. “Don’t worry about it so much…”

Ciel tried to hide his trembling hand; suddenly certain Sebastian was going to do something terrible. I hope it’ll be quick. I hope that Sebastian isn’t a demon after all... Thoroughly miserable, he missed whatever other words of sympathy the others had to say.

“By the way, are you coming to the Fencing club meeting today? Redmond was asking for you,”
Bluer asked casually. He handed Ciel a banana. “You ought to eat something for breakfast, you know.”

Ciel ducked his head, not wanting his irritation to show to Bluer. It wouldn’t do for his senior classmate to realize exactly how little he wanted to hear that. His relationship with Redmond was strained, and Ciel remained uncertain how much any of the upperclassmen had put together. There were certainly clues to a falling out, but neither student had made anything clear. Ciel intended it to stay that way.

“I’m fine,” he mumbled. “Not hungry.”

“Eat,” Bluer insisted.

A strange, high-pitched cackle interrupted their argument. Both boys turned to see what made the offending noise.

“Ohhh, we can’t have that, Mister Phantomhive...” the Undertaker peered at Ciel from under his long hair. Ciel caught a glimpse of yellow-green eyes. “You have to eat something, or that Sebastian just might...” too amused to continue, he dissolved into a snickering mess. Apparently he was unable to make whatever-Sebastian-might-be-doing more clear.

“You know Sebastian.” Ciel frowned. Something tickled the edge of his memory...like he knew something and forgot. So absorbed by this incongruent information, he didn’t bother trying to disguise his suspicion. He frowned outright, demanding more information rather than showing anxiety like his role demanded.

“Know Sebastian...” Undertaker snickered. “Mm. Yes, I suppose.” His smile looked more like a leer. “But wasn’t it you who told me his name?”

Bluer looked between the two of them, confused and a little annoyed at the interruption. But more eyes than Bluer’s and Undertaker watched him. The silence that had overcome the cafeteria gave Ciel an inkling of something he’d rather not think on too much. Perhaps his persona was not as innocent and forgettable as he had thought...

“Excuse me, sir, but Professor Michaelis is a teacher at the school, and I don’t think he would behave in a way that should cause anyone concern,” Bluer decided to inform his employer. He placed a tray before Ciel. “French Toast with maple filling, fresh whipped cream on the side.” He paused for effect and added, “on the house,” with a glance askew at Undertaker.

Undertaker only smiled. “Michaelis may be a teacher here, but I know his kind...” Here, several non-native speakers blinked alongside Bluer. Ciel glared, and then attempted to correct this lapse in character by pouting.

“He’s...” Undertaker flashed a look of purest amusement at Ciel. “...an unreliable narrator...who might just imagine himself as another Humbert, wouldn’t you say?”

The students all exchanged glances, suitably confused at this enigmatic expression.

“In other words,” Undertaker continued, pushing the plate of toast at Ciel, “he needs you to act first. So if you are good,” Undertaker folded his bony hands on the table, “and don’t push him, Ciel Phantomhive...it would be all right.” He coughed. “But that might be impossible for you. So maybe you should request the detention to be rescheduled. Get another teacher to handle it.”

Ciel squirmed, tapping his fork gently into the fresh whipped cream. The conversation was not going where he wanted it. Was Undertaker hinting that he was like Lolita? He made a face. More
importantly, Undertaker seemed to be giving an awful lot of free advice. That was unlike him, and Ciel was keenly aware of how this might turn into a ‘you owe me’ situation.

“I'm afraid I don’t see your point,” Bluer said in a this is final sort of way. “Ciel has ever been the model of gentlemanly behavior.” Then he decided to retreat back behind the counter at that, and a number of students hastily turned away from Ciel then.

“Give us a show then, Ciel. Show us exactly how it’s done,” Undertaker called blithely. The bell rang, announcing the beginning of the morning teacher meeting. Ten minutes remained before class began.

“Chin up.” Bluer called from his place at the counter. “If anyone asks, just remind them...”

“That a gentleman’s business is his own affair?” Ciel confirmed quietly.

“Quite right.” He smiled at the Undertaker. “Thank you for the breakfast.”

Whether he noticed the dismissal or not, Undertaker made no sign. He was already fading into the back.

Ciel swallowed, and closed his eyes. It would be a long day.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Student Discipline: in case you wanted to know. Student discipline is decided privately between the homeroom teacher (tannin), the offending party, the head of the teachers if necessary (he's called vice-principal in English, but his title is 教徒、 literally "head of the teachers."), and one of the teachers unlucky enough to have been roped into being the "student discipline teacher." (Changes every year.) Usually, you hear about minor "offenses" like, "he was caught riding double" (er, 2 people on one bike.)
XVI. His Would-be-Master, in Trouble

Chapter Summary

Ciel is in trouble for breaking curfew...and it's time for Sebastian to meter out the punishment.

Chapter Notes

This is the Teen version. If you don’t want to read about Sebastian being sexy punishing Ciel in some description, I recommend you read the other version (which has less description.) For those of you looking for lemons, please note that neither version is graphic or could be rated mature, I believe.

His Would-be-Master, in Trouble (Rated Teen version)
(Sebastian)

I raised my hand to the final student's door and rapped sharply. “There is a dorm meeting, Mr. McMillan. Your presence is required.”

The door opened, and McMillan looked at me with wide eyes. “O-oh. Yes, sir.” He turned tail and fled, sparing only a glance over his shoulder at me. Such a compliant boy...

Back in the lounge, the students gathered in small clusters around the TV, in the sofas and standing by either exits. There was a nervous tension in the air, while students gossiped in hushed whispers.

Ciel sat in an overlarge armchair, refusing to stand in front of his peers as I instructed. Outwardly calm, he looked at me as one watches a player about to make an opening move.

I drew their eyes back to me with a small gesture. “As I told the resident assistants, there has been a serious breach of the rules. You all know what time curfew is by now. And you are all old enough to understand why we have such strict rules in place.” I swept my gaze around the students, meeting as many eyes as dared look up.

“Your safety.” They shuffled as the rebuke reverberated in the small space. “Yes, you need to stay
inside after curfew so that no harm comes to you. Junior High third year students have been allowed in the dormitories only with the understanding that you will behave as your upperclassmen do,” I said.

Ciel straightened. He glanced up at me with annoyance that he couldn’t wholly disguise. He seemed to think that his “innocent student” act fools everyone, but there are more than a few students staring at him askance, their mouths turned down in petulant scowls.

“Unfortunately, a Junior High School student was out of his dormitory two nights ago.” All students turned their collective gaze on Ciel, rumors having been circulating ever since that time. I refused to let myself smile, tempting though it was.

Ciel glared at me with such hate, how could I not be amused?

“Sir, what are you going to…?” Redmond began to ask, but didn’t dare to finish. Funny that it should be him to ask. Ciel did not seem to think so, though. He eyed the boy suspiciously for a heartbeat before turning his attention back on me.

I smiled then; it would be good to see him recognize how close he came to expulsion. “Ciel Phantomhive. Come with me. I must administer your punishment.” The words rolled off my tongue, rich as honey and as smooth too. I could taste the same cloying sort of panic Ciel exhibited before at Redmond’s rough treatment. It would only get better.

Ciel lost what little color remained in his cheeks. When he stood, he wavered, as though he might fall back down. I wondered what he was imagining…Displaying the compassion and care a teacher of my rank should, I took his elbow and caught him before he could fall.

There was a shock of emotion not unlike desire. I wondered if my perception of Ciel would change when we entered a contract; would it be as balanced? As sweet? Or would the instant we formed a demonic pact change his soul? It could gain a hidden flavor of the melancholy and deep despair of the damned. Or perhaps he would only grow more arrogant.

“Sir, what is the punishment?” Another student, Bluer, this time, dared to intervene.

After a pause, I glanced away from my prize. “Simply detention, Bluer. If you would, Phantomhive, the sooner we begin, the sooner you can get to bed. And stay there this time, I trust.”

Ciel tried to look as though he wasn’t relying on me to remain standing. He removed his hand and took a step forward. “Where will it take place?” he asked quietly, his cheeks still tinged pink.

“Never mind that...” I turned him in the proper direction. Two sets of footsteps sounded ominously. Careful to select a study room close to where the other students still lingered, I opened a door. All the better for them to hear, I thought.

They would hear, of course. But then, they might hear different things. A demon’s mere presence can confuse the masses. What one man swears is hellfire-and-brimstone-induced torture, another might have heard as the sweet cries of lovers, passionately tasting one another… Keeping a direct line of sight and firm control over one’s imagination would prevent some humans from being fooled, and so…

I motioned Ciel in and shut the door. For a moment, I leaned against it, allowing myself a small smile at this triumph.

“So...” I murmured. “I wonder what this will do to your reputation...? You’re not supposed to be caught, are you?”
Ciel swallowed, and only a lifetime of social-training kept him from fidgeting, from glancing wildly around the room. That father of his has served an excellent example, it would seem. “Am I to write lines, sir?” He asked sullenly.

Ah. Not quite the master of his emotions, is he?

“No.” I purred. I took several steps closer, joining Ciel.

“You can’t touch me.” Ciel’s chin was raised, and there was no quaver in his voice. His posture screamed defiance. But one foot drew back even so. He very nearly retreated…but then the moment passed, and he held his ground.

“You really think I can’t, don’t you, little Ciel.” The smile was gone, and I leaned in. My hair fell before my eyes and cheeks, disguising my face and accenting a few sharper lines. He would remember what I was. I wanted him to.

Ciel stopped breathing. His fingers clenched.

“But, alas, you refused to form a contract before.” Finally, I allow myself to smile again, and looked up to meet his eyes. They were very wide…so much so that I vowed to make them mine. “If you don’t make a binding contract, you have no control over me. I could make your life hell.”

“I’ll scream.” His lower lip trembled, and I reached out to touch it. He jerked away before I could.

I laughed quietly. “If you scream over a little spanking, I’m sure your classmates might actually start to believe that you really are only a Junior High student.”

Ciel’s brow furrowed. “What do you mean by that?”

“You think you’ve got them fooled into believing that you are a sweet innocent.” I shook my head. “You think you’ve escaped your family’s reputation for being, hmm… not quite on the wrong side of the law.” I removed my white gloves.

Ciel couldn’t keep his eyes off me. He seemed torn between anger and fear.

“Let me tell you, Ciel.” I put my hands against his wrists, and gently moved him over a chair. “You haven’t fooled anyone.”

Ciel wavered then. He glanced from the door to the rest of the room, checking the windows (locked) and looking for anything that might help him. Must have been quite an upbringing, if he’s really thinking of escaping. I was faster though.

The boy struggled under my hands, refusing to bend easily. He was quiet, though. So quiet. Humans and their pride…it made me laugh again.

“What’s so funny?” he demanded. “Let go of me!” he hissed. “You’ll—”

“I’ll be sorry?” I mocked. “Do you really think so?” Would he remain quiet? Or would he cry out at every touch?

I reached his belt with one hand, unfastened it, and with the other, removed his jacket, leaving him with loose trousers and a stiff white shirt. Through the thin fabric, I could see where he’d scrubbed his skin raw where the marker touched, and I wondered at this boy.

I unfastened the button on his trousers, and Ciel gave a low cry. His anger was equal to his sense of
betrayal—I, as myself and as the assumed personality Demandols—flooded my senses. It was a delicious taste, and I closed my eyes to enjoy it.

“It will be over in a few seconds.”

I raised my hand, ready to administer the strike.

“Wait,” Ciel began, ready to bargain at last.

“Yes?” I watched him carefully.

“You can’t do this.”

“We’ve been over this already, Ciel…” I snorted disdainfully. “You have two choices. Give me your word, or live with the consequences I make for you.”

“Why would I contract anything that hurts me?!” Ciel demanded, and I decided he wasn’t ready to listen.

“It won’t hurt…much.” I smiled, and drew my hand back.

Smack.

He leaned away from me as I struck him. It was still the soft, tender flesh of a child…he had not known much hardship. He did not cry out though, and this surprised me.

I pulled my hand back again, and repeated the gesture several times before Ciel began to squirm.

“Professor…”

The skin under my hand was turning red. His heart beat rapidly, and his breathing came in shallow breathes. It was a significant change.

“We’re almost finished, Ciel,” I murmured close to his ear. He jerked at the touch of my hair so close to his neck, and I saw for an instant how panicked he was. “But don’t you think…?”

I struck him again.

“…that it would be so much simpler to order me not to touch you? To order me to protect you against all harm?”

Ciel breathed in. “Stop it,” he hissed.

One more time, hard against his upper thighs now. He jerked in surprise.

“You can’t,” he said loudly, and he struggled against me, wriggling away and near snarling.

“Once more for you to remember the lesson.” I smiled to myself. “Repeat after me, Ciel…”

He clenched his jaw shut stubbornly.

“I will not be caught.” And with that, I rapped the wood next to him. It sounded like thunder to the poor, confused boy—this thought amused me greatly—and his whole body flinched. I released him.

He went limp against the wood. His knees buckled.

He tensed as I rubbed in a salve, and tried to look at me over his shoulder. He did not trust me, it seemed. Perhaps pain is a lesson this young thing will understand.

I would have preferred he purred in my hands at the administrations, or arched into the light massage I ran up his back, but alas. He is not a kitten. Instead, the boy tensed further still, and finally got away with one violent jerk.

He pulled up his trousers and refastened his belt buckle.

I waited a moment before moving back to a precise place in the room. Then I walked forward…and handed him a roll of parchment. He stared at in dull surprise.

“Is this your…contract?” he asked stupidly.

“Would you agree if it were put in words?” I raised an eyebrow elegantly.

“No,” he spat.

“Then write your lines. ‘I will not break curfew. I will follow school rules.’ You may leave when you’ve written in a hundred times.”

Ciel stared, resentment mingling with a dozen other emotions. “You’re...”

“Evil? Wicked?” I shook my head. “I hardly think any of my actions have merited that praise. Do your lines Ciel, and remember...”

When he sat with the parchment, I leaned in front of him. “I could be yours.”

He swallowed.

“Yours alone. I am capable of being all you ever needed in this world, Ciel Phantomhive. Promise me one thing…and history will be remade.” His history, that is.

“Once these lines are finished, I’m out of here,” Ciel snapped. “Leave your biblical tripe for someone who believes you.”

He was lying. He did believe me.

…but what is it that makes Ciel so hesitant to take my mark?

The days dwindle, and I am not pleased. But a challenge is a challenge…and I would win the greatest prize of all.
Chapter Summary

Sebastian dealt the punishment to Ciel in the privacy of the dormitory, but rumors now plague him rather than the young student. Will Sebastian's pursuit be thwarted by bureaucratic rulings against corporal punishment, or can he fast talk himself out of the situation?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 17: That Teacher, In Trouble

(Sebastian)

My phone rang again. I ignored it resolutely, and shoved it to the bottom of my bag. When a tall shadow fell through the glass door, Undertaker’s inane humming stopped.

I put the finishing touches of cream on one of the petite cakes, and looked up in time to see the Vice Principal, Mr. Agares, crash through the door. He landed sprawled over two ornate chairs.

Undertaker snickered and helped the man up. “Vice Principal,” Undertaker crooned. “What brings you here? Have any jokes to share…?”

I set my tools aside, and considered my employer.

“Mr. Michaelis, I’m afraid you really must come back to school. Your absence is fanning the rumors.”

I raised one eyebrow. “Rumors?”

Undertaker leaned in causally. “Do tell.”

Agares sighed, an expression of pained exasperation.

“People are saying that you laid a hand on a Junior High School student. Members of the PTA, teachers and students have all been gossiping for the past 24 hours.” His voice was neutral, stoic even. The only sign of his displeasure was his stern grip on his own cell phone, which also flashed and buzzed with unnecessary noise.

Though no one had mentioned the detention until now, the teachers had apparently gleaned information from the student body. The children were want to gossip, after all, so it seemed that word had finally caught up with the staff. Not to mention a few PTA members…who also seemed to have my phone number.

I suspected Phantomhive.
“I’m afraid there is nothing to those rumours. It was only a detention, Vice Principal.” I pick up a knife and began cutting the cakes into individual pieces. “...Also, class has finished for the day. Please allow me to indulge in my hobby.”

“You are a professor at our school. You must take responsibility for your actions!” Agares held his phone before him, as if demanding I look at the amount of trouble it was causing.

Undertaker looked between us, bemused. “Maybe you should apologize.” He waved one hand vaguely, displaying long black nails. “Write a letter of resignation on a sheet and hang it in the school gate?”

“There’s no need to resign.” I murmured, nonchalant as I removed the apron. “But, yes, of course, I will return to school straight away.”

So that I can find out who leaked information to the News reporters and PTA. Ciel may think he has the upper hand, or perhaps the sympathy of the staff and teachers, but I have plans. “We can’t have little Phantomhive and the mass media making a story out of that…” I met Agares’s gaze.

“What do you mean,” Agares’s tone was carefully measured.

“Phantomhive obviously believes he can get away with such a blatant lie. You may check the… security cameras, yes?”

After all, what would be the harm in checking the recordings? I’d already altered the record. The only remaining evidence of the events that night was what I wanted them to see—that is, the part when I had him sit and write lines. It amused me that I could practice my new computer technology and eliminate any possible incriminating evidence.

Ah, but what Ciel would think, if he knew his tutelage had provided me with the seeds to his own downfall?

I smiled pleasantly.

Agares seemed to have difficulties swallowing. He coughed shallowly. “Professor,” he whined. “You can’t deny what half the school—”

“Half the school seems to be under the impression that a young Ciel Phantomhive has links with the underworld. They are dreadfully curious about anything that comes out of his mouth—even if it is blatantly false.”

“You deny all charges, then,” Agares stated.

“Of course,” I smiled politely.

“That won’t keep the media out of this. This is a disaster for the school—”

“I don’t think today is such a slow news day as that, sir.”

Undertaker pulled out a chair for Agares. “Have a seat, Vice Principal. I can serve you a dead gorgeous cup of coffee...we even have skull cakes left…”

Agares ignored him and stared at me. “You’re taking this too lightly.”

“I see.” I pursed my lips, and moved to wash my hands. “Shall we return to school so I can fulfill my responsibilities? No one mentioned anything before…” I offered a frown, as though confused by
why no one thought to stop me before I left the school only an hour before. “Undertaker, please excuse me. I have business to attend, it seems.”

“No at all.” Undertaker grinned. “I’ll have someone watch shop, I think. I’ll come with you both… check up on the school café and all.”

“Look who we have here,” I smiled down at the child. He’s either brave or foolish to confront me on his own. There we were under the shade of a tree outside the school building.

Ciel glared at me balefully, looking utterly delectable in his irritation. “You should have been fired, you know, for causing such a scandal. This story should have been on every News channel, and reporters should rightly be hounding your every footstep.” Ciel seemed to be sulking because these things were not happening. “Who did you bribe to keep out of the lime light?”

“No one.” I smiled.

“So you’re telling me you just happened to get off scot-free without any work on your part.” Disbelief colored the boy’s statement.

“I hardly call being lectured by the Vice Principal and head Junior High teacher getting off scot-free.” I tapped my fingers.

Ciel scoffed. Who would have thought such a tiny thing could make so much noise. “I don’t believe it.”

“Will you be telling Daddy then?” I asked nonchalantly. There were a few students milling about, all of them curious what we could possibly have to say to each other.

Ciel’s mouth opened. Then closed. “You’re not endearing yourself to me, you know.” Those blue eyes of his narrowed. He must be planning something...or perhaps not. He might just be annoyed.

“And having your name spouted on every channel would be amusing, then?”

“I’m a minor! They would have kept my name out of it.” Stubborn to the last, Ciel even argued with dignity. “Besides, that shouldn’t have happened to begin with. I should have told everyone you abducted me.” He crossed his arms.

“Ciel, have some sensitivity. There was a case very like that...some reporter abducted a child today, didn’t you hear?” Honey coated my words. I wonder if he can read the threat between the lines.

“Stop making a fuss about a detention.”

“A detention.” Ciel seethed. “You did that. The child--”

“What is this nonsense? I won’t allow a student to accuse a staff member of such heinous crimes.”

Ciel was outraged. He barely managed to reign in his anger, but kicked the ground—most childishly, I might add. Then he screwed his face into an angelic smile, and softened his gaze to look at me. “I know what you are,” he said, just as sweetly. “I can reveal you, and…and then you’ll just have to leave. You couldn’t stay.”

He doesn’t know what he’s talking about it, and feared he might be wrong. There’s a certain lack of substance to his threat.

“I know you had something to do with that newsie, and the head teacher’s own little scandal. You
set people up,” Ciel continued.

I considered him. “You know something of what I can do. Don’t you think it would be better to influence me, rather than run me off?” I put two fingers under his chin.

“Not a chance.” Ciel scowled.

“Someone else here is pulling the strings, Ciel. Someone has put you off me...” I brushed Ciel’s fringe out of his eyes. “Your memory is suspect.”

“You’re telling me I misremembered my own detention?”

He practically shook with anger.

“We met twice before that day in homeroom. You named me, Ciel Phantomhive. Undertaker told you as much...”

Ciel was quiet. My words seemed to have struck a note in him, and some of the anger fell away. He has been too upset, too angry. It is not good for a Phantomhive to ignore intrigue around him, and my words have shaken him. He has missed a plot right under his nose.

“I would remember that,” he said thickly, suspiciously.

“There is magic involved,” I reminded him. “Demon’s work...or a reaper’s? But no. That is unlikely.” My own thoughts spun around the idea.

But I wasn’t allowed any time to explore that idea. The wind rustled the leaves, and I have the sense again that someone or something had already set its gaze on Ciel. I turned to look around, but rather than a subtle intruder, I was granted the sight of the vice principal stubbing his toe on a rock. He manages to kick the thing directly into his own face.

Ciel’s breath caught in his throat. He sounded as though he was hard pressed to keep from either crying or laughing. I wondered which.

“Professor Michaelis...” Agares muttered, squeezing his nose to quell the flow of blood. “I need to speak to you.” He didn’t spare more than a glance at Ciel. “It came to my attention that your paperwork hasn’t quite been finished. I know you were hired only a few days ago, but there are certain documents we need copies of right away.” Agares wiped his forehead with a pocket tissue.

“Documents, sir?” I stared blankly.

Agares’ eyes flit to the boy for a fraction of a second before they returned to me. Again, he ignored Ciel. “Well, to start with, we need a copy of your Resident Card (*) and visa. Where is your paperwork? We don’t have your apartment on file, either...”

I cleared my throat, trying to disguise my annoyed, somewhat mystified expression. Not many humans ever noticed my lack of documents and paperwork (when it was required at all) in the old days.

“I will go get the required documents immediately,” I replied smoothly. “Perhaps during my lunch hour?”

Agares smiled thinly. “A copy will suffice. You are already in possession of the Residence card, are you not? Please present it.” He held out his hand.
Ciel looked from Agares to me, his wide blue eyes shining.

“Is that a usual request, Vice Principal?”

“It is quite standard,” Agares confirmed. That stiff upper lip never seemed more like a sneer.

I glanced at Ciel for confirmation, but he only shrugged. “It’s in my office.”

Ciel practiced his ‘intrigued’ expression. He looked a little too cunning, in my opinion. “Hm,” he mused. “I needed to ask you about something, Professor...” And he followed me, just like that.

I smiled.

Agares called after us, “I need the apartment address and a copy of your lease by 4:00pm!”

It seemed I would need to clarify a few things for my employer. If only I knew what was required...

“I foresee a long battle with Agares and the School Office personnel.” I sighed.

“You’ve gone starking,” Ciel said, apparently awed. “You have no idea what kind of things you need to work legally, do you?”

I didn’t bother confirming the obvious

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Agares is demanding the Resident Card, which used to be called "Alien Registration Card", and it does need to be carried with you at all times if you're an adult. "Children up to the age of 16 have no legal requirement to keep the card on their person." (cites a gov. website). Penalties for not complying are: deportation (according to my teachers.) It’s like an ID, but required by law to keep with you wherever you go.

Comments are adored. :D
Chapter Summary

Sebastian deals with the consequences of hitting Ciel. It's not always pleasant, but a
demon always comes out on top...doesn't he?

Chapter 18: Attacked on Both Sides

Agares wouldn’t let up.

“Your presence is no longer thought to be enough to substitute for the previous history teacher’s
load,” he explained, and introduced Charles Grey, a young, experienced teacher of aristocratic
bearing. “He will help cover the courses, extracurricular activities and guide the students between
junior high school and high school.”

I, on the other hand, was requested to do less. I would teach fewer classes and join the PTA
meetings, a rotten assignment if I ever saw one.

“You did well with the parent-child teacher conference, didn’t you?” Agares smiled thinly, his tone
irritatingly smarmy. “Why don’t you give your lesson notes to Professor Grey, and we can forget
about that…rusty old thing you wanted to use. Students don’t really need it in the classroom.”

All the while, Charles was praised for going to the National History Museum, and manning a history
workshop and tutorial several times that week. “He wrote a five page paper explaining how it
directly benefited his students.”

But of course, a certain degree of expertise was to be expected. Grey actually had a teacher’s license,
though previously, he used it to teach rich home schooled children abroad. Before joining the
school’s staff, he made a point of publishing teaching articles and giving presentations on how to
“properly” teach the Queen’s English.

At one point, I failed to see Grey approaching the history office, and thus missed the opportunity to
head back to the teacher’s room.

“Oh, Professor Michaelis. Do you think you could put those books on that other shelf? I want a place
for my publications and medal for my service to the Queen…Now that I have an office, ahh...that is,
now that I have office space, I would like a nice place to display them…” Grey flashed his overly
white teeth.

“Of course. I was just leaving…” I began, eager to retreat. The uppity young teacher might start
snapping teaching jargon at me again, and then I might actually have to respond. He truly is a
loathsome creature. However, I must remain coolly professional and spend my nights researching
modern teaching instead of looking into Ciel Phantomhive’s mysterious past and oh-so-tantalizing
mental state. It really was unfortunate that there were so few hours in a day…which reminded me.
The teacher’s school day ended at 17:00. I smiled.

“What did you think of my lesson plan? You can use it, if you like…”
“I was just heading out, Professor Grey. If you would excuse me…”

Grey’s smile disappeared. “You’ve been avoiding me all day, Mister Michaelis…” He put all the aristocratic disapproval he could muster into that comment.

“The school day has finished, and I only have one last call to make…” I slipped past his guard and through the unlocked door. It was simplicity in itself to make it to the school telephone, and a matter of seconds to dial the number.

Grey followed me in, observed me for a few moments, and then sighed. He apparently didn’t want to look as though he was free enough (or a low enough position as the newest member of the staff…) to await my leisure, so he took himself out.

I held onto the phone, the picture of a teacher patiently waiting to talk to a parent. In reality, the line was dead. I made meaningless one-sided talk for the benefit of any eavesdroppers, and snuck out the door, thus successfully evaded Grey. For today at least. With a satisfied smile, I meandered out of the office and into the hall.

Unfortunately, Vice Principal Agares still managed to find me. “Mr. Michaelis. I hope you’ve been thinking about how you handled the disciplinary action the other day. You may find yourself in an awkward situation with the student’s family, you see. The homeroom teacher just finished talking to Mr. Phantomhive…he may wish to talk to you as well. I believe he’s still on campus.” He pushed up his glasses with a long finger. “Do feel free to consult a senior teacher about anything before a confrontation occurs.”

“Thank you sir. I will do that.” I smiled frostily and nodded in acknowledgement. “If you’ll excuse me?”

“It would be best if you waited in your office or the teacher’s room for a bit longer. You may be needed.”

“Yes, of course, sir.” I headed back for my office and counted to five.

If Mr. Phantomhive was at school, then he might be talking to Ciel...that was some information I was not willing to miss. If Mr. Phantomhive decided to seek me out after all, then it would be a simple matter of beating him to the office. Child’s play for a teacher of quality.

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I found Ciel talking with his father in one of the study rooms. Presumably, it was Phantomhive senior’s influence (or good looks) that kept other students from entering. Or perhaps they never used it. The two of them were sitting close together like co-conspirators in a plot.

Ciel kept his head ducked low, but the impatient shifting of his feet made it clear that he wanted a turn to speak. Phantomhive senior obligingly stopped his tirade. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Father, I...I wasn’t even off the school grounds. I wasn’t going to go off grounds… I thought I could talk to Professor Michaelis about...something, and he took me outside. I didn’t even want to—”

“He took you outside?” Phantomhive looked skeptical.

Ciel swallowed. Suddenly his restlessness evaporated, leaving him rigidly straight. “Yes...he said...he said he was going to take me—”
Vincent. Yes, I remembered his name now. He frowned slightly at his son.

“Take you where, Ciel?” He obviously was accustomed to having control over the conversation, and he relinquished it only superficially.

Ciel knew that. And his (undoubtedly carefully planned) speech fell to pieces as he played his part. His body language suggested a confused teen, at odds with the entire situation. “He wanted me to show him how to use an app…you know, Jorudan…” he finished lamely.

“Then why didn’t you say your teacher asked you to leave the dorm that night?” Vincent asked slowly. The anger was gone from his voice— only cool, calm authority. The kind of tone that makes ‘good people’ want to please the speaker. “Waiting so long to tell someone that…it sounds as though it’s a convenient excuse. As though you thought up a story to explain the crime.”

Ciel blushed. It might have been the embarrassment of having this conversation at all, but I had to admire his ability to control his features. He looked the part of a susceptible boy.

“What really happened?” Vincent pressed.

“He...” Ciel said slowly. He met Vincent's gaze for a moment, and then his eyes shifted again. He looked down, clenched his fists tightly. “He wanted to take me to a...a hotel,” he said, his voice barely audible.

Vincent froze.

“I didn't go,” Ciel said hurriedly. “That's when...when Vice Principal came.”

Ah, so he attempts to move his Bishop against me. A clever move from a desperate boy. The situation has gotten decidedly more difficult...

Vincent nodded his assent, his mind racing to put the pieces together. It explained Ciel's flustered inability to respond that night, certainly. And a shy, hormonal boy might easily be too embarrassed to even suggest attempted harassment. If modern times were anything like the past...but Ciel was no blushing girl. Someone taking his virtue would be inexcusable only if it offended the family honor. Though I suppose...without his consent, the idea might offend his father.

“Ciel, you need to tell the teachers immediately when something like that happens.” Vincent’s voice was grave. He sighed and studied his son intently. “I will be having words with your professor. I don't suppose you have any evidence? Text messages, photos, a witness or any such thing?”

Ciel looked at his hands. “No,” he whispered.

That little brat. I suppose he can act.

Looking at his son, Vincent shook his head. Frustration finally got the better of him, he stood, and began to pace.

“I...I don't want this to be about me,” Ciel muttered. Then he started speaking more clearly, and louder too. “I just don't want people to think it was my fault, and I...I don't want them to think I'm trying to get attention or anything. Or that I—that I— I’m not interested in that sort of—”

Ciel stopped himself and took a slow breath. I’m sure every stutter was perfectly calculated.

“You don't want it to be public knowledge,” Vincent murmured. “I see.” He didn't look happy. “But we can't leave your...opponent...unchecked.” His expression went from cool and collected to hard
determination.

“We will have words, Ciel. Do you have any other...claims to add to what you already told me? Don't hold back now.” At Ciel's silence, he sighed. “Well. I need to think things over...”

I decided then that it would be best to head back to my office. The damage was done, and Vincent may yet decide to seek legal action. But if I call them before they have time....

Ciel's accusations can still be blown to pieces.

Safe at my desk, I smoothed my clothing and straightened the edge of a book. I smiled.

This could prove to be very entertaining...

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“Mr. Michaelis, the only reason I agreed to this meeting is because my son is not here. Why are we having it here, of all places?” Vincent frowned at me over a freshly brewed cup of tea.

At this proximity, I realized Mr. Phantomhive had dressed every part the Lord for today's visit. Gone are the comfortable, stylish slacks. He was showing off the family wealth, dressed in a well-fitted suit.

“The Swan is a student favorite, yes, but of late, your son has taken to avoiding it...” I noted. “He might not have told you.”

“I will grant you that.” Vincent gazed at me with the intensity that a cobra would envy. “He has not been the most forthcoming with the happenings at his school lately. However...I heard that you administered punishment for my son after he was found outside after hours?” The words were slow, careful.

“That much is true.”

“He says there's more to the story. Enough to start a lawsuit get you fired and possibly deported.”

I smiled back at him, at ease even in that situation. “I image he keeps quiet about a great many things. However, I’m sure it's nothing that you couldn't uncover for yourself.” With perfection born of practice and a keen eye, I folded my napkin. “You seem to be avoiding a subject...”

“I want your story. Tell me what happened and why. I'll let you know if you need to find yourself a lawyer.” His tone was blunt, demanding. Vincent leaned forward on his hands, reading my every movement, my very body language.

“Mr. Phantomhive, I am quite pleased to speak with you, but I remain unconvinced that you are willing to listen.” I sighed for effect. “I was attempting to speak with your son...to get him to pass along some sensitive information. I requested he follow my lead and accompany me out of the school, but,” I cleared my throat. “He seemed to misunderstand my intentions.” I raised an eyebrow. “Teenagers and their overly active imaginations and all.”

I slid an envelope across the table. Vincent did not move to pick it up.

His gaze hardened, and he changed his demeanor immediately. Suddenly, I was faced with a coolly angry aristocrat. “So you admit you asked him to break curfew. Then you threw my son to the
wolves and punished him for obedience?”

I shook my head slowly. “You misunderstand. Agares found us on the school grounds...to respond in any way other than the Vice Principal expected me would have compromised my situation at this school.”

Vincent was not yet convinced. At last, he opened the envelope. He was silent for several long minutes as he studied the content. “Why do you even need to stay at this school?”

“Excellent.” I leaned back. “You don't trust me immediately. That's good...” I tilted my head to observe him. “I would have been most disappointed if you had.”

Vincent kept his silence. Instead of replying, he sipped at his tea.

It was Ciel who helped me log onto the server of the school and explained the basics of security, after all. And so I had experimented.

At last, Vincent shook his head in disbelief. “Couldn't a man with that kind of information have another kind of employment? What keeps you here? A boarding school.” He tapped the envelope as if for emphasis.

I chuckled. “This position provides necessary cover, and access to certain...assets. Even you, I think, thought me little more than a temporary professor.”

“Assets?”

“I'm afraid mum's the word. I have my...orders.” I smiled thinly, hoping he might associate me with the light side of power, and in line with whatever it is he really works for. It would take more than a few hours (or maybe even a few weeks) to figure out all of the Phantomhive secrets, and I hoped he wouldn't unearth too many of mine while I tried to lure Ciel in.

Vincent cleared his throat. “For the time being, Ciel and I will have words. If you really didn’t threaten Ciel...well, I'll see what he says about your stack of evidence. I assume you wanted him to pass it on to me?” He waited for a conformation. I said nothing. “Well, next time you need to punish him, why don’t you make him come up with a solution to the problem, and in the meanwhile, leave the punishment to the rest of the staff...” He gave me a sardonic smile.

He set his teacup down with an air of finality and tried to give some advice as if I were an underling, of sorts. “A teacher’s power is his influence. Use it subtly, so neither student nor parent realizes what you are doing.”

With this cue to the end of the conversation, we made some inconsequential small talk, but I knew that threat had passed. I didn’t need to worry about Mr. Phantomhive. Probably. At least, he wouldn’t be a distraction from making the contract with Ciel. Once I made the contract, anything Mr. Phantomhive could have said would come too late. Though it might be fun to play with the father and son anyway...

The whole situation amused me. I concentrated on looking the proper mix of teacher and spy for the Queen, all the while imagining what Ciel Phantomhive’s soul would taste like.

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Chapter Summary

Ciel seeks refuge from a certain demon. However, his home is not as empty as he thought...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 19: His Master, Retreating

(Ciel. Third Weekend.)

Ciel watched the scenery rush by with satisfaction. Going home for the weekend was just the thing to distract him from Sebastian—and it would keep the demon comfortably away.

As he neared the countryside (as countryside as one could get and still be nearish Tokyo, anyways,) fewer and fewer passengers remained. Ciel watched impassively as the doors opened and closed, feeling the tension drain from his body.

He had almost closed his eyes to doze off when someone sat down next to him. A flash of annoyance made Ciel frown. Why should anyone sit next to him when there were so many other seats available? But when he turned his head, his expression fell away to astonishment. Ciel actually stood up, unceremoniously sending his things flying. Instead of thumping to the floor or the contents spilling out, however, Sebastian held out a hand and caught the messenger bag and neatly rearranged the contents.

“Calm yourself, Ciel. You wouldn’t want to cause a commotion. We’re nearly to your family manor, are we not?”

Ciel quickly sat back down and fixed Sebastian with his best impression of his dad’s ‘don’t be silly’ look. “It’s not a manor, it’s just a house. A nice house, but it’s not called anything else here.” Except maybe a villa, some traitorous part of him thought. “And don’t call me Ciel. What are you doing here anyway?”

Sebastian smiled slyly. “If you wish me to address you with respect, make a contract. You can’t get rid of me otherwise.”
“My father will *hardly* approve of you lurking about.” Ciel stuck out his chin.

“He won’t even know I’m there. You’ll look quite the foolish, scared child if you suggest otherwise. Your father thinks I’m a kind of information agent—he’s not going to believe I’d follow you home for the weekend. Especially if I only let you see me,” Sebastian’s voice was low and gravely like a cat’s satisfied purr.

Ciel decided that the only remaining anti-Sebastian defense was to go to sleep after all.

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Ciel wasn’t at the local train station for more than a minute before his dad’s “secretary” and “servant” Mei-rin and Finnian picked him up. Finnian ordinarily would speed around town on an electric motorbike, but today, he had the Stake-Out Car (at least, that was what Ciel thought of it as).

If either Finnian or Mei-rin noticed Ciel looking behind him to see if Sebastian was making good on his threat to stay out of sight, neither mentioned it.

“Hi Ciel! Welcome home.” Finnian grinned at him. Finnian always seemed like a big kid, but in his t-shirt and cargo pants, he looked not much older than Ciel himself. Which was probably true.

“You’re right on time! Your father said he’ll be around for tea today, as soon as his meeting is over.” Mei-rin took Ciel’s bag and stowed it in the trunk, miraculously not dropping or breaking anything.

Home-sweet-home was just as nicely decorated and just as empty. With only his father living there, and not even every day, it was as meticulously clean as usual. Barring accidents from any of the ‘body-guards’-posing-as-servants, of course.

When Ciel arrived in the foyer, he was greeted by Tanaka, who took his bag and chuckled affectionately.

“It’s good to see you, Young Ciel (*1).”

Ciel nodded absently. “I’ll just go put my things up, Tanaka. Thank you. Will Dad be long?”
Mr. Tanaka shook his head. “I’m afraid Master Phantomhive didn’t leave me with that information...for tea, certainly.”

Ciel smiled slightly. “I suppose it depends on the company, doesn’t it?” He changed his shoes and went inside.

“I’ll be up to my room and get changed, Mr. Tanaka.”

“Of course, sir,” Tanaka replied, managing to insert just enough of a chuckle to seem grandfatherly rather than grave.

He found himself looking for traces of forced entry as he headed for the stairs, looking at little things that only a family member would notice. But there was nothing amiss.

His bedroom was unchanged, it seemed. His father had neither redecorated nor boxed anything up--only the guest bedroom had the false, “unused” look to it. Ciel’s things were still (for the most part) where he’d left them. Minus a few dustings or whatnot.

Ciel breathed a sigh of relief and shut the door, only to find a pair of arms close around his mid-section.

Sebastian pulled Ciel close, and put a long-fingered hand on Ciel cheek. “Welcome home, little master.”

Ciel startled rather badly, but Sebastian’s grip was too strong to get away easily. He only laughed and turned Ciel around. Dropping to the floor in a sort of old fashioned, abasing posture, he kissed Ciel’s hand.

“Can I get you anything?” Sebastian’s eyes flared red. He didn’t bother to hide his amusement.

Ciel only pulled his hand away and proceeded to ignore the demon. He stalked over to the closet, and turned away from Sebastian, trying to act as though his presence in the room did not make him nervous.
“I’ve taken the liberty of choosing your clothes for the afternoon, young sir. Allow me to take your jacket....and I will clean your uniform,” Sebastian interrupted smoothly.

Ciel looked at the outfit on a-- what was that thing called? Tie rack?-- and decided to choose his own clothes. Wishing he dared to take his clothes to the bathroom to change, Ciel fiddled with his belt.

“What are you doing?” Sebastian cocked his head, lazily going over to Ciel’s desk. Black nails flicked Ciel’s things, lingering on a plush animal.

“I want to change. Get out.”

“No.” Sebastian smiled.

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Several minutes later, Ciel went back downstairs in clothing (which Ciel picked out, thank you), planning on making himself a cup of tea. A good plan, he had congratulated himself, except that Sebastian was waiting for him in the kitchen. How he avoided being seen by Tanaka, Ciel couldn’t begin to guess.

“Have you eaten?” Mr. Tanaka asked quietly. His eyes twinkled at Ciel’s appearance (it was as different from Sebastian’s chosen attire that it might have been...an unusual combination...), but he made no comment.

“Ah, I’ll just have some tea--” Ciel said, and when he closed the cabinet door, Sebastian was gone. Disappeared into shadow.

Ciel nearly dropped the cup.

“Very good, then. Your father received some very pretty cakes this morning. He had them put away, saying you’d appreciate them more than he would. Shall I...?” Tanaka continued.

Ciel spotted a bit of shadow darker than the rest, and wondered if he saw red eyes glinting out of them. He stared at it suspiciously.
“What? Oh. Um...don’t you think we should wait for Dad to come back? Eat them together, and all that?” Ciel wanted out of the kitchen.

A chime sounded as the gate was opened for another car to go through. “Ah, that will be Master Phantomhime. Excuse me,” Tanaka smiled.

Left alone again, Sebastian was quick to step behind Ciel. “You wanted tea? Let me show you how.”

For the second time in less than half an hour, Ciel found his hand in Sebastian’s, this time teaspoons and teapots being pushed into his hands as well. “You’re a terrible teacher. I’ll never remember all this. You make brewing tea too complicated,” Ciel complained.

Sebastian smiled his mysterious smile. “True...but you could order me to make you food and tea just to suit.” He waited for a moment, and seemed to look out where Tanaka had gone. “I could be your butler. A young, able man who you could entrust to do anything and everything...”

Ciel scowled. “Go away.”

“Ciel!” Mei-Rin hissed. “Your dad wants you in the dining room! I’ll get the sweets-- you just go hug your dad and be nice.” She said all of this as she went through the kitchen door, and very nearly ran into a cabinet that mysteriously opened. She toppled over, sending a pile of plates onto the floor.

Ciel had no idea how she managed to do so much damage by walking, but oddly enough, there was no sound of breaking porcelain. He blinked. The offending dishes were back where they were supposed to be, and the cake was on a tray with serving dishes and dainty spoons enough for two.

But Sebastian...he was gone.

Tanaka took the trays and beckoned for his employer’s son to follow.

When Tanaka reentered the kitchen, he seemed surprised that “Ciel” had already brewed a pot of tea, and had arranged the cakes onto an antique tea tray.

“Ah, Mei-rin, could you see to Master Phantomhive?” Tanaka politely requested, and surveyed the kitchen. “Everything all right in here, Ciel? Thank you for preparing the cakes...”
“Oh, it wasn’t…” Ciel chewed his lip. If Sebastian was going to keep pulling that vanishing act, it would be very hard to convince anyone of his presence after all. *Video evidence may be required,* he thought.

“Go along now, why don’t you?” Tanaka cast a glance toward the sitting room where Mei-Rin could be heard trying to help Master Phantomhive with his suit jacket.

“Mei-Rin, please. I shudder at the thought of you touching anything up close—please confine your exceptional skills to long distanced objectives, or your enemies personal belongings. Not mine,” Vincent said in an amused voice. He must have touched her cheek or otherwise touched her feminine side, for she very nearly swooned as the door opened again.

“Ah, Ciel. There you are. Let’s try these cakes, shall we?” Vincent sounded so pleased with himself that Ciel nearly forgot how disappointed (for lack of a better word) his father had been. And so it was that father, son and servants settled in the sitting room. Mei-rin hovered near Master Phantomhive’s preferred chair, while Finnian appeared to be dusting off a house plant. Tanaka, of course, was setting the table.

“I admit I’m pleased to see you this weekend, Ciel, but could recent events have led you here?” Vincent met his son’s eyes, skipping all pretense of small talk.

Ciel fidgeted as the three servants shifted, their interest clearly caught. Ciel resisted the urge to glare at his father.

He wanted to turn to the servants pointedly and say, ‘There’s no one here to see you playing at being servants. Why are you pretending now?’ Because all of them knew what their real jobs were, and cleaning was only ever a front. Instead, he caught Finnian’s eye and shook his head very slowly.

*No,* he tried to convey, *nothing’s the matter. I’m fine, so please don’t try to sneak into my school again…*

“I…did want to get away for a bit,” Ciel admitted. He took the cup in his hand for a distraction.

“Perfectly understandable. Has Mr. Michaelis done anything else you’d like to talk about? Tried to pass on any more information, or tempted you out of curfew?”
He doesn’t seem to realize how condescending it was to stir his tea while addressing a sensitive subject, Ciel thought glumly.

Ciel took a deep breath and said, “Sebastian Michaelis is a demon.”

Vincent only laughed. “Was he that rude?” He smiled fondly at his son. “This tea is really quite excellent.”

Ciel dropped his cake spoon and glowered at his father more openly. “I mean it.”

“I don’t follow.”

“He’s not on your side. He’s not on anyone’s side. He’s a sneaking, over-privileged—” Ciel began, turning red with indignation and barely stopping for breath, “—demon!”

He couldn’t quite bring himself to say, and he wants to make some kind of unholy contract with me. I think he wants my soul. for two reasons. First, Finnian and Bard had started squalling their outrage all at once, and second, well… it was just too much to say all at once.

And he wasn’t really sure Sebastian wanted anything of the sort. He might be crazy. They both might be crazy. And he wasn’t ready to face that yet, either.


“What reason do I have to trust him? He’s given me nothing but trouble since he came, oh so conveniently to my school after Mr. Clark had an accident. He pins detention on me, alienates me from some of my friends, and then has the gall to say he’s on your side. I don’t trust him. I don’t believe him. I want him out of my life.” Ciel fumed.

“Ciel.” Vincent said warningly. “You’ve said too much already. If you’d contacted me earlier…”

“It was too late!” Ciel insisted.
Interestingly, all of the servants started talking at once at that. They weren’t expecting a clash of values or teenage-al arguments until, say, another three or five years.

“Master. Phantomhive, I think we should listen to Ciel a bit more…” Mei-Rin began.

“What’d he do to you?” Bard demanded, his roughly handsome face suddenly much closer than Ciel would have liked.

And Finnian, who merely asked, “Wait, what?

Vincent ignored the others. “So you don’t like your new teacher. And I’m not ignoring your concerns— don’t you scoff at me, young man— my informants are watching him as much as they are taking his information. If he needs to be taken out of your school, he will be. Until then, try to stay away.”

Ciel looked affronted. “You should have told me more. What did he say to you? Why don’t you believe me?”

Vincent held out his hands in exasperation. “What is there to believe? You said he asked you to go out of your dorm. You said so yourself. You told me nothing happened, but you still want me to believe he’s a bad person.”

“Well, he is.”

“Yes, but we’re looking into it.”

“Tell me what he told you.” Ciel stuck out his chin.

“There is information you are not privy to. I won’t include you in business, Ciel. You’re only thirteen, for god’s sake! It was--”

"I'm fourteen, nearly fifteen--" Ciel interrupted.
"--a mistake for Michaelis to approach you at all, I agree, but he agreed to be more discreet in the future, now that I have him in contact with one of my people." Vincent did not even notice Ciel's correction.

Mei-rin and Finnian watched as the pair exchanged heated words. Mei-rin edged closer to Ciel.

"Master. Phantomhive, are you saying that that teacher did something to Ciel?" Finnian looked between the two, his eyes filled with anxiety.

"He didn’t!" Ciel was quick to explain.

"The teacher claims to be an operative. I believe I told you. We’re looking into the situation," Vincent was saying, talking over Ciel.

"He ought to be fired right away," Mei-rin huffed. "Anyone who threatens the Phantomhives shouldn’t be left alone to teach." She waved a feather duster for emphasis.

"Begging your pardon for interrupting," Tanaka murmured, "but I believe Master Phantomhive said the situation was being examined. If this professor is not what he says he is, I suspect you three will be the first to be sent out to deal with him."

"Like that would do any good," Ciel muttered, thinking of Sebastian’s speed. How could you even shoot something like that, unless he was just playing around?

"Ciel," Vincent sighed. "Put some trust in me. I will do my best to keep you safe. Don’t ask for details that could compromise that very safety."

Tanaka cleared his throat. "Do either of you have a request for dinner?"

"I’ll help!" Ciel surprised everyone, by announcing. "What’s the point of coming home if I’m left alone the whole time?" He tried a thin smile to explain the unusual offer.
“Ooh, me too!” Finnian held up his hand as though he were in a classroom.

“Te-he. But I can, um...wash up? Fetch things?” Mei-rin too offered her support.

This arrangement ought to keep Sebastian from harassing me. Ciel thought with satisfaction. But the red eyes glowing from the shadowy corridor ought to have proved this assumption wrong.

Sebastian’s antics had only just begun.

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Chapter End Notes

(*1) "Young Ciel" or "Young Lord" or "Little master" or "young sir" could all be translations of botchan. Botchan is really a polite term used only by friends-of-the-family when addressing said person. If used by a stranger, it would come off as a bit rude, kind of like saying, "Miss Up-and-Coming" or "Mr. Right" or "You're rather Young-and-Rich, aren't you?"

(Bocchan can also be Romanized bocchan, but I take the spelling from the English translation of Natsume Soseki’s famous novel of the same name: Botchan. BTW! It is apparently noted in the dictionary as “a green young man from a well-to-do family.” XD)
XX. The Phantomhive Manor

Chapter Summary

Sebastian continues to stalk Ciel, letting no one but the boy see him. In the evening, Vincent holds a dinner party...

Chapter 20: The Phantomhive Manor

(Friday afternoon)

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p>The demon was away.

Ciel breathed a sigh of relief. He remembered something Sebastian had said to him during their brief internet conversations; Sebastian had an unhealthy obsession with cats. So Ciel had sent Finnian out into the neighborhood with a bag of cat toys and catnip, hoping to set the bait.

The silly ‘gardener’ had skipped off into the streets, and now, several hours later, Sebastian could no longer ignore the playful kitten noises and Finnian’s laughter.

Sebastian had gone to investigate, and possibly ‘rescue’ some cats from the attention, thus leaving Ciel alone in the manor, free to plan. Ciel smiled to himself, imagining Sebastian using his smartphone to record something mundane as a kitten sneezing, or a cat asleep on the road. All the while unaware of what Ciel was doing inside.

Perfect. Ciel thought to himself. I’ll block all the entrances. Dad won’t be back until this evening, and if I can get him to use just one door, we can keep the demon out.

Ciel set about gathering the supplies he needed. A few broom handles, some of the furniture and sheets to tie it all together might be enough.

“Ciel? …what are you doing?” Finnian came up behind Ciel while he was ransacking the linen closet.

Ciel dropped the bundle of sheets in his surprise and swiveled to look at Finnian.

“…”

“Oh, I get it!” Finnian’s youthful face split into a grin, and he too started pulling items from the closet. “You’re making a fort. That’s right, isn’t it? There’s all sorts of stuff by the door…I kinda knocked some of it over, but I’ll help you put it back,” Finnian chirped in Japanese.

“You opened the door?” Ciel’s eyes widened, and he ran back to the door. Sure enough, heavy furniture and the odd broom or two was strewn aside. The door was barrier free.

Ciel peered out the windows, desperate to see if the demon was still there, playing with those stupid cats, but he saw nothing. Ciel felt a thrill of fear, as he quickly began to reconstruct the barrier. It might slow him down….or at least make Finnian realize someone came in, Ciel told himself.

“Da-da-da-da-dan. Pyuu~” Finnian cried out, and launched his missile—several fluffy pillows
which rained down in succession.

Ciel started. “I thought you said you’d help, Finny.” Ciel struggled with the arm chair and lost his grip as a pillow hit him in the face.

Finnian laughed. “But it’s more fun with two sides, right? You need someone to attack! Dan-dan-dan-dan! Gunfire, master Ciel! Hit the deck! I mean, take cover~”

Ciel yelped and did just that as Finnian’s secondary weapons were tossed—flower bulbs.

“Finnian, stop playing and help me,” Ciel grumbled. “We’re going to be under siege by a real enemy.”

Finnian paused. “Siege? That sounds like a fun game…” Then he realized Ciel was setting the alarm system as well as sliding the multiple dead locks into place. “Master Ciel? You mean a real intruder? I don’t think they could get past the security. But you probably ought to cancel that—Mei-rin is taking in the laundry from outside…”

Sure enough, the alarm sounded. Ciel sighed. Sebastian was sure to follow the maid in—before he could properly barricade all of the doors.

“Aaaah, Ciel, hit the off button!” Finnian ran out the room, presumably to explain to Mei-rin why the alarm was going off.

Ciel chewed his lip and slowly turned around.

As expected, Sebastian ghosted out of nowhere, a small cat in hand and a smirk like none other. “What’s this, Ciel? Making a mess are we? Or are you trying to keep me…” Sebastian set his cat down and gently touched the boy’s shoulders before sliding his hands down the boy’s back. “…out?”

Ciel hastily stepped away, barely managing not to trip over his own obstacle. “Shut up. Put that cat outside and close the door. I need to call the alarm company.”

Sebastian only laughed.

oOoOoOo

(Saturday morning.)

“Ciel, sir?” Tanaka called from the hall. “Were you researching in the library?”

Ciel looked up from his laptop. “Hm?”

“The library, young sir…” Tanaka said affectionately. “I’m afraid I don’t know which of your books to clean away, and which ones to leave out. It is rather…untidy.”

Ciel turned fully to face the butler. It was unusual for Tanaka to come ask him a question about housekeeping; ordinarily, those jobs were familiar enough that Tanaka could go about his business without bothering anyone. He was, after all, highly trained to respect his masters’ wishes.

“Let’s have a look…” Ciel got up, trying to remember what books he’d been looking at. Ah, yeah. That. Demon possession and exorcism… He thought he’d put them all back though.
They opened the door to the library.

“What.” Ciel’s breath came out in an exasperated sigh. “Who did this?”

Tanaka was too polite to give Ciel an odd look, but he did stiffen in surprise. “I asked the others, but they have been otherwise occupied… Master Phantomhive has had them out on errands for the better part of the morning. Finnian has only just returned, and the others won’t be back until lunch.”

Ciel eyed the mess. Shelves were practically upturned in places, and books were laid out haphazardly next to notebook paper, highlighter pens stuck in various spines, and more books in other unusual positions. The entire mess looked half balanced, artistic, even, in the areas that were cluttered.

Footsteps from the hallway. Ciel didn’t need to turn around to know it was his father coming in from a spare room. At first, Vincent didn’t say anything, except to draw in his breath when he saw the mess.

“…Tanaka, why don’t you go… um… see to some tea.” Ciel hastily offered a reason to get Tanaka away from the scene… he didn’t relish the thought of being lectured in front of the man who’d cared for him for years. “I’m sorry. I should have, uh… taken care.”

Tanaka withdrew, leaving father and son to regard one another warily.

“Ciel.” Vincent began.

“Um.” Ciel replied.

“What were you thinking?”

“I…” Ciel sputtered. Didn’t do it. That demon is playing tricks on me! He thought. But he couldn’t very well say that.

“You do realize I have a dinner party tonight.” Vincent closed his eyes. With one hand, he massaged his neck, and with the other, he closed the door to the library. “I want you to straighten things up. You aren’t to have lunch until you do.”

Sometimes, Ciel reflected glumly, he wished his father would yell. It was so much easier to be indignant about it if Vincent just seemed more… evil-mastermind-ish.

“Yes, sir.”

Vincent withdrew.

Just as expected, the ghost-of-a-butler appeared as soon as the door shut. “Hello Ciel.”

“Why did you make this mess?” Ciel demanded.

“I was making note of the Phantomhive knowledge,” Sebastian replied, unperturbed. “To see what you know of the world and its workings.”

“By tearing up the library? And what’s with those highlighters in the books? Some of those books are really old. Did you damage any of them?”

Sebastian chuckled. “I thought it would give the scene a more ‘authentic’ feel. I’ve seen you mark your place with all sorts of things.”
“Clean this up.” Ciel demanded.

“I have the right to decline,” Sebastian demurred. “Unless you give me what I want.”

Ciel fumed. “Fine. Get out so I can get to work.” He picked up a book, dropped the papers that had been sandwiched between the pages onto the desk, and scowled. Authentic? I do not make this much of a mess, he thought to himself.

A few tiresome minutes later, Tanaka opened the door. “Ciel.” He stealthily waved the boy over. “You need energy to clean this much.” He offered by way of explanation. “Eat it in your room, and when you’re done, I’ll help you clean up in here.” His kind eyes sparkled.

Ciel grinned at him. “Thanks!”

Tanaka only shook his head slightly, and led the boy back with the glass of milk and fresh fruit.

After that quick lunch, Ciel sent Tanaka on ahead to dispose of the evidence, hoping his father wouldn’t run into him on the way. When he opened the door, however, a new sight greeted him.

The library was spotless. And at the center of it all, Sebastian stood with a dusting cloth, a cruel smile, and laughing eyes.

“How am I going to explain this?” Ciel moaned.

Sebastian only looked at him, bemused. “You could tell them I’m new help. I’ll take care of everything, Ciel…” He stepped closer.

“If only I give you my soul. Yeah. I remember. The answer is still ‘no.’” Ciel stomped over to the bookshelf. “…this isn’t where this goes.”

“I took the liberty of separating the books by subject, and arranged them alphabetically in English, and by order of the kana in Japanese. You’ll find a card index on the table, in the old ‘card catalogue’ system like the one used by librarians and scholars all over London last I was there.”

Ciel snorted. “All that’s on computer now.”

Sebastian raised an eyebrow. “Your…oldest servant…is back.”

The boy sighed, and wished the demon would go away.

Ciel had always admired how Tanaka kept cool no mater the situation. Accordingly, Tanaka’s astonished face looked little more than a slightly surprised elderly gentleman. “Oh, my, it cleans up well, doesn’t it? Ho ho ho…I suppose I shall help the others with preparations for this evening.”

Tanaka closed the door behind him, leaving Ciel with a very smug Sebastian. The demon gave a little bow, and stepped back into the shadows.

“A party tonight? I’m looking forward to it.” Sebastian chuckled.

Why, Ciel wondered, did such a common statement fill him with dread when Sebastian said it?

Nothing truly bad would happen…so long as no one turned up dead, it would be the same as countless other parties the Phantomhives held. Except that Vincent had never had a demon guest before.

oOoOoOo
“All the useful people,” Ciel muttered, watching as another guest came in. This one, he thought he recognized from some society or other—English Gentlemen or something, or perhaps the man represented certain group’s interests to the embassy.

Others he didn’t recognize by face, but by demeanor. He saw the way a few of them could pass by without raising any eyebrows, and how they subtly stayed out of Vincent’s way until given some sign. Then they’d go and talk to Vincent discretely, and never for long.

Informants, partners, a few police officers, and even suspects were all invited to dine with the Phantomhives tonight. Ciel could not hope for a more influential crowd.

However, he had very little to say to them. In fact, he was mostly trying to stay in plain sight without having to talk to anyone. He had a feeling this would be the best defense against Sebastian. Don’t let him get you alone again…

Sebastian, however, was three paces ahead of him, as usual. “Lemon-aid, young sir?”

“You’re going to get caught, dressed like that. My father is very careful with his staff, and he’ll recognize you immediately.” Ciel stuck his chin out. “You won’t be able to talk your way out of that.”

Sebastian mischievously put a finger to his lips and bowed his head to whisper in Ciel’s ear. “He won’t see me. None of the staff will see me.”

Ciel turned away, deciding to walk directly in the path of a different server. Predictably, Sebastian disappeared.

Ciel smiled.

Ciel heard a tinkling, girlish laugh and turned around to see a vaguely familiar face. "Oh, if it isn't little Ciel Phantomhive..." One of the women declared. There were two of them, each with gray hair and shrewd, watching eyes.

"How you've grown!" The second woman nattered, her voice thin and high, as the other’s was low and gravely. When she smiled, she looked faintly vacant, as though she couldn’t quite remember where she was. "We met when you were smaller, you know..."

“Oh yes, dear. Do you remember us? I’m Carol, and this is Wendy.” The first woman smiled too, but on her, it looked more like a threat.

"It was so sad about your mother, you poor thing." Wendy gave a sad little sigh.

"Why yes, it was a tragedy. Such a tragedy. I heard your father couldn't work for a month! Things must have been in a right state."

"Did they ever find the criminal that did it?" Wendy lifted her chin, looking somehow more like a hopeful child than a gossiping old bat.

Ciel interrupted the flood of voices with what he thought to be quiet, and shy-sounding, “Oh. I remember. You kept saying that I was trying to hide behind things. But I’m in school now…at the international school the Redmonds and Greenhills sponsor. Do you know it?”
"Ohh, it was all over the news," Carol continued happily. The two shriveled old women simply spoke over him, as though he hadn't said anything at all.

"And I remember it was on every time I turned on the telly! Who would have thought the Phantomhives would be involved in such a terrible scandal."

"You must have been so happy they didn't get your father too. Where was it they said you were during all that time?" Those small, crafty eyes bore into him.

Ciel shook his head numbly, trying to figure out how to get out of this situation. "Excuse me..."

“I thought I remembered that you were missing. Did you run away, boy? Or was it kidnapping like the police expected?”

“It wasn’t like that,” Ciel denied, and took a step backwards. Straight into the imposing figure of the demon, presently glaring daggers at the two old women.

“I do believe your father was calling, young master.” Sebastian put a hand to his breast and gave an antiquated bow. He kept his eyes down and his tone quiet and steady, as propriety demanded of a servant.

Ciel nodded, and left the two specter-like old ladies to gossip about his mother's death and the surrounding rumors on their own.

For now, Ciel would stay with the demon. And so, Sebastian stuck to his heels like a black shadow, keeping the gossips at bay. Or at least out of earshot.

Sebastian’s protection, however, only extended to the next hired help. Sebastian had an eye for detail that wouldn't allow him to be caught so easily. So Ciel went to the next safest person in the vicinity —his father.

Predictably, Vincent was deep in conversation, probably discussing business.

“—any leads?” a man turned around. “Oh, hello Ciel. Didn’t realize you were in town this weekend. Were you careful on your way back from the station?”

To his side, Lau asked cheerfully, “You have heard about that, haven’t you? Showing up in news reports and all over Tokyo?” His lips pulled into a leer.

“No,” Ciel muttered. “I haven’t.”

“Yeah, well, me neither.” Lau laughed.

Ciel was unsurprised.

“I’m sure those two were talking about something along those lines, though. Too bad you couldn’t tell me. Do you suppose it has anything to do with train stations? Is that why they asked you?”

“...no idea. Isn’t it just a greeting?”

Lau mirrored his shrug and walked off. “Saa ne.” Who could say? “See you later, Ciel.” And he wafted off in the direction of his pretty Chinese flower of a “sister.” Ciel watched incredulously.

“Whatever,” Ciel muttered, finally turning back to his objective. “Good evening,” he said breathlessly, as though he considered this the start of his conversation.
Vincent, for once, frowned at Lau’s comments rather than start some off colored jokes of his own. He turned away from his son and uttered a few last comments before Ciel caught one word—“disappearance.”

“Did you need something, Ciel?” Vincent asked quietly, motioning one of the other adults to ‘hold that thought.’

“Wasn’t someone calling me?”

“No.” Vincent smiled affectionately. “Oh, but haven’t you grown. I remember just a few years ago when you’d try to disappear whenever the opportunity first presented itself.”

“Now you’re all underfoot,” one of the gentlemen agreed. “Full of curiosity, isn’t he?”

Ciel’s cheeks reddened. “Well. If you weren’t calling me, I’ll be…I’ll go enjoy the night air. It was a pleasure to see you.” That didn’t go well… he thought.

“No need for that.” Vincent’s expression tightened. It was so subtle that Ciel nearly missed it. “Look there. Mr. and Mrs. Osawa look to be a bit overwhelmed. Why don’t you practice your interpreting skills and help them ease into a conversation?”

Feeling thoroughly misdirected, Ciel bobbed his head and went off in that direction. He had no inclination to go straight away, though. First, he needed to make a phone-call…

“Violet?”

“Speaking.”

“You had an event this weekend, didn’t you?” Ciel stepped into the way of Bard. He appeared to be pretending to have been the one who prepared the food he carried, and when Ciel walked in front of him, he very nearly dropped the whole thing.

“Hey!” Bard protested. “Try and stay out of the way of the chef, mind you!”

Ciel snagged something to nibble on. “It was tomorrow, wasn’t it?” He held his breath and waved his hand in some semblance of apology to Bard.

Bard rolled his eyes. “You only just got back. Now you’re leaving us so soon?”

“It’s rude to eavesdrop, Bard,” Ciel chided. “Anyway, it’s a sort of school event, right? There’ll be lots of, er, students?” Ciel thought this might make the demon behave himself.

“Ahh! School events.” Bard nodded sagely. “Do you need lunch?”

Ciel shook his head and listened to Violet’s explanation. “Uh-huh. Yeah. OK. Tomorrow then?”

Ciel could almost swear he saw two red eyes glowering at him in disapproval.

That very fact made him grin. He swiped another bit of food from Bard, and walked off in the direction his father had pointed him.

Time to be the good little son… he thought.

And so the evening went on.
tbc…
XXI. Ciel, on the Runway

Chapter Summary

Ciel attempts to lose Sebastian by leaving his home behind for fun in Tokyo. He finds himself dragged into a school event that turns out to be more exciting than anyone could have imagined.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 21: A Friendly Outing: Ciel, On the Runway

(Ciel)

Ciel was determined to keep his eyes shut. He was alone in his house, his father at work, and every one of the servants deployed on some task or other. Yes, he would keep his eyes shut. He’d forget that Sebastian was lying on his bed. Right next to him.

Petting his hair.

Ciel sat up and shoved Sebastian away. “This is ridiculous.” He flicked his phone on and scanned the messages. He had his jacket on and was scribbling a note before Sebastian figured out where he was going.

Sebastian made a noise of displeasure. It was something between a sigh and a frown, and barely discernible. “Little master…” he began, “that is not advised.”

Ciel fended off Sebastian’s hand and turned to smirk at the would-be gentleman.

“You’re trying to be my butler, aren’t you? So just do as I say, and keep your opinions to yourself.” Ciel stuck out his chin a bit.

Sebastian chuckled, and gently pushed Ciel back toward the bed. “It’s too early. Sleep a bit longer.”

Ciel smirked and said, “No.”

Sebastian shook his head and wondered how far this little brat would take him…but the contract appealed to him more and more.

“Of course, my lord.”

Ciel only laughed.

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(Sebastian)

Ciel’s friend Soma was more sensitive than my prospective master thought. He repetitively asked Ciel if he was all right, and quickly noticed Ciel glancing around.
"Are you sure you're up to seeing a fashion show? There's gonna be a lot of people..." Soma asked, navigating effortlessly in the sea of people.

The taller boy continued, "I'm sure Violet would understand... he didn't think you were coming until last night." Soma held his phone up to his face, glancing to see if he had any new messages. "We could always go to that art store you like. And a cafe. It'd be quieter."

Ciel had just opened his mouth to give some retort when Soma's phone buzzed. Soma grinned apologetically, and answered. "Moshi-mosh~" he said, waving his hand to indicate that Ciel should stand in the side street with him while he talked.

I took the opportunity to slip in next to Ciel.

"So it's Violet's fashion show, is it? Mr. Muto Toshi's work will be featured? How quaint." I leaned in to whisper near his ear, and I had the pleasure of him stiffening in response.

Ciel looked at me scathingly. "Everyone calls him Violet."

I shrugged. "What sort of Art was it that you were so looking forward to? Soma is right...everyone would certainly understand if you wanted to avoid an extracurricular activity...what with your reputation and all."

He glanced at me, annoyed. "I'm going."

"I could always fetch a bit of artwork for your family manner. I can think of a painting or two that would look grand in the foyer..."

Ciel turned away from me, determined as ever to ignore whatever I said.

Well. He seems particularly responsive to more personal actions. A hand on his back, and he can't look away.

"Go away. Soma will see you."

Indeed, Soma was ending his call, so I stepped back out of sight. *Patience in all things*, I told myself. A demon learned this maxim before many others.

"So, do you want to go back?" Soma asked casually, as though he and Ciel hadn't ended the conversation at all.

Ciel shook his head stubbornly, and with some effort, he managed to keep from looking strained.

"No, I want to see. It's been too long since I've been to an art exhibit."

"All right," Soma shrugged. "We're almost there. It's on the seventh floor of that department building." Soma pointed helpfully to a tall building.

"Hang on a minute," Ciel muttered and he poked at his cellphone. I noticed that he was careful not to tilt the screen towards his tall friend and wondered at his antics. "I need to call my family...help.

Yes, hello? Yes, thank you. Listen, something’s come up. I need you to find some reserved tickets for my friends and I. Three tickets to the um, Kary Pamyu Pamyu’s concert. Yeah, in Saitama arena right after this. Uh, huh yes. Yeah. Alright, thanks."

Ciel looked straight at the advertisement draped on the side of a building. The date advertised was this very day.
Finally, I realized what Ciel was up to. Clearly he hadn't dialed any numbers, and meant to speak to me without drawing Soma's attention to my presence. I snorted. He thought to give me an order to keep me occupied while he went to the fashion show. Did he still not comprehend that I wasn't required to do any such thing?

Ciel looked up anxiously at Soma, making a strange sort of expression that I was not quite able to decipher. Perhaps he was trying to convince Soma (without use of words that would damn his little ploy utterly…) that he really didn’t intend to go to a concert of someone so ridiculous as Carrie Pamew… whatever it was…

Well, this would not do. Ciel needed to be assured of something—that I was willing to do any order. I could do this… in seeming. In reality, it is a demon’s duty to follow a master’s true orders, and he had none of these without a contract. I would follow his heart’s desire, but only when he promised me his soul. Which would be mine.

Soma was looking at Ciel strangely through all this account. “Uh-huh…” he said slowly. “Right, we should, um, head for the train by… er, what time is that?”

Ciel fidgeted and frantically tried to suppress any urges. “Soma, we can go soon...” he watched me out of the corner of his eye. “We can go say hello to Violet before we head off, right? You did want to come, right? And Violet too, if he…”

He trailed off, clearly trying to cover his foolish, all-too-transparent plan. Ciel would need much practice before he could delve into subterfuge, I feared.

I sighed, and made a tiny nod of ascent, and caught Ciel’s eye. He stared at me, face drawn and pale, but with an anticipation that was truly beautiful. I smiled, and leapt into action. My body was lighter than air. Some of the transparency that plagued me when I was nameless returned to me, and I felt a strong pull on my being. I had a glimmer of a tie with Ciel Phantomhive, and this made me highly reluctant to break myself from him. But I did so, and with great speed and elegance.

I was a black streak in his eye. In a few quick motions, I caught a pole and stood, peering down at him for a moment. Then I nodded again, and made my way back in the direction of the station.

He would be explaining to Soma, then, that he had no intention to leave for Saitama this evening. He would make other plans, I think, and would attempt to avoid me for the entire afternoon. But I would circle back, follow him closely, and smile when his little plans all came to nothing.

He would learn soon. With or without a contract, his life was already mine.

Ciel walked on towards the fashion event, looking very pleased with himself. Perhaps he might even enjoy himself now that he thought he was free of me.

...ooOooOo...

Some minutes after my little ruse, I decided it was a good thing I decided to ignore his order and follow him into the department store.

"What do you mean you're short a model? I'm not tall enough to be a model." Ciel scowled. If anyone has the height, it's Soma” He looked quite picturesque with his lips pursed. I chuckled to myself.

Mr. Muto (or Violet as he was called by 'everyone’) stood before the pair looking a cross between annoyed and pleased, smiled thinly. "Well, Soma's already in on the show, now isn't he?"
“No I’m not!” Soma sounded indignant. “Nooooo, I came to watch.” He stuck out his chin.

"He has promised to be our biggest supporter from the audience."

Soma’s mouth was in a little ‘oh’ of understanding, before he nodded vigorously. "I came to see, Ciel, not participate,” he assured the fuming boy. "Why don't you have fun? You won't have to talk to anyone. Just...get dressed and walk."

Ciel would not give up without a fight. "You have that swaggering, 'I know I've caught your eye' look down perfectly. Why don't you do it?"

Violet sighed. "The size is more like yours. The model was a small, petite girl, none of which Soma fits."

"I'm not a girl either," Ciel muttered.

"But you are both delicate, small, and more, elegant. Also, she had no breasts to speak of, so you're fine there, too." Violet gestured at the door. "In with you. We need to get your hair and makeup done too."

Soma glanced at his watch. "The show starts in 30 minutes. There's not much time! I'll help out in the back-- I'm good with makeup you know..."

Briefly, I toyed with the idea of altering Ciel's costume, or of fetching makeup’s more appropriate for his pale complexion, but in the end, I decided not to. It would be a shame to miss a moment of his debut.

Ciel was sent into the throng of student artists and department show officials.

“Well.” One of the high school students, Cheslock, if memory served, loomed over him. His hair, normally combed in such a way that it’s difficult to send him in for a uniform check(*4), has been spiked into a wave of whitish ‘froth’ for lack of a better word.

Ciel observed him with a faint smile. “Hello Cheslock.”

“You don’t give us much to work with, do you?” Cheslock closed his eyes, exasperated. “You’re not even in our school,” he sneered.

“I will be,” Ciel muttered. “I’m a third year in the junior high program, you know.”

“Fancy that,” Cheslock muttered. “Put your things down.” With that, he threw a plastic sheet over Ciel, and manhandled him over in the direction of a mirror, sink, and makeshift hair styling station.

Another unknown student held up the costume in question. She was eyeing Ciel determinedly, and something of a possessive gleam marked her gaze.

“Violet, he’s perfect,” she declared.

Violet shrugged. “Mm. Whatever. His coloring is good…” he moved in close to the girl, reached out to touch her cheek, and held her still. “Cheese,” he said, without inflection.

I blinked.

He snapped a photo with his cellphone. Then he handed the thin cellphone to her. “Document the transformation. I might want to sketch it later.”
With that, a number of other students crowded Cheslock and Ciel, each one trying to get the boy to change out of his clothes, bush his hair or do his makeup simultaneously.

It was most amusing.

“Oh, this color will look great on you!” The girl exclaimed, speaking in the ‘cutely’ falsetto, coquettish voice (*5), a whine I associated with the girls determined to become school idols.

A quieter student, Harcourt, a blond student a year older than Ciel, hesitantly held out a corset. “Excuse me,” he murmured in polite Japanese.

Ah, yes. One of the so-called ‘half’ (*6) children…this one who barely spoke English out of class. He seemed embarrassed by his pale skin and fair hair.

Ciel turned to look at him, and visibly balked at the item in his hands. “No,” he declared. “I’m not wearing that.”

Harcourt’s smile fell. “But…” he said weakly. “We had it ordered just for today.”

“Come on Phantomhive,” Cheslock laughed. “It’s just a corset.”

Ciel somehow talked them out of forcing him into that. “I have asthma. It’s always too hot in these places, and I’m already wearing more clothes than necessary. Do you want me to pass out?”

Harcourt nodded, and went to go get the matching fashion socks, and a pair of shoes from the collection.

“Cheslock, that’s good. Stop there. Give the rest of us a chance!” The girl butted in. She held out a handful of something silver and pointy.

Ciel looked closely at what she proffered. “What is this for?”

“Well, you’re kind of flat chested,” she said with a straight face. “And still small. Your chest hasn’t broadened at all, but you’re not quite big enough in the hips, so I would like to have some give here and need to bring in a seam there, and well, we don’t have time to do it all properly, so we’ll make do with these.”

Ciel looked utterly aghast at the thought of using safety pins for a semi-professional event. He shook his head. “No again.”

She pouted at him.

“I’ll just nip downstairs to get some proper sewing pins, or fashion tape, if they have it,” he insisted. He batted Harcourt’s hand away, who was holding a brush with mineral powders on it. “You’ve already done that,” he informed the boy.

Ah, yes. Ciel was considering becoming a professional artisan…or at least taking the fashion courses. I supposeed he would have a thing to say about using awkward materials. Especially if there was a possibility that it would pinch him.

“Let’s just take one quick photo before you do, so we can discuss what else needs doing…” the girl muttered. “And we could scare up something more, um, better, if we looked, right? No need to go.”

Ciel waved his hands in exasperation. “Take your photo. I’m going downstairs. Give me a pile of those adverts, and it’ll accomplish two purposes at once, wouldn’t you say?”
“You’re ninth in the running,” Harcourt reminded Ciel quietly. “It should be about forty-five minutes in, but they want you back for lineup at least twenty minutes before that.”

“Got it,” Ciel muttered. And with that, the ‘petite, delicate’ little thing stormed (albeit gracefully) out of the throng. He was not pleased to be around so many people after all.

oOoOoO

Ciel paused at the door, and at that moment, he looked so like a young cat, setting paw out into the world for the first time. As soon as the nearest doorman was looking the wrong way, I put my hands around his waist, and pet his hair.

Ciel stiffened, under my hands and wrenched free. A look of alarm transformed his sweet countenance to…fear? Exasperation? He looked utterly overwhelmed. He masked it quickly, of course, but I could feel his heart speed. “No,” Ciel said faintly.

I sniffed, enjoying the scent of his confused fear. Nearly despairing…

"Hello Ciel," I purred. "Such a pity you haven't already made a contract with me...did you forget? You'll need a request a great deal more interesting to remove me from your side today." I pause, and dangle a loose piece of lace before his eyes. His eyes track its movement before his gaze returns to me. "Your costume is coming along nicely."

“You’re not wanted here,” he breathed. “I’m busy. Go back where you came from.”

I had to laugh. Was he rewording some old texts in efforts to exorcise me? Or was he simply being rude? “Not today, little master. Not until we have a contract.”

Ciel turned on his toe and marched towards the escalators. Feeling the many eyes on him, he slowed to a more sedate pace and stepped onto the moving stairs.

I thought briefly of getting the pins he needed and surprising him with a handful of pointy sewing things at the bottom of the stairs, but something in Ciel’s cautious, wary posture bid me stay. Sometimes things happen in the world with a demon in mind.

Ciel squinted at something in the distance. He was at an angle to the flooring below, just at the part where they couldn’t see him, but he had a view of below.

“What…?” Ciel said quietly. He squatted on the stairs, eager to see something. So caughtvup with the seeing that he didn’t notice the fabric tear catch between the moving platforms.

He peered into the depths below, trying for a better look.

Curious, I looked below us.

There was a troupe of performers wearing gaudy costumes. One handed out balloons, while another drew attention to the "Time Sale" event for the store. But that was only a facade. The balloons were attached to something completely unnecessary...and the performers huddled together holding...gas masks?

“It’s time for you to choose, Ciel Phantomhive,” I whispered. “Make a contract with me now, or… live…with the consequences.”

Ciel looked up at me with complete horror in his eyes.
(
1) Moshi-Moshi is a kind of “hello” used primarily on the telephone. Moshi-mosh is a silly, cute of saying the same thing.

(*2) Muto Toshi. Mutou, written 紫藤, Violet Wisteria. (Wow, he has a flower in his name. LOVE.) and “Gregory” means “watchful, alert,” which doesn’t translate well into Japanese. So I took the “intelligent” aspect of “alert” and interpreted “watchful” as observant, and decided on Toshi; which means bright, intelligent. With other kanji it can mean a variety of other things too. Either way, everyone calls him Violet. (If he were a girl, he’d be Sumire, but alas…)

(*3) School Uniform checks. Random checks of skirt length (girls), whether or not you’re wearing the approved white shirts, undershirts, whether or not your hair is dyed, etc, etc. Though I highly doubt an international school would be too strict on dying your hair. (Don’t ask me, though. I’m a public school kinda person.)

(*4) Falsetto, coquettish voice. Many of my American friends visiting me have described the ‘cute’ voice of girls (and shop attendants) to be whiny and nasal. It is a cultural difference; most Japanese people think it’s cute. Sebastian either way thinks it’s annoying, but this does not reflect my opinion.

(*5) ‘Half’ is a somewhat-controversial-in-a-formal-situation term, but it is still a widely-used description of a Japanese person with mixed heritage. This term is especially used with persons who have strong features (especially Caucasian features.) Also, not all persons with mixed heritage can actually speak more than one language. They may be embarrassed if they do, and they may be embarrassed if they don’t.

(*6) Kary Pamyu Pamyu really is an artist. She’s cute, and her songs are slightly techno and musical all in one go. Her most famous song is “Fashion Monster,” I think. I like her, even if Sebastian doesn’t.

(...and even though this is the most footnotes I've written in one chapter, I would be disappointed if that's all you have to talk about…)

A/N: Ciel is caught in a tight spot. Don’t you love my cliff-hangers? So! Tell me what you think?
XXII. The Cage

Chapter Summary

Up until now, Ciel has endured a variety of complications of being pursued by a demon at his Junior High School. Now, in a Tokyo shopping mall, Sebastian urges Ciel to make a Choice right when terrorists threaten Ciel's safety.

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Remember:
“What…?” Ciel said quietly. He squatted on the stairs, heedless of the fabric that could tear if caught between the moving platforms.

Chapter 22: The Circus and the Cage.

(Sebastian)

There was a whirl of commotion between the troupe. Faces turned up at Ciel, sharp with fear and anger. I danced out of sight, while a troupe member carefully stepped in front of what had to be a large quantity of… whatever it was. I assumed it was their arsenal.

Ciel wrestled with the fabric of his dress. Sadly for him, it was not the gauzy stuff that would tear at such treatment. He was stuck fast on the ever descending steps of the escalator. He would soon reach the floor, where the performers were already moving to surround the boy.

“It’s not too late. We still have time to start this,” a young man with a similarly painted face, and red, red hair proclaimed. “She doesn’t have time to go to security, and our cue should come any second now. Everyone to their places.” He turned to Ciel. “You, girl. Stay with Beast.”

“But Joker! I was going to go with you—” the dark haired woman protested.

“We don’t have time for this! The customers are watching.” Joker smiled and gallantly bent to help Ciel up. “Are you all right, Miss? Go there with Beast. She’ll take care of you.”

“What’s that thi—” Ciel began, but he was interrupted by the girl wearing a rose headdress.

“What a pretty costume! Are you doing the fashion show upstairs?” The girl pitched her voice expertly, drowning out Ciel’s accusation. “Look everyone, there are fliers! There’s a student fashion show upstairs! Don’t rush now, but look, look!”

Already people seemed to be setting the uneasy moment aside, ready to hustle on with their shopping.

“Everyone!” Ciel began again, but once more he was drowned out.

“Time Sale! It’s a time sale!” Two children did cartwheels for the crowd.

“—the balloons—” was the only thing Ciel could make heard.

“Try it! It’s great!” The children sang out, their high soprano voices carrying over the crowd.
“—gas—” But Ciel was already being taken to the Staff Only door.

This little group of circus terrorists certainly worked fluidly together. Not a single performer was out of step in making it seem perfectly natural that the young ‘girl’ in costume be taken away with them.

But what was their goal? Simply to cause mass chaos once they received their signal, or to kill?

I weighed the options, feeling a sense of anticipation, and adrenalin run through me. What I needed was for Ciel to forget about the potential danger of the others, and focus on his own impending misfortune. Without actually losing my chosen human, of course.

The door closed behind them, and Ciel, unused to walking in his heels, stumbled as he was forced along. They wouldn’t want him to be in the way…So where would they take him?

I kept close to the shadows. It was natural for me to avoid a human’s limited sight, and so none of them would notice me either. In that way, I trailed them. Ciel was near panicked, and he scuffed his feet whenever he could, tried to jerk out of their strong arms, and generally caused a ruckus. But there was no one to hear.

“Stop,” Beast grunted, “struggling!” She clutched Ciel’s upper arm with more force than necessary and glared at the boy. “You can’t get past me, so you can’t tell anyone about anything you might think you saw.” Beast’s fingers twitched to her side, flexing, as though she wished to reach for the firearm hidden there.

Ciel stuck out his chin. “Your actions indicate that you’re up to something seriously illegal. Something dangerous. I saw—”

“You saw nothing!” Beast tried to smile, but it came out more like a sneer.

The smaller figure leaned against Ciel. When he looked from her pale hands to her sweet, trusting smile, he stopped just long enough for them to re-situate him. “Just wait here a little while. It won’t be long now.” She rewarded him with a giggle as Beast roughly pulled Ciel’s arms behind him.

Ciel looked up in alarm.

Beast half carried him against her back. “Doll…come here. Through these doors…yes…it locks, doesn’t it?”

“Mm-hmm,” the girl sang.

Ciel wailed. “They’ll notice I’m gone,” he warned them.

“They won’t have the slightest idea where to start looking then, now would they?” Beast shot back.

“Don’t worry,” Doll said solemnly. “You’ll be all right. We’re just keeping you out of the way, ok?” She teasingly pressed on his nose, as if he were a child. That action only served to accentuate their similar height. “Be a good boy, and we’ll go play when the show is over.”

“Whatsoever you’re doing, you’re going to get caught. You ought to—”

Beast laughed, her voice harsh. “Of course we’ll be caught.” She gave a derisive snort, and she truly did look fierce. I was merely amused, however. “Most of us anyway. But that’s not the point. Those were our orders.”
“That’s our role,” Doll agreed. She looked at Ciel, her brow furrowing as she considered him. “We know that the Japanese Police Force isn’t stupid,” Doll said simply. “So getting away…it’s not the point.” She echoed Beast. It was likely that she didn’t have an original thought on the matter.

“We’ll go out in a wave of glory.” Beast smiled grimly. “Our message will burn brightly in Japan’s memory.”

Ciel shook his head. He looked confused. “I don’t understand.”

“You wouldn’t,” Doll said sadly.

Ciel breathed softly. “If you know you’ll be caught…let me go,” he demanded. He should have pleaded. Should have smiled. But he didn’t.

“No.” Doll shook her head. “Someone will come back for you. This might be the best place for you to wait it out.”

Beast nudged Ciel, gesturing for him to back up. She kept walking menacingly forward, herding the boy against the wall and near the piping of an old sink. She took a scarf off part of her costume, and wordlessly accepted Doll’s. The two pieces tied together was enough to go around Ciel’s slender wrists twice, with still enough room to tie him to the exposed pipe. She was thorough, I will give her that.

“There’s a good child…” she smiled faintly. “Hold still and this won’t hurt a bit. Struggle, and it could cut off your circulation. If it’s too tight…you could eventually lose use of your hands. That is, if no one found you soon enough.”

Ciel quieted, and dropped his gaze. He was biding his time, to be sure, but the two women assumed he was too scared to think.

Like a true performer, Beast pulled a gauzy piece of fabric, not out of her sleeve (which might have been expected of a children-appropriate Sale Event), but out of her bustier. She tugged at the gauzy red fabric, pulling out centimeter by centimeter delicately. She kept her eyes locked on Ciel’s. Ciel struggled again when he realized where she meant to put that fabric, but it didn’t help.

“No, no, I’ll be quiet. Who’s there to hear me?” He gabbled out the words quickly, near tripping over them. My. He really is fluent if he can beg, isn’t he?

Beast smiled cruelly, and put two fingers on his cheek. The other hand danced across his smooth face, still so soft and tender, and she dared to put one finger in the corner of his mouth. Ciel would have bit her, but she was too nimble.

“Smile,” she whispered.

He opened his mouth to scream—a mistake.

Beast slipped the cloth between his teeth, cutting into his mouth and ruining the makeup.

_Ah, a pity._

Then she caressed his lips once more, and tapped his forehead sharply. “Be good,” she reminded him.

And then Beast left, her heels clicking as she went.
Doll came after quietly, scurrying. She had lost some of her grace. Doll spared a glance behind her, a sad frown making her somehow more like her namesake.

Ciel was left alone with the knowledge that some act of terror was about to commence, and he, the son of the Dark Gentleman, could do nothing about it. How helpless he must have felt.

When the door closed, as Ciel had thought (hoped) it wouldn’t, Ciel began trying to scream in earnest. He banged his feet against the floor, even daring to smack his head against the metal pipe to see if it would make more noise. He was in a right panic.

I couldn’t help but laugh.

He met my gaze. In that moment, Ciel’s eyes held more hatred for me than they had for his captors.

I looked at him, and then pointedly away. The room was not quite silent. Not enough to drive a person mad with fear. We could hear the outside, hear the utter normalcy that continued, moment by moment. That would not do.

I reached out, in a manner of speaking, and ‘tweaked’ Ciel’s perception just...so. Now it was appropriately silent, and the seconds seemed to Ciel to tick by like hours. He stopped screaming, and gasped for breath, resting, half dozing. My gift to him was a subtle play on his mind, and I lent him the solitude and quiet of Hell. Nothing was so utterly profound as darkness, numbing loneliness, and the ache of hunger gnawing at your stomach. Here was something that might break a child.

Once it felt to Ciel as though he had been tied up and abandoned for hours, I allowed him to focus on me once more. He gasped when I brushed his hair from his face, and shivered violently when I wound my fingers through the scarf for a moment. Ciel winced at the additional pressure, but like a person at knifepoint, he made no sudden moves. I stroked his neck, and at last, removed the gag. Ciel merely took uneven, ragged breaths. He still had enough energy to glare at me.

Time to break the silence.

“You have the power you require to end all of this. I could easily free you. Protect you. You would have such great abilities—available to you with just an order.”

I looked into his blue eyes seeking a glimpse of that delectable soul. Ciel met my gaze.

“Your orders would be absolute. You could name three conditions in exchange for one thing and absolute loyalty. Promise me your soul, and I will be your strength.”

“Why would I...believe the word of a demon?” Ciel whispered, lacking the oxygen to say anything louder. “I still think...you...might have set this all up. It could all be your fault.” His eyes were glassy for a moment, and oddly accepting. “You said it yourself...you would...torment me...into a contract.”

“I didn’t mean for you to suffer in this way.” I murmured, and brushed his cheek. He flinched away, though he tried to mask the motion. “I only meant to tease you. I’m afraid you walked into this mess all on your own.” My expression was blank; lacking any easily recognized human emotion.

To be truthful, I did not think the situation so very out of bounds. No one was there to see Ciel’s torment, which would have been the worst situation for a boy of his age. He needed an audience to be truly humiliated.
“As you wish. If you wish to invoke a contract, merely call my name.”

At last, I let the silence fade. Something was happening outside. I listened to the milling crowd, and pondered the taste of their screams. Their confusion, and fear and mounting terror were like an orchestra performing a subtle masterpiece. I settled down to listen, and wove their voices, stretching seconds into hours, into days. I knew that Ciel would break under the pressure. He would call for me if he thought he would die of thirst and hunger, surely.

But the brat was unwilling to sit still and go mad. Oh no. That determination that set him apart, that desire to do things his way or no way at all, it made him do something entirely unexpected.

I watched, bemused.

Ciel was practically an acrobat, I soon found out—and he pulled several muscles in the process, and dislocated a shoulder, if that noise was any indication, but he’d maneuvered the silk scarves enough. He knew the fabric, I saw, and stretched it against the short weave. And the very safety pins he’d been afraid of poking his delicate skin (positioned neatly by his shoulder, holding up a strap under a layer of shawl), found its way to his mouth. His lips bled only a little. He managed to tear the fabric enough to wrestle free.

I applauded his ingenuity. “Well. That was unexpected. Quite the Houdini, little master.”

Ciel was focused and intent. He didn’t respond to my commentary. Instead he gently massaged feeling his wrists and feet; he still felt as though he’d been in that position for days, after all.

After several minutes of listening to the panicking outside, he ventured a look at me. “If you want me out of here safe and sound...” he swallowed, “to get you that contract...”

I smiled. “I owe you no allegiance until you promise me your soul. I would much rather keep you in my sights. . . Would you like some water? You were tied to a sink, if you recall.”

Ciel nodded vigorously. “Yes,” he said in a small voice. Ah. It was easy to see how his father still thought of him as a child.

I watched Ciel take slow steps back to the place he was tied, and stepped behind him to steady the boy. His heartbeat was erratic from dehydration. Ciel’s swollen fingers struggled with the faucet, but he managed. Gingerly, he opened his mouth to dribble the water in, and then used the water to clean his face and neck. It seemed I didn’t have to make him stop drinking-- he knew enough not to gorge on water.

Ciel tried the door, but of course it’s locked, or blocked in some way. Only his eyes moved as he tried to conserve energy, searching for some way to get himself out. At last, his eyes settled on the wall to our right. A wall both his captors and I had dismissed. But Ciel Phantomhive walked right up to it, and sat down, examining the floor. There were grooves there, like the ones I’d seen somewhere before.

Ciel’s nimble fingers turned a bar in a circular... key... near the base of the floor. He shuffled over to two more spaces to do the same, and then took hold of what had to be a...lever. The boy began to slide the room divider, revealing a similar room beside us. A room with a second door.

He didn’t bother sending me a triumphant smirk. Ciel marched forward, walking so hastily that his eyes unfocused and pupils shrank to pinpoints.

I caught him as he wavered, preventing him from falling. “Slower, Master Phantomhive,” I mimicked Tanaka, and he turned his face toward my voice.
He lay perfectly still in my arms, just breathing. “I need my inhaler...” he said finally. “It’s...I don’t
know where it is...” he continued quietly, and I heard faint wheezes when he spoke.

I sighed. Ciel was an intoxicating mixture of weak and demanding, proud and dependent. I stroked
his hair and offered him his inhaler from his bag. I held him upright, in a sitting position that was
easiest for his inflamed lungs to function.

Ciel took his medicine, and leaned back into me. Slowly, his breathing steadied.

“What is your plan, Ciel?” I wondered what his scheming intelligence might have devised, but I half
suspected he’s only moving on instinct.

Ciel opened his eyes wide (thinking to look alert? he looked instead like a kitten, just barely able to
walk), and looked at me directly. “Those balloons had some kind of chemical gas in them.” At my
impassive stare, he continued. “I’m asthmatic. If I stay in here any longer, I’ll...”

Ah. Apparently some form of logic has reminded him that it’s still the same day-- even when his
body told him otherwise. I supposed it would be highly unlikely for there to be any more screams if it
truly were days later...but nevertheless. I was surprised he reasoned it.

“Yes, my lord.” I stood, lifting Ciel into my arms. “Breathe through this,” I suggested, and handed
him a handkerchief.

“What, no gasmask?” Ciel asked, a hint of a smile quirking his lips.

This door may or may not have been locked, but for the sake of a show, I kicked it in, and dashed
into a blaze of light and gunfire.

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XXIII. That Demon, Taking Flight

Chapter Summary

Sebastian and Ciel attempt to make their escape from the Circus. Will Ciel make the contract when his life is on the line? Or has he managed to pull the wool over Sebastian's eyes?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 23: That Demon, Taking Flight

All around me, there was chaos. The humans, screaming customers and insane terrorists alike, milled about like so many worthless cattle. We slipped through them as easily as a shadow as I searched for the fastest means of escape.

“Shall I carry you outside so you can inform the police, or do you want to go back to your fashion show?” I teased.

“Get me to the ground floor. I’ll call from there,” Ciel instructed, already texting, though I couldn’t see how he could possibly see the screen at that angle.

Since there weren’t any windows, I headed for the escalator, planning on running down the banister. But Joker had that area well guarded. He took a measured aim, and shot two handguns in my direction. I spun out of the way, and took cover behind the gas balloons.

Ciel protested loudly at being next to the gas, however, so I resorted to dodging out of the way.

A bullet clipped the side of my suit jacket, and Joker was still shooting all out.

I slid across the floor, and threw Ciel in the direction of the escalator banister. His small form arched into the air just as—

Joker’s shots pelted into my torso and passed through me into the crowd. I twisted my body in the direction I desired and I caught a glimpse of Beast. She was quite the beauty in her own way, and the feral anger she displayed so easily made her intriguing, if not appetizing. She gestured violently at Joker, and her lips moved. I couldn’t hear her words over the blood rushing through my ears and the discomfort of being shot, but I read the words there. ‘You missed the brat, Joker. She’s trouble, and you let her escape.’ (*1)

Ah, the vicious beauty may be smarter than I gave her credit for. I briefly wondered if I could get anything useful out of her, but failing to see anything due to the fact that she was attacking my future-master, I decided against it.

I let gravity take a hold of me. I made a show of losing my balance and ‘fell’ down the escalator, right after Ciel. Joker would waste no more materials on me, I hoped. I managed to touch the ground seconds before Ciel (balanced precariously and looking something between annoyed and terrified)
was finished with his ride. I caught him neatly and smiled into his dazed eyes.

“Cutting it a bit close, wouldn’t you say?” Ciel breathed. His voice was too faint to sound scathing.

“Hm. Wouldn’t it be proper for you to show a little gratitude to your savior, little Ciel?” I chided him.
“I require very little. A certain promise would do,” I reminded him, knowing that even now I could stop to carve the contract marks on his flesh. There would always be time for that.

“Save it,” Ciel snapped. “We’re not—”

There was a noise from Beast. Our seconds of reprieve were over. Ciel turned away as a gun was aimed at him. Beast’s projectile was not the balls of lead (or whatever modern bullets are made of), however, but was something with synthetic feathers and a pointed tip came our way. I jumped up over the projectile’s path, and Ciel squinted furiously after it.

“Can you catch that? I want a sample,” he demanded.

“Of course,” I purred. “Provided she sends us another.”

But we were running out of banister, and she was not as fast as I would be. We landed neatly on the next floor before she could shoot any more at us.

“Stop!”

I glanced up to see the little figure in white. Doll. I offered her a tiny smile, and momentarily set Ciel on his feet. If she was to attack, I wanted both hands free to disable her. Beast had specialty darts, and this child held balloons…I briefly wondered what sort of poison could be inside.

“This is hopeless,” Ciel muttered. “Stop now, give yourself up to the police.” His voice was steady, but quiet. Whatever gas they’d released was less potent here, and he had finally begun to catch his breath.

“Stay where you are,” Doll said evenly. “If you try and escape, we’ll catch you. There are people on every floor.”

I didn’t spare her another glance. Although everyone was in a state of panic, there was still time to escape; I didn’t have time to listen to the ramblings of fanatics. Doubtless they were carrying out the orders of their leader— probably part of a cult. Or perhaps they were strays taken in by a madman’s apparent kindness, and were perfectly willing to be thrown away at his direction. Either way, their actions threatened to injure Ciel. That would not do.

“Doomsday is coming. Father tells us so. It’s pointless to run away now...” Doll murmured, and held onto her balloons.

Ciel moved slowly, cautiously, acting as though she were a wild animal. “Have you seen the signs?” he asked with an easy smile. “How can you be sure? Why not just come with us, and we’ll tell the police everything we know.”

I pressed Ciel into a column as she ran toward us both, leaping into a kick that would have broken his fragile bones. She soared past us, and scrambled back to her feet as she turned around.

I leaned in and kissed Ciel’s forehead. “Do stay out of the way.”

Doll stared, and took a small step backwards. Her large eye fixed on my shirt, on the slowly widening bloodstain there.
“You’re hurt,” she said softly, and compassion filled her single visible eye.

Ciel struggled against me, an expression of alarm passing over him. He looked down to see the blood, and he looked stricken. “You…” he began.

Across from us, Doll lurched forward. Her feet took her closer to us, but her emotions made her waver. Doll’s porcelain fingers released the balloon as she stretched out her hand—

Now. She couldn’t stop me from leaving, and was too distracted to call out to the more dangerous of the two. I moved quickly, and due to the complete lack of windows in this part of the building, I headed towards the non-mechanical stairs, thinking to make our escape by more traditional means.

I pulled Ciel close to me and sped that way, only to find those guarded as well.

There was a flurry of movement, and a little girl dressed in pink and black emerged from her hiding place. She must have been quite determined to help, but I doubted she had any real effect on the situation. Then I saw the other child, a blond boy dressed in shades of green.

Between the two of them they held something faintly reflective-- a thin wire held taught. It seemed they meant to strangle us, trip us, or (though I doubted they could manage it) cut us to pieces. Unless it was razor floss...Had technology allowed for such bloody advancement? Considering the high-speed rail service, the technology chips and other things, I suspected it had.

Humans are, after all, a terribly violent race.

The boy stepped forward. “Father wanted to meet you, Phantomhive. It’s too bad you had to be here, you little snot. He’ll be so disappointed…” His tone and manner were entirely out of place with his visage. The boy looked as though he was a sweet, tender thing still in elementary school, but his scowl and sneering voice spoke otherwise.

Again, Ciel wavered. I had to keep him firmly in my grasp, or he’d fall. Somehow, the presence of these gaudy performers shook him in a way that I and my soft, subtle threats never did. He was at the mercy of stronger men that wanted to do him harm, and they thought nothing of his charms, or his determination.

“So Sebastian,” Ciel said in a low voice.

The blond sneered, and pulled the gas mask over his face. Opposite him, the girl did the same.

There wasn’t time or space to run and get Ciel out of reach of their weapons and poison both. Not with these tiled floors and my own blood making a fine trail. Go back, and Doll or Beast would have me. Go forward, and they would make Ciel fall into poisoned oblivion, drugged on some chemical I did not understand.

So I chose the third option. The lift. I turned my heels and stood before the closed door in an instant.

“So Sebastian, the lift won’t work! They don’t in fires, and the terrorists probably jammed it or something—” Ciel hissed in my ear. Master of his fears at last, he implored me with ferocious conviction.

“It seems, Ciel, that you are right.” I set Ciel down to get a better hold, and pried the metal doors open. “Oh good, it’s above us,” I remarked.
Ciel only had time to let out a despairing moan.

I snaked my arms around his middle, balancing him against me to situate him in a way to promote as much mobility as I could.

“Oh God.” Ciel did not try to close his eyes. He flinched, and only looked away when I spared him a glance.

Then I leapt into the air—

A tiny noise escaped Ciel.

— and I pulled with enough force to knock the lift from its hook, and send the cable spinning wildly in its hook. The lock on the cable was broken. I hung onto the bar with one hand, and with the other grasped Ciel. We began to descend at pleasant speed.

“You idiot.” Ciel’s voice was flat. “When you get to the ground level, how will you open the—”

The whirring of gears, cables, and wind ripped the words from his mouth. He had a point, though. I swung gently from one side to the next, readying myself to force entry. Or exit, as the case were.

I released my hold on the elevator bar, free falling the last ten meters. I timed it just right, if I say so myself. The flimsy metal doors gave way to my kick with a mild amount of noise and resistance, and we somersaulted onto the ground as the elevator plummeted farther below, only to give a deafening crash as the cable finally reached its end.

Ciel, dazed, did not comment.

“The ground floor, young master.” I released him and offered a small bow.

I surveyed the surroundings. “Ah.” There were no terrorists that I could see, but it certainly was not deserted.

The doors were being blockaded by a ring of men in black uniforms with large plastic shields, looking rather like a foot soldier platoon with plastic gear. I wondered how effective they would be.

I pushed through the glass doors, and collapsed in a heap to dissuade the police from attempting to shoot at us. Ciel obligingly ‘noticed’ the blood staining my suit, and began to cause a scene.

“Get up!” he shouted. “You can’t—”

“Yes, my lord,” I murmured. “I will be fine.”

Slowly, the people came closer. Even with Ciel’s charming performance, the men were cautious approaching us—perhaps Doll and the other child-performer’s descriptions had already reached their ears, judging from their hesitation.

I pushed Ciel away. In his bloody costume and stage makeup, he drew all the attention from me. As I wanted it.

While he made all the noise, I looked about. Immediately, I caught a glimpse of a familiar, if pale and drawn, face. A face that didn’t belong.

Meanwhile, Ciel, having dismissed my condition as play-acting, called to the policemen. “Inspector
Sakamoto! Officer Ohno! It’s a terrorist group.” He walked forward, stumbling only a little. The people made way for him; he seemed to carry a sort of dignity with him that wouldn’t have been out of place in an earl. “Come here.” His voice was ragged and hoarse, and he could not shout any further.

Several unfamiliar police, their shields in place and visors down, stiffened at his approach.

But Ciel walked on, limping forward in his confidence, knowing that he would not be shot. Despite the fact that his features and outlandish costume could easily be taken for a circus actor. “It was the performers in Noah’s Arc Circus. They have people on every floor—” Ciel gasped out, his weak lungs and shock finally making him stumble and fall to his knees.

One of the police rushed forward to support him, with a medic on his heels.

Well. *He doesn’t seem to need any help.* I left him to explain the situation.

As though to cover my movement, more and more civilians ran outside, heedless to the, ‘Please evacuate calmly’ announcement. I took advantage of the ruckus, and sped toward the pale figure before he could duck out of sight.

*Yes. I have you now,* I thought to myself.

Agares moved like a shadow behind the lines. He stalked between paramedics and police, seemingly unnoticed. It was fascinating, how this weak thing could blend so seamlessly with the environment. How low he can lie. How artless, his game.

Finally, I stepped out before him. “You.” I caught him, setting my black nails to tear into his skin. I pulled him roughly to me, stepping close enough to smell the rose-scent on his breath.

He froze.

“You are the challenger.”

Agares smiled thinly at that. He met my gaze.

“I’ll have you know,” I purred. “I resent your meddling.”

oOoOoOo

tbc...

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Because I have the circus folk speaking Japanese, what Beast actually says doesn’t include pronouns, therefore there wouldn’t be any clues to what gender she thinks Ciel is in that line. However, English needs pronouns and we can’t drop them, or use a neutral pronoun so…. oh well.

(*) The elevator was inspired by the James Bond movie “Skyfall,” though Bond rides it UP. Only Sebastian would dare take it down...

A/N/ Author's challenge. Do you know what Agares name means? ;) (We had this
conversation months ago with Carrie...our beta is smart.

OoOoOo
XXIV. The Challenger, Pulling Strings

Chapter Summary

Sebastian at last confronts the Challenger, but things do not go as planned...with Ciel out of danger, Sebastian is off to confront other threats...

Chapter 24: The Challenger, Pulling Strings

oOoOoOo

“It isn’t against the rules. Hardly affects the choices you made concerning your young...choice,” Agares said, his voice cool and his face expressionless.

I reached out and took him by the shoulder, ramming him into a very handy pole (for telecommunications or some such thing. How useful they would have been for capital punishment in the past...you could hang a man at every stone’s throw).

“Keep talking.” I smiled.

“It would never have been a challenge if I did not. You would never remember this meal otherwise,” he muttered, resituating my hand and pressing lightly into my shoulder.

Pain radiated from my wounds. “So the little mouse douses the bait with wine, and puts his greatest weapons on the line.” My fingers danced up his arm, and I squeezed his shoulder in return. What would have looked like a friendly gesture hurt him so much that he cried out. “…bureaucracy, social media threats, and...what else could you possibly do?” I squeezed harder and smiled, thinking of his recent actions.

Agares grit his teeth. “You know very well what that child has to offer. You know that his reputation means the world to him. What I can do is hardly of question. I have made him into the—”

“You had nothing to do with that,” I murmured. I dropped the smile. “He was beautiful before you touched him with your memory tricks and manipulation.”

“Oh?” Agares smiled in sly satisfaction.

“What other damage have you done to Ciel Phantomhive?”

“Little Ciel,” Agares repeated. His eyes stopped reflecting in his glasses, and I wondered at his true appearance. Hell can be a confusing place, and the shapes we take there are often misleading.

I shook such musings off. “You have interfered with the pathos of things. You have stretched this encounter long past its natural course. You have sullied the Aesthetics,” I charged him.

“Have I done all that?” Agares’ smile stretched against his teeth. “But the boy is a stubborn one. He would never have called you. He would never take you, no matter my little games.” He stepped aside, redistributing my weight and slipping out of my hold so easily that I suspected he had been toying with me.
The realization was a sour one; this demon was not cobbled. He had no limits on his body here. I stared after him.

“Your aesthetics demand it,” I reminded him. “If I am unsatisfied with our game…we should settle it now.”

“Dissatisfied? With your own inability to make the Contract?”

I frowned at him.

“If we were to have a duel…” Surely, I thought, his lips twitched there. “It would solve nothing. It would only serve to amuse…” he stopped, corrected himself. “…amuse everyone concerned.”

“Do you mean…” I began, but stopped.

While Agares laughed aloud, I felt his presence fade. Not as a spirit, a demon without contract, but the sly, shifting form of a demon moving faster than humans could perceive. Under the cover of a group of paramedics rushing into me, Agares slipped away.

Well. We’d have to settle this later. In my weakened state, I could not follow. The medics put their hands on me, locking me to this place with their determination to ‘set me right.’ Human hands can constrain one in ways indescribable.

The chance to follow passed, and I finally heard the gabbled words. “You’re bleeding,” one of them informed me. His voice was calm, slow, and impossible to argue with.

All around us civilians, police and paramedics rushed about. Some insisted on going home straight away (request denied), while other, apparently healthy individuals demanded a private ambulance to the hospital.

“Check for signs of difficulty breathing. Anyone with respiratory problems should seek medical attention. The criminals used pepper spray. If you have trouble breathing or seeing, seek a medical professional,” someone intoned. I turned to see a young female officer speaking through a horn that muffled and distorted her voice, but simultaneously carried it farther than an unamplified human’s voice ought to be able. I winced at the noise.

“He’s in shock,” the other one said tersely. I wondered if he were a paramedic or police.

“Sir, you need to come with us,” the first one continued. “I’m Suzuki. Let me help you.”

The second didn’t wait to hear me out. “Can’t you see his face? This guy doesn’t understand a word you’re saying,” he said in Japanese. “He-ru-pu. You,” he said with a thick Japanese accent, and he proceeded to attempt to get me to rest my weight on him.

I caught his wrist and pushed it away. I stood to my full height and smiled cruelly at the men before me. “I won’t be going with you, I’m afraid. Help some of the actual victims. I’m fine,” I told them in perfectly polite Japanese. If my eyes glowed a bit too bright, or my teeth were the barest amount too sharp, it couldn’t have been helped. The humans were asking for it.

Suzuki frowned. “Sir, all persons with injuries are being treated.”

The other one scowled, his temper breaking. “Hey, you. Tell us what you know about whatever’s going on inside!”

I rolled my eyes. “Terrorists are trying to prevent people from leaving while they set off gas attacks. I
Officer He-ru-pu looked at my bloodied shirt, and looked back to Ciel’s costume, and dared to take a step closer. “We have some more questions for you sir. If your wounds aren’t troubling you—”

Suzuki nodded slightly, and interrupted. “Yes... But he is still bleeding. Here…” he touched my chest, and suddenly I remembered.

“Ah.” I looked down at the bloody mess of my shirt, and then I laughed. “Do you think I’m a terrorist? I’m afraid I actually was shot. But what kind of teacher would I be if I let a few injuries keep me from getting an asthmatic student out of a situation like that?”

Suzuki looked at me, impressed. “You’re a teacher?”

Officer He-ru-pu snorted.

“The same one who was supposed to be with the fashion show kids, huh? Why didn’t you get all of them out?” He said sullenly.

Heedless to my speech, the actual paramedic urged me to sit on his gurney and tore at my shirt. He started visibly at the gunshot wounds. He looked rather funny, and distinctly disturbed. It was laughable.

I smiled pleasantly, keeping my gaze on the other officer.

“Sir, you need to stay very still while we put pressure on the—” he said slowly, firmly.

The other officer fidgeted awkwardly on his feet, alternating between leaning closer to see the details and looking away, embarrassed to realize he insulted a clearly injured man. But he also seemed suspicious. Most humans, after all, couldn’t survive wounds like that. “He can’t be...”

“Tokyo will end!” A voice interrupted, breaking all of our concentration. Though most native news persons were filming away from the scenes of chaos and (albeit limited) carnage, there was no lack of amateurs holding cellphones to record, and one apparent freelance cameraman. They immediately turned their attention toward the fanatic.

I turned to see a severely bandaged figure surrounded by police, bellowing out his words. “Tokyo will end, and I shall become—”

But news persons were not the only ones in the vicinity. The police quickly mobilized, and he was overcome by a quick moving officer.

He was not so easily deterred. I watched with acute interest as he continued to spew the terrorist’s doctrine. “I shall become Father to all those children in the New Tokyo.” His voice was as loud as any preacher’s, but his face was cast in shadow. “Aaah, aah,” he cried, as handcuffs were forced around his hands.

Was he in pain? The thought made me smile.

“Sir...” the medic Suzuki said, without much force. He seemed momentarily overwhelmed by the situation, panic blocking his training as effectively as anything I might say.

“Quiet.” I pulled the shirt back over my wounds distractedly, and looked into the scene. There was a familiar person with flaming red hair about to be taken away, and I had no idea how he’d gotten there. Had so much time passed?
“Father!” Joker, being held tightly by no less than three police, lurched towards the bandaged figure. He was forced to the ground, his face pressed close to the pavement.

Father suddenly stopped, and his scarred, bandaged face split in an approximation of a grin. He stepped free from the officer, and began to laugh, half shaking with his guffaws.

_So he is mad after all._

He spoke with utter conviction. “I wanted to be wrapped in the same darkness as those special, beautiful people. We will change Tokyo, and make them our princess, and I shall be beautiful and dark as that beautiful child—I want to touch him before he becomes as cold and distant as the moon.”

Curious. I wonder if the Phantomhives would have any information on this...possibly religious group. Perhaps they could shed light on those enigmatic words.

I was forced out of my reflection as the paramedic started jogging with me still on the gurney. “I need an occlusive dressing! We’ve got a gunshot victim, three bullet wounds to the torso—” I looked down to see more blood emerging from the wounds. Ah, yes. I needed to get out of sight before the idiots realized my true nature.

“Stop jerking me around,” I ordered him, and oddly enough, he did. But not at my words, no, he stopped so he wouldn’t run crashing into another blood-soaked figure. I smiled at the small figure in front of me.

“Sebastian.” Ciel’s voice was hard, and it carried straight to my heart. “What are you doing over there?”

The medic turned to Ciel. “Get out of the way. We need to hurry.” At Ciel’s look, he tried another tactic. “Do you know this gentleman?” He asked quickly. “He needs immediate medical treatment —”

“What?” Ciel demanded.

There was a small flurry of movements as the three ‘servants’ from the Phantomhive family caught up with their little master.

Mei-rin and Finnian visibly balked at my wounds, but Bard was more interested in staring me in the eye. Soon he turned away, looking instead to the little child.

“You should be on your way to the hospital,” he said gruffly in English. “You need a breathing treatment.”

Ciel brushed the comment aside. “What’s wrong with him?”

“I am in no need of medical treatment,” I interrupted smoothly. “If you could spare me a new shirt, good sir, I will be perfectly all right.”

Bard looked at me again, his eyes sharp. In the patchy sunlight, they reflected and clouded like turquoise. In another era, this man might have been.... but he was speaking. I turned my attention back to him. “If you’ve been shot,” Bard interjected, “you need to lie down and do what he says.” He jerked a finger at the paramedic.

“I’m afraid that is out of the question. It’s not as bad as it looks...” I looked to Ciel, wondering if he would back me up.
To my surprise, Ciel did.

“He’ll be better off with you and Tanaka.” Saving his life might have more benefits than I suspected.

“It is fully within my rights to decline treatment,” I remind them, though I was only half sure that that was actually the case.

To accent my point, I stood up from the stretcher, and accepted only a bandage. I tried to drop the bloody mess of bullets as inconspicuously as I could manage, but to no avail. Bard winced.

“This is not a good idea,” he grunted. But he willingly lent himself as a walking crutch, and looked irritably at Ciel for instruction.

The unlikely Finnian delivered the plan of action in rapid-fire Japanese. “Ciel, we need to get to the ambulance for you too, you know. We have to be at the hospital so you can recover, and your dad knows where to look for you, and.... and all that.”

Mei-rin nodded enthusiastically.

“When did you all get here anyways,” Ciel whispered, watching the man called Father warily. He seemed more shaken and disturbed by that single man than he had been by a handful of clowns with guns.

“Roof. Special entry permit granted by Tokyo Special Assault Team.” The answer was more a reply to “how” rather than “when.” It was rather suspicious, I thought, how they could respond to the situation so quickly?

Ciel must have felt so as well, for he raised an eyebrow. “So that's why so many of the performers are down here now...”

Well damn. It seems that all my prospective influence I could have had over Ciel because of my minor role of hero would be overshadowed by these incompetents after all.

Perhaps Ciel would see me favorably in Hospital. After that, there would be words to be had…with the boy, and more importantly, with the demon.

All good things in time.
XXV. His Would-Be-Master, Recovering

Chapter Summary

Ciel has escaped the Circus performers with hardly an injury, even after being locked away. Stuck in a room full of his classmates and upperclassman, Ciel faces some unexpected questions. Was the attack somehow planned to get to him? Sebastian and the Undertaker lurking about the hospital doesn't help either...

How do you hide in a hospital room? Ciel tries to find out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 25: His Would-be-Master, Recovering.
(Ciel)

Having finally been transported from the parking lot after the gas attack and installed in the pediatric ward of a very full hospital, Ciel hadn’t really expected many visitors yet. He doubted there would be room for visitors. Not to mention, the parents were probably still trying to work out which hospital everyone was being kept in. Unless they used Line… (*1)

Not expecting anyone but the rare nurse to come in with all of the more seriously hurt people to look after, Ciel had been accordingly surprised to see Undertaker pop in. His slow, sudden appearance startled some of the others. Only Violet and Ciel didn’t visibly start. Cheslock swore colorfully and actually attempted to get out of bed.

“Hello children. I brought cookies.” His sleeves dangled over an old fashioned picnic basket as he scurried from bed to bed, handing each child an individually wrapped cookie shaped like dog biscuits. “And here’s one for you, Earl.”

“Thank you,” Ciel murmured, and looked at the Undertaker with some confusion. “But I’m not an Earl.”

Undertaker snickered. “Of course you aren’t.”

“Oya, Sebastian, I would have thought you’d request a bed next to your young charge. Why hide there in the corner?” Undertaker waved a last bone shaped treat at Sebastian.

Sebastian looked less like a walking corpse now that he had proper bandages and a clean hospital gown. The blood soaked shirt he had been wearing previously was no where to be seen. Probably because the gown was not long enough, only Sebastian’s faintly stained trousers hinted at significant blood loss.

“Good afternoon, Undertaker. I wasn’t expecting you to show up just yet.”

Ciel sighed dramatically. The nerve of that demon, showing up even in the hospital. He probably gets off on the thought of all the pain and death, Ciel thought uncharitably.
For their parts, none of the artists seemed to be surprised at a professor’s presence at the department school that day.

“You have some nice bandages there, professor. Did you see more action than faulty pepper spray contraptions, then?” Undertaker’s grin was crooked, and his tone was playful. “The media is having a field day, chastising police response, department store security and other…private defenders.”

“He was shot. He should be dead. Devil only knows why he isn’t,” Ciel muttered.

Violet raised an eyebrow, while Soma made a noise in protest before adding, “I heard he carried you out, Ciel.”

“Now, now, Soma. Be charitable. He's probably experiencing post traumatic stress disorder. If he's feeling vulnerable and weak, we just have to humor him.” Sebastian's lips curled into a sly smile.

Ciel felt heat rush to his cheeks at those words. “Am not!” He barely restrained the urge to stick out his tongue.

“Poor Ciel,” Soma crooned, instantly sympathetic, which only made Ciel more irate.

Undertaker snickered. “They do say going about a regular schedule is good for the trauma victim.” His thin frame shook with suppressed giggles.

“So I should ignore you and go find something sweet to eat then?” Ciel widened his eyes and gave a tiny smile, playing at the 'sweet kid' everyone should be familiar with.

He was fully aware of Violet's gaze on him.

"So he should ignore us all until we have something interesting to say?” Violet commented blandly.

Cheslock sniggered. "So, Undertaker, we don't have to coddle him then?"

Undertaker's smile was back, and he met Violet's gaze with a few small nods. "Mm. But really, do Phantomhives ignore anything?" He turned to Cheslock. "And you ignore him at your own risk. He can have quite a temper..."

Ciel pretended they weren't baiting him, and turned on the television.

Ciel watched the television with disgusted fascination which was more deservingly fixed on an insect; He was determined to ignore Sebastian’s and the Undertaker. Predictably, the station was covering the terrorist attack. Ciel flicked the channels to his preferred news program with English subtitles and sat back to watch.

Ciel turned the volume up, but still heard Soma’s energetic denial of Violet’s critique of Ciel's behavior in the background. "He doesn't ignore you, he's just...uh, quiet. And sometimes grumpy. But you're grumpier, Violet!!"

“...Japanese police and special divisions were quick to respond,” the newscaster said gravely.

“Soma, quiet,” Violet demanded.

Cheslock loomed over everyone, straining his ears to catch every word.

When the culprit’s faces were flashed again, the young artists murmured quietly. Undertaker and Sebastian stopped their conversation.
“Just listen,” Undertaker suggested.

“—police have made several arrests, though no names have been released at this time. It seems that several defective aerosol spray dispensers prevented the attack from being much more deadly.”

The footage showed an aerial view of the department store, surrounded by police cars, ambulances and fire trucks. The people on the ground looked little more than swarming ants.

A brief scene of the bandaged man and Joker being put into police cars, with officers holding a jacket to hide their faces was briefly shown as the anchor continued. “Only one of the floors was exposed to tear gas, with limited numbers of individuals attacked with pepper spray on the lower floors. Japanese police and special divisions were quick to respond.”

The footage switched to an official setting indoors, with members of the police on one side, and media on the other. Along the walls, Ciel noted a familiar figure. Only the top of his head was visible, but Ciel recognized his father, unobtrusively in the back row, seemingly deep in discussion with one of the police.

“Ciel,” Violet’s voice cut through the murmurs of the fashion students. “Isn’t that your dad? In the back.” Clever as always, Violet was the first to pick up on a detail Ciel didn’t want anyone to notice.

“Oooh, it is, isn’t it?” Soma leaned forward. “He’s got a lot of connections with the police, Mr. Phantomhive…” he blurted.

Ciel frowned at the two of them, and declined to comment.

“How fortunate that the young Guard Pup was there, eh?” Undertaker crooned. “Really, the response was quite fast. Almost like they had some…information.”

“Were you really held captive?” Cheslock asked, ignoring Ciel’s silence. “Everyone else was just pepper sprayed. Why the hell were you kidnapped?”

Ciel shook his head, feeling all the blood leave his face. He said nothing.

Was that man called ‘Father’ really referring to me and the Phantomhive family, or was that just shock making me read too much into it? Ciel shivered under his blanket. He felt Sebastian’s eyes like a lead weight while trying to swim to the surface.

His thoughts rang around in his head, each one contradicting the one before it.

I wonder who was pulling the strings for these terrorists--

But they couldn’t have known I would be there today,

It couldn’t have been a coincidence...

How did my dad know to send Bard, Mei-Rin and Finnian?

His eyes slid back to the Undertaker, now talking once more with Sebastian about some mundane school topic.

“I know you’re still new, but they really are an amusing lot, these teacher types. Especially Agares. He’s quite tame…obedient, really.”

Ciel wondered at Sebastian’s sudden stillness at that comment, at the subtly long glance he gave the Undertaker.
Something was going on that Ciel couldn’t quite understand. Something that involved Sebastian.

*What is going on here?*

oOoOoOo

Sebastian and Undertaker politely waited in the hall, knowing that Ciel was waiting for his father. Sebastian had a particularly surly expression, which the nurses and other patients presumably mistook for discomfort due to his injuries.

“How do you need something, sir? Can I show you back to your room? This is the pediatric ward…” a capable looking nurse said kindly.

“I’ve already checked out, thank you. I’m waiting for my students’ parents to arrive…” Sebastian informed her, giving his best Go-Away smile.

Watching her disappear down the hall, Sebastian mused, “Why does every machine in the hospital have to make noise? In the past, doctors and nurses were expected to do their work stoically and without undue noise so as not to disturb their patience.” His furrowed brow the only indication of his annoyance.

“Hmmm…I believe someone just died three floors down…” Undertaker sounded almost wistful.

Sebastian sighed, and resumed eavesdropping.

oOoOoOo

After a time, the hospital room slowly emptied. Around the room, students slept or played with their phones while three adults wandered in and out of the room. Ciel tried to relax. He tried to sleep, or to answer the dozens of text messages he’d received in the past few hours, but it was all in vain.

Phantomhive certainly did not twiddle his thumbs or otherwise wait anxiously. Nevertheless, he found himself chewing his lip and eying the edge of the hospital curtains while he waited for his father to arrive.

*Curtains* Ciel thought, *are a poor imitation of privacy.* Somewhere, a clock ticked the seconds away.

“You need to eat. Sugar or something.” Bard poked his head through said curtains, his friendly smile beguiling his special unit uniform/lab coat combo.

“Thanks Bard. But, um, you know you can wait— or go to work or whatever— in the hallway.” Ciel pulled a face.

Of the three “servants,” Bard, received the most wary glances from the steadily dwindling number of students. Finnian, with his baby face and hair barrettes was taken for a friendly rookie, while Mei-rin was overlooked once she had her civilian clothing and glasses on. Bard, however, even wearing a lab coat (probably pilfered), looked like a mad, battle hardened field doctor.

“Everyone thinks you’re on guard or something. Like you expect a crazy, tear-gas wielding terrorist to attack here next. You’re making them nervous.”

“Psha, if Undertaker isn’t scaring them, I won’t.” Bard grinned at Ciel as though they were sharing a joke.
Ciel stared gloomily back, wishing his family’s weird hiring practices hadn’t been made known to all of his peers.

A golden head pushed through the curtains. “Ciel!” Finnian called, delighted. “Did you hear?” As he trampled the curtains in efforts to get closer, Bard stepped out of the way, unhooked a bit of fabric, and drew the curtains back to prevent something falling on Ciel.

“Dad’s been cleared to come up. Yeah. I heard. That doesn’t mean he’ll be here anytime soon,” he replied, but his expression softened a little at Finny’s look.

Outside of the room off in the “designated waiting area,” if Ciel’s sense was correct, there was a loud hissing noise, followed by someone (sounding suspiciously like Bard) letting out a manly shriek. Several things fell over, and finally, the patients’ ward opened again, with heavy footsteps leading directly toward Ciel.

Bard pushed past Finnian, bearing a soot-blackened metal tray with what could only be a Bard Special Dessert. “I made chocolate marshmallows!”


“Er, yes.” Bard offered Ciel a shapeless glob. “No?” He grinned boyishly. “Well, the good news is, you’re father’s coming.”

Finnian made a face at the treat. “I think the chocolate’s burnt….” he said with dismay, but he picked up one of the lumpy things—only to quickly toss it from hand to hand. “Owww, it’s hot. Ciel wait a minute for it to cool down,” he advised.

Mei-rin trotted over at the commotion. “What’s hot?” she asked, stepping right into another patient’s bed. As she tumbled, her feet got caught on the wires, which in turn got caught on the bedsheets. Something began to whir and beep angrily. Mei-rin, of course, panicked. “Are you ok??” she demanded anxiously of the patient.

Said patient, a girl from a different school, laughed outright. “Oh, you unplugged the IV and it’s annoyed now. Just hook that bit there—”

Mei-rin looked at the things in chagrin. “I’m sorry!!”

Finny started to run over to help, but Bard shook his head. “That nurse has got it. Just relax.”

A few minutes later, Vincent arrived and was sitting on the edge of Ciel’s bed. “So, what’s this about you wanting private treatment at home?”

“I…I know I need more breathing treatments, or they’ll stick me in an oxygen tent so I don’t get pneumonia or something, but…” Ciel steeled himself. “I want to go home. And get someplace before those crazy terrorists or anyone else guesses where we’re staying.”

Vincent gave Ciel a measuring look. “You…heard…what that man called ‘Father’ was saying.”

Ciel glanced away, unable to hold his father’s gaze. “He pointed at me. He said something about… covering himself in darkness or something. Like ‘that boy.’ He recognized me even in girls clothes, when the rest of the country is convinced I’m a girl.”

Vincent looked like he might interrupt, but Ciel rushed on.

“He knows me, or about you, probably.” Ciel’s voice did not shake, and his hands did not waver,
but his weak, breathless tone betrayed his fear. “He knew about…don’t you know him? I heard his name was Tom Kelvin.” (*2)

“Ciel. There’s no evidence that the attack was anything more than what it seemed—a terrorist attack by fanatics. You were…captured before the attack was meant to begin. It doesn’t mean their whole plan was to get you.” Vincent took Ciel’s hand and squeezed it. Ciel looked at him unhappily. “You shouldn’t allow yourself to get so worked up.”

“Someone knew I’d be there, father, or someone set it up so that I’d go. Maybe someone in this room. Maybe someone from school,” Ciel added darkly. “I want to go somewhere they won’t guess for a while.” Ciel’s other hand clenched at the sheets.

Vincent searched his son’s eyes for a moment, judging Ciel’s words and state of mind. “All right. We can leave Tokyo, Ciel. But we can’t exactly put you in hiding.” Vincent shook his head. “No, it’s better for you psychologically to go back to school. I’ll keep an eye out on you there, and you can talk to the school counselor.” Vincent put a hand on Ciel’s shoulder as he stood. “No one will get to you. Probably anyone involved with the plot was already arrested today.”

“Father, someone knew I’d be there. They now where I am now, and they’ll know where I live and go to school. We have no guarantees that even half the terrorists were caught.”

“Ciel, you can’t live your life in fear. We have many qualified people looking out for you.”

“It didn’t help mother,” Ciel hissed the words, barely daring to even whisper that statement. At his father’s stony silence, he went on. “Those ‘qualified people’ didn’t keep Sebastian away.”

“Not that again,” Vincent muttered. “I’m looking into his background and I have a new agent at the school,” Vincent murmured, barely vocalizing the words at all. Probably, he was counting on the fact that Ciel would read his lips. “You’ll get treatment near your school and you’ll go back on Tuesday, possibly Wednesday at the latest.”

A loud noise interrupted the staring contest between father and son. Mei-rin, Bard, and Finny stood awkwardly at the door. Mei-rin carried a file in hand, and a black bag that Ciel recognized as his father’s business materials.

“Eh-he-he…”

They awkwardly made their way into the room. “Master Phantomhive! It’s been a long day. You must be tired,” Mei-rin muttered.

Bard saluted. “We’ve gathered the proper sign-out materials and gotten a release form ready. Please stamp your seal in the lower left corner, and we shall deliver it! Sir!”

Vincent rolled his eyes. “Yes, it seems you’ve all been ready to go for a while now. Let me see the papers.” He looked them over, and then glanced around the room.

“Master Phantomhive?” Finny murmured. “I found Ciel’s bunny in your bag, so I kinda took him out, and we thought Ciel would like to have it, so…” he tossed something small and fluffy through the air.

Ciel stared as it landed on his bed. It was a very old plush toy… the first Ciel had made on his own. Tentatively, he touched its paw, then the long ears. He picked it up, testing the weight.

When he looked up at Vincent, his father was looking distinctly uncomfortable. “Um. Finny, don’t you mean to say you brought it with you…?”
Ciel looked on, ignoring the question. “You kept it. I thought it was thrown away or lost…”

Vincent turned faintly pink. “Yes. I did.” Then he turned back to the servants. “Ok, we need to call the nurse to get you ready to check out.”

OoOoOo

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Line, as mentioned back in chapter 10, is a global online messaging service access (primarily) via cellphone or smartphone. You can make groups to contact many people at once, or you can have one on one conversation. It’s an app which started in Japan after the 2011 earthquake after people couldn’t contact each other because the phone lines were jammed.

(*2) Actually, he’s just known as Baron Kelvin in the manga, but he signs his name as ‘Tom the Piper’s son’ (a nursery rhyme), so that’s his name for this fic…”
XXVI. That Demon, Undecided.

Chapter Summary

It's dark, and this demon has no leash. The Circus Troupe lies in ruin, but not for long. Sebastian hunts.

Chapter 26: That Demon, Undecided.

(Sebastian)

The demon Agares had momentarily escaped my wrath when he disappeared that day before the police. Now that Ciel had been relocated, I kept mulling over the situation with the other demon. *He will feel the full ramifications of manipulating the challenge beyond its normal boundaries, and he will retract his influences over Ciel, I vowed.*

Until then, there were other things that occupied my mind. Ciel had been contemplating the fanatical “Father” rather more than I expected him to, and his dear papa had taken him back to the Phantomhive abode.

But there was no time for sweet talk and games of wit. There was only a week left before the challenge ended. I could make Ciel mine with honeyed kisses and strong hands, of course, but I could use another piece as easily. The night was dark.

I considered long, and then I acted.

Three small bodies curled in amongst each other, lying on top of cardboard boxes they’d dragged in to the abandoned construction site. Standing out of range of the electric street lamp that flickered as I gazed on, I remembered a simpler time. A time when all of humanity lived like cattle to be herded and hunted when I was young, and I thought that all the bodies must surely hide the souls that got away. So new the world, so green, I could not comprehend that there were so many more of them than there ever were of us. And their companionship. Like these three (seemingly) children, lying side by side. I would rouse them, the hunt would begin.

They would show me that human *loyalty* was only for good times. For peaceful times.

*Creeeeek.* The noise was drawn out like a groan. My prey looked up, wide eyes luminescent in the dim light even as the others ran.

*Pitter patter, the mice do scatter.*

The hunger was on me.

I watched the remainder of the circus troupe grasp at each other and run in fear through the night. This night, wherever they walked would be the devil’s playground.

Their voices rose and fell, urgency, anger and fear mixing in a cacophony, which disguised the way the children run. Doll was soon left behind, but I paid the pair no mind. I understood that Wendy and Peter’s loyalty was only for each other, while Doll was only their expendable teammate. Just so. Human loyalty was a fickle thing. They would reason Doll to be “less of a loss, really,” than Joker,
Beast and Jumbo had been.

"Wendy, hurry up!" Peter called, desperate.

"I—" she gasped, out of words, and ever quiet.

Something hit the ground, and they left my sight for the deeper darkness. No matter; I ignored their desperate words and swift feet. They were not my prey.

Doll quivered in fear even as I stepped lightly to the ground, emulating the rope-walker’s landing pose. She could appreciate it.

"No," Doll whimpered, shaking her head. She tried on a brave face, but it faltered.

"What is your wish, Doll?" I kept my voice low and honeyed. I bent down and grasped her face. A single eye, large and bright eye stared up at me.

"Wha…what are you?"

Strange how similar her eyes were to his. Hers were more sad, or perhaps more worldly. Ciel’s eyes were brighter. Hers are the color of stone. She recognized me for what I am in an instant. But she still asked. Ah, there is sullied innocence. A parody of childhood. My lips twitched.

I ignored the question. "If you pay a price, I will serve you most loyally." I toyed with her hair, which (even in her present circumstances,) she carefully styled to hide her scar. Vanity, or shame, I couldn’t say. Human emotions could be so subtle, so fickle.

"Or would you rather I free your Father?" I smiled a long, knowing smile.

"Don’t speak his name." Doll shivered and pulled away. "You’re not dead. But they shot you and you still moved." She shook her head. "You’re not dead."

I looked down at her, huddled in dirty, nondescript clothes and wondered what Ciel would have done in her place. Bereft of his cause, separated from his family. Failed. Abandoned. Would he bend?

My fingers brushed her cheek light as the wind. "You’re not fit to be on your own, Doll. Don’t you want Father or Joker back to take care of you?" I played off of her insecurities, reminding her of the only parental figures she knew.

I held out a hand to pull her to her feet, gently holding her in place. She trembled and quivered in a way that Ciel didn’t. Wouldn’t.

And yet they seemed so similar in some aspects…dependent on others, soft and caring. I suppose she was a reflection of what Ciel could have been rather than of what he was. But does this scarred girl have the same steely resolve that attracted me so?

“What…price?” She whispered, and wet her lips. “I don’t have any—”

I put a hand on her jaw and closed her mouth. I turned her head in the direction Peter and Wendy went. “Not much,” I murmured, and handed her a knife.

If it were Ciel, he’d turn it on me, I thought even as the girl dropped the knife, recoiling.

“Now, now. It’s not the time to pretend at being a good little girl.” I bent down and pointed the knife at her. “They abandoned you. Father,” I whispered, “would be unhappy with them. Furthermore, he
would bestow the greatest honors on you for freeing him.”

Never mind she wouldn’t live an hour past the man’s release. Doll wouldn’t think to make a deal that would preserve her life longer.

Ciel would guess. He would ask me to make Father’s plans work. He would command me like a general.

I turned the knife around, offering her the hilt.

She wavered. A part of me wanted to lean in—to mark her with my contract. But…I also felt contempt for her easy, simple desires. I was bored with the same old chase.

*Use this. Make the deal,* I told myself. With a surge of conviction, I picked the little thing by the scruff of her neck as one would a kitten (or rather, I grabbed her clothes.) Her high pitched scream would set Wendy and Peter faster. We would flush them out.

My feet touched on the road once, then we leapt again.

Close. Very close. I could smell their fear and traces of the tear gas.

I dropped the girl when I caught sight of them, supporting her just long enough to keep her from breaking a leg.

She cowered into the ground as I hovered above her. I lunged to frighten her in the right direction. She skinned her knees to get away.

In the distance, water dripped somewhere. That detail distracted me from the symphony of their racing hearts and the beating of their feet.

The hunger was on me again, clawing at me with tooth and nail. I might have laughed, I might have smiled at that moment, as I imagined those deep blue eyes staring out of a youthful face.

But below me, there was only the girl, half sobbing, clutching the knife as I herded her after the others.

To make the contract, she must become the hunter, and yet… I no longer thought her capable of the act. A sour taste filled my mouth. She was not my first choice, and she did not summon me. She did not name me.

The thrill of the chase faded away, and I clamped down on my hunger.

Enough.

I stepped down in front of the girl just as her fear was finally turning to anger. She struck out blindly.

I frowned in annoyance. *Humans.* I gave her my second gift by tossing the bag (which contained a bit of money and a change of clothes) directly at her chest.

“Pay the toll and call my name. If I’m in the mood, I’ll come.” I had no more words for her.

The moon was upon us, casting my face in blue-ish shadows that made my face unearthly. Marked me as different from anyone she had ever met. The wind was like a lover, casting its hands through
my hair and rippling my clothes. I observed her without a twist of the lips.

And yet she trembled.

I withdrew.

“Your name?” Doll gasped out, all that adrenalin made her hands shake.

“Sebastian Michaelis.”

I had other things to do that night. The challenge could be won yet.

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XXVII. That Teacher, Scheming

Chapter Summary

Sebastian is running out of time to secure Ciel, but he still has a few cards up his sleeve. Will Ciel listen now that he's back at school?

CHAPTER 29: THAT TEACHER, SCHEMING

The final work-week opened with a dawn that was as glorious as it was bitter. The news channels were filled with follow-up information on the department store terror-attack, and despite fears of attendance drops and angry parents, the school day began with all its usual mishaps.

Grey eyed me as I stepped into the Staff Room, his gentlemanly features schooled into a carefully blank expression. “Are you really feeling better?” he asked, cutting directly to the chase.

I glanced at him for the barest of a moment before letting my lips twitch upward. “I shall endure.”

The teachers surrounding our desks turned their heads to observe the two of us. I had been given “sick days” for the two days previous, and I used the time to find Doll and the others. Once back, I was met with open astonishment as I sat down at my desk.

“Don’t you think…” Mr. Nakamura began, his voice firmer and filled with more passion than I’d come to expect from him. “…you ought to stay home the entire week? You were injured.”

I of course offered only a small smile in reply to that. There was nothing else to say.

Grey decided to explain for me. “Mr. Michaelis is intent on showing the children that even a national incident will not keep them down if they choose. He is able to walk for a few hours, I am sure? So he will continue bravely with routine and set an exemplary…example,” he declared.

I merely continued smiling. Oh, there could be that ‘exemplary behavior.’ And there could be a certain demon that needed talking to.

“That is wonderful!” Someone else added, erupting into a broad grin.

“You are a superb teacher, Michaelis. We are happy to have you.”

“I hope you won’t take on too much at a time. Be sure to rest. What’s your schedule? We can perhaps rearrange the classes today so you can go home at noon…? Or is resting in-between classes better?”

Grey happily started to peddle his (ever grander) opinion of the matter, and set about convincing everyone of whatever schedule changes he wanted to see happen.

I ignored him and looked over toward the Vice Principal’s desk. Strangely, Agares was nowhere to be seen. Only the Japanese Vice Principal (the one with whom I had very little to do) stood at attention. I glanced at the announcements board, and saw printed very clearly, that Agares was slated for a ‘business trip’ at a station far to the west of here.
“Perhaps a free afternoon would be best,” I interjected. “As for my schedule, I have only four classes today…” and Ciel Phantomhive was in one of them. Fresh from his stay at the family manor, he’d be eager to see me. “Would this suffice?” I pushed a card to Grey, who looked startled to have his suggestions followed.

“Very good,” he admitted. “If you could have a look—” and the card was passed around and agreed to as the meeting began. The other teacher’s accepted this schedule change without even the slightest reluctance, so I would be seeing Ciel sooner than either of us anticipated.

Ah. So heroics have their benefits after all.

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The classrooms were alive with activity.

Presumably, the homeroom teacher, Mr. Nakamura, had informed them of the schedule change, and so there was no confusion as to why I was there. Instead, I was subject to whispers of adolescent awe and pity echoing even into the hallway.

“Ciel, is it true? Did he really save you?” Someone stood up in their rush to ask first. There was a slight fluttering as most of the class turned to observe the exchange.

Ciel was silent. He held his hands close, that one.

“What were you doing in that dress, anyway?”

“How come you got to participate in the senior fashion show? That is so not fair!!”

“If Professor Michaelis rescued me, I think I could die happy.”

“Idiot, if you died, there wouldn’t be anything good about saving you!!”

The sudden hush that welcomed me when I opened the door was telling. The children looked upon me with something bordering on respect.

“Good morning,” I greeted them. I pressed on without waiting for a response. “We have progressed farther than the other history classes, and as our esteemed Mr. Grey has not finished the plans for the museum trip, it is unlikely that we will need to press on at a hurried place. We have two options.”

The students looked up in interest.

“We can either discuss recent events, or we can play a review game. I leave the decision to you. You have 20 seconds to decide.” I took out my pocketwatch and appeared to be watching it for that time. I’m quite sure Ciel realized I was really watching him. “Let’s have a show of hands. Review game?”

Predictably, few hands were raised. Ciel had his hands crossed over his chest in a defiant manner.

“Discussion?” Ciel still did not raise his hand. The majority, however, did.

“Very well.” I turned around and began writing a sample of the English and Japanese headlines from the newspapers.

While I wrote, the students watched on in expectant silence. It was, perhaps, the quietest discussion I’ve heard amongst students.
When I turned around, they were attempting serious, adult-like faces. One or two of the students looked scared. The others looked eager (in spite of their good postures, their stiff-upper-lips).

“If you expect me to hold a discussion by asking you questions,” I said, descending among them in a few quick steps, “please reconsider your assumption.”

There were a few chuckles at that, but I paid them no mind. Junior high and high school students will laugh at almost anything remotely amusing a teacher says.

I don’t let it bother me.

“Sir?” Someone asked. Watanabe, his hands trembling as he thought through his words. In the few weeks I’d been teaching them, this one in particular had his English ability improve…perhaps games and cruel machine demonstrations (all with the ‘teeth’ removed, of course…) were good for him.

“How are we discussing then?”

I nodded. “I will be the moderator. Each person should give at least two remarks, even if it is only to agree with what is already said, and justifies that you understand the content.”

Uneasy silence followed. “We don’t want to be graded, sir,” Ciel’s little hanger-on, McMillan, mumbled.

“I recommend asking questions of your classmates. ‘What do you think such-and-such means?’ or ‘If you were so-and-so…’ Those starter questions should be just enough for us.”

“Can you give us an example?” One of the breathless girls asked.

“If you had seen the terrorists before their plan was set in action, what would you have done? And how would you have evaded capture?” My eyes did not stray from the young woman. Most students would think this meant I saw only her, but Ciel, ah, Ciel. He knew I was observing him.

There was the expected minute of silence as the children digested this, discovered that no, I was not going to volunteer an answer, and started looking at one another. They met each other’s gazes awkwardly, mediating the space between silence with children’s graceless frowns and shifty movements.

Finally, a girl spoke up. She was a prim little thing, eager to follow instructions and a good student, but with a desire for the unnatural, the unusual, that I could smell on her.

“I’d have pretended to be on the phone. Walked to the ladies’ room or someplace out of earshot, and called the police.”

A boy immediately disagreed. “No, you wouldn’t call the police. You wouldn’t be sure. You would call your friend, wouldn’t you?” Watanabe again. He seemed rather disagreeable today.

The girl blushed. “Well. Maybe. And then she would have—”

“And the bathroom.” Another girl looked aghast at her classmate. Mary, the girl with flawless Japanese and a strange, blended accent of every-and-no country for English. “What if they followed you? What if you got trapped?”
There were nervous giggles as the young realized how little they knew. Their safe school-world had been invaded by reality, and part of that reality housed terrorists. There would be no silence after this—they would chatter to fill it up, to keep their minds from wandering to the horrific scenes from their imaginations, from so-called horror films.

Finally, when they’d exhausted their ideas about the bathroom and cellphone usage, the students turned curious gazes on Ciel. He after all, had seen the terrorists, and gotten caught for all the good it did him.

“How did you get away?” Someone asked, quiet as a mouse. He was afraid of the answer. “I heard you were locked in a room and tied up.”

Ciel, bored, peered out from behind his fringe. “The police gave a statement to the news people. I don’t have to, or want to, talk to the press about it,” he said primly.

“But we’re your classmates.” McMillan insisted, sounding hurt. “And aside from that, what if someone else gets kidnapped? Wouldn’t they need to know how to—”

“It was dumb luck!” Ciel shouted. “Who else would be caught by a dangerous group and tied up? Just don’t go do stupid things like getting drunk on your own, or even with some senior classmen. Don’t put yourself in dangerous situations. That’s how you get out.”

The sheer volume of his response startled most of the class into reflective silence. Some of the girls looked at Ciel with admiration. Others with a small amount of pity. The boys were looking at him blankly—and a few with outright irritation. Those boys, perhaps, decided they were entitled to more information…? Well.

“Was it through the air-ducts?”

Ciel cast an irritated glance at the boy. “Have you ever seen something like that in a Japanese department store?” He demanded. “Those things only exist in places that need servicing areas. Not spare rooms for staff.”

They contemplated this. “So…you can pick locks?”

Ciel rolled his eyes. “They didn’t notice it’s meant as one of those meeting rooms. The kind you can unlock and turn into huge meeting areas if needed—like the seminar hall above the library. Flexible walls,” he admitted.

“Then how’d you get out of the ropes?”

Ciel looked abashed. “Er. I didn’t. Professor Michaelis….”

Ah, if hero worship were enough to sustain a demon…. I only smiled. “The ingenuity of the situation lies entirely with Mister Phantomhive. I am only one hell of a teacher, after all.”

Their smiles were radiant. I had to laugh.

“Upperclassman Violet said you were targeted specifically.” Mary again. She wore her expressions on her sleeve breathed. She was half terrified Ciel would shout at her, half full of admiration.

“The so-called Circus Troupe didn’t know who I was,” Ciel said dismissively. He had his doubts, though, about the ring-leader, and maybe one more. Joker, perhaps? But Ciel wasn’t done thinking about this. He said no more about it.
The rest of the discussion focused on the media’s interpretation, and the students’ own perception of events, though no one thought of it as such. The children were unaware of Ciel’s disdainful gaze, his shaken confidence. They didn’t notice if my attention was only ever half on them. I can, after all, play my cards quite well.

Ciel would sit in the classroom and think about his powerlessness. Patience. A well-played hand would yet bring him into the contract.

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tbc...
A COLOSSAL JOKE
Agares, it seems, was a man who enjoyed fine dining. Tonight he planned to dine with the most influential upperclassmen, as a sort of ‘etiquette lesson.’ Ever a stickler for the fine details, however, he should be setting the table himself.

Ah, yes. The afternoon’s search was not wasted. From his so-called school related function, I had little clues. So I’d spent the extra hours researching Agares’ habits, preparing for my next move.

The hall was beautiful, in a mundane, human kind of way. The glass windows were polished to shine, and the lights neither too bright (as in school), or too dark (as in the medieval ages, where a demon could stand behind you without a person ever noticing…). The table was long, with six places set at generous positions. It would make a lovely impression, with the dark stained woods and softly shining glasses.

Agares froze in step, holding the centerpiece by the tips of his fingers. Ah. So he noticed at last.

“Good evening, Agares. Please excuse the intrusion.” I sketched a bow, but beguiling my polite words, my hands spoke another purpose. I had a handful of knives and forks at the ready.

Agares offered a thin smile, but before he said anything, he positioned the great heap of flowers. “I wasn’t expecting you, Professor Michaelis.” That he should pretend we were so cordially related amused me.

Whether or not he was willing to fight, I certainly was. “Agares. It’s time for a reckoning.” I ran at him at a rush, flinging forks in his direction at a speed no human could dodge.

Agares leaned out of the way, dodging all but one missile. He really was clumsy, it seemed. Or was this too, some sort of calculation? But now that the fight has begun, he gave a counter-attack of his own. Rather than take a piece from his artwork (the table), he rolled forward, lunged into a rather-awkward-looking kick, and swung around at my heels.

But I had already moved. Unlike the fight at the department store, I had no human obstacles to work around, and no contractee to protect. I too leapt, tucking my feet under me and spinning gracefully. Three more knives marked Agares, though none of them sank in.

“Tell me, Agares. How do you find living in this soft world with no tempting prize awaiting the end of your trials?” I teased.

“It is time better spent than languishing in the depths of hell.” Agares snorted. “Sloth is frowned upon in any circle.”

My eyes flashed at that. “Well. It sounds as though someone has been working too much overtime…” When I took a handful of utensils from his arrangement, only then did he really start to look pained.
“Put those back,” he demanded. He caught each one in as I flung it toward his face, and his hands bled merrily for it.

With a wide grin, I reached for the flower arrangement. Its ceramic base had quite the feel to it. “Take it off,” I demanded.

“Michaelis.” His tone was not friendly. Distracted, he asked, “Take what off?”

“Your spell.” I tossed the arrangement experimentally from one hand to the next, testing its weight.

“Oh.” He gave a long suffering smirk. “Little Ciel’s memory?” He purred. “He could break something as simple as that on his own…if you gave him proper motivation.” He tsked, even though he desperately wanted me to unhand his precious display, he shook his head.

I gave no tells. I would take him in a rush, running instead of tossing it as he expected. My feet were taking me toward my objective when a voice hailed me from an unexpected corner.

“What’s taking so long? Little Ciel got cold feet?” And there he was. Like a king on his throne, or a jester playing at the crown.

He sat at the cushy armchair at the very head of the table, wearing a silly hat that hid half of his face. In one hand, he held a pot of something sweet and sickly smelling. In the other, he toyed with a clump of that ungainly silver hair.

I stopped; flowers still in hand, and asked it of him. “What are you eating?” I threw the flowers without even looking at Agares. A satisfying umph reached my ears.

Undertaker snickered.

I stepped closer to the pair of them, relishing in the simple sound of my heels clacking against the floor. This game could still be mine. “You’ve come to face the charges?” I demanded of him.

Undertaker frowned. “Hello to you too, Sebastian. Come to give me a good laugh? I’m sure I have some information you’d be quite interested in….” Ah, yes. Undertaker was ever fond of his games.

I shook my head, and hid a knife behind a gloved hand. “I’m afraid the terms of the challenge on which I came into the world were made in ill faith. They violate the basic aesthetics.”

Agares didn’t smile or make his presence unduly overbearing. Rather, he frowned in the way most headmasters do. He seemed to count on the typical student reaction to authoritarian disapproval—subdued obedience with a hint of regret. He fair looked down his nose at me.

I threw my knife, but he had the good sense to dodge.

He continued as though nothing happened. “The terms were simple, Sebastian Michaelis. You were to choose a soul—any soul—and tempt it into a contract within one month. Simple, really. Why you haven’t accomplished such a basic thing is, I must confess, beyond me.”

Undertaker, lounging in his chair, spoke up. “He named you, didn’t he?” His green eyes peered out from under the top hat. It was an eerie picture.

“It’s not those terms which offend, Agares.”

He wavered in his posture, seeming unwilling to attack me while I accused him. Odd man.
“It’s the unnatural nature of your . . . involvement with a God of Death.” I took two more steps closer to the pair. “Whose idea was it really to Challenge me?” I allowed my tone to stay even as propriety demanded. As the accuser, I could afford such niceties.

“Undertaker. What claim do you have on the demon before me? Why did you challenge me?”

The silence stretched between us.

Undertaker quivered with his amusement. A tiny laugh escaped his lips.

“Ah, but…it seemed like fun, Sebastian. And admit it, you’re enjoying yourself… That little brat has you wrapped around his finger!” His laughter rang against the decorated room. “Who would have thought you such a masochist…”

I frowned.

“Just imagine what you could do in my service…!” His grin stretched against his skull. “Or will you win after all? Which would be more amusing?” Here, he smiled and stood.

I was uninterested in his comments. “Rogue Reaper. What is your purpose here?”

“To understand life. And to have a good laugh…” He toyed with his hair and summoned his weapon to his hand. A Buddhist wooden grave…stick…marker… (I’m not sure even the humans know its true purpose, after all…). Lazily, he tossed it in my direction.

I dodged his missile with ease. "I have been named by a human boy. He accepts his position to order me,” I tried. I could discover more about my true adversary after the terms of this charade of a contest was finished, after all.

"But he does not bear your mark.” Undertaker pointed his wooden grave marker at me. He offered his thin, crooked smile. His eyes shone a more vivid yellow-green this night than ever before. "It was foolish of you to not form the contract when he ordered you."

I snorted and dismissed his words. “A contract must be forged in very specific circumstances, or chosen in understanding of what the demon asks. Twisting his words goes against my aesthetics. He must choose his damnation on his own…” I smiled grimly. “But I could always lay a trail for him to follow.” I revealed a handful of knives, flinging them one at a time for him to catch with that supple grave marker.

“Oh?” Undertaker snickered. “A trail of breadcrumbs?”

“Which,” I dodged a poorly timed blow from Agares—he really has no balance—and showed my teeth. “I still intend to do.”

Agares ran straight into my trap. He was caught with both arms momentarily paralyzed with a well-applied blow, and I took the opportunity to push him down face first to just the right height, and kicked him viciously in the head.

“Aa!” Agares wailed, and I took his hesitation as an opportunity to jerk him up by the hair.

“You have no say in whether I win or not, do you Agares?” I purred. “How far you’ve fallen.” I didn’t bother hiding the disdain in my voice.

“You gain nothing by hurting me,” he growled, and blood dripped into his mouth.
Undertaker laughed and laughed. “Nice show, gentlemen.” He clapped his hands together, and all of the spent grave markers disappeared. The dining hall, however, remained in shambles.

“Now, we have a dinner to begin in exactly thirty minutes. Why don’t you get a promise out of Agares, hm? And be on your way.” Undertaker made a shooing motion with his hand.

“I won’t trouble Ciel,” Agares said through gritted teeth.

I released him. As he fell, I swiped a bit of the blood from his forehead and had a taste. There was nothing strange about the texture or flavor after all. “I accept your promise,” I said.

He nodded stiffly, collecting his balance from the floor.

“If you should go back on your word…” I smiled, and his blood shown on my white teeth, “then we shall have more than words, Agares the Damned. Agares the Aged. Agares, Duke of Eastern Hell. I name you, and thus claim right to a reckoning at a later date.”

There’s power in such words. And with him, bound in some way to the Undertaker, he had no defense against the blood rites either. Undertaker has made no claim on his vital fluids—the thought amused me to no end—and so he was unlikely to break our promise.

I wondered, Is he more or less bound than I have ever been with my human masters? To think… being bound to a master who will not die. But Undertaker’s entire existence may be…something similar to a human soul? Or not at all? I had never considered the nature of a Reaper before. However the Challenge turned out, I could always rip him into pieces and have crows devour his heart later.

Undertaker’s laughter brought me out of my reverie. “Tick-tock, tick-tock. Best you go try and win the heart of the young Phantomhive.”

I gave him a nod. “Of course. Please excuse me.”

I left them there in that darkened room, and would not think of the cleanup I left in my wake.

OoOoOo
XXIX A Doll with Strings

Chapter Summary

After Sebastian confronts Undertaker and Agares, Ciel is surprised to find Doll at his school. What is her purpose there? Can he learn anything useful?

Chapter 29: A Doll with Strings

(Ciel)

Suddenly, the light dimmed. Thinking that a cloud had simply passed before the sun, Ciel ignored that fact and kept working on his latest creation. That is, until there was a scraping noise and soft thump at the window.

Unease made his stomach lurch, but he resolutely kept his gaze at his desk. The boy bit his lip, worrying at the finishing touches on a tuft of mohair. The fabric was bulkier than he had imagined when he picked it out, so he thought he might need to streamline the costume design…

A resigned cough finally drew his attention. Sebastian, as he half expected, was at the window. This time, the demon was inexplicably hanging upside down with a sour look on his face. He gestured at his pocket watch.

It was too much. Ciel didn’t know what Sebastian wanted, but he doubted he’d enjoy the venture. So far, following Sebastian’s lead has led to public humiliation, corporal punishment, abduction, and no small amount of irritation. Like hell I’ll sit around and wait for the demon to introduce some new complication.

Ciel bolted. His feet flew under him as he headed down the hallway— until Ciel noticed his classmates staring— and then he skidded to a more leisurely gait. His heart raced in his chest, and he found himself seeking solitude near the only informant in the school. (My dad’s informant, he reluctantly thought.) He headed for The Swan, eager to get some answers.

Overeager in his hopeful contemplation, Ciel grinned as he opened the door. “Undertaker…” he started to call out, but the name faded away to a dull murmur.

Undertaker was nowhere in sight.

The café bustled on without him, students chattering at their tables, oblivious as ever to the complex events going on around them. Ciel was about to go to the counter, perhaps to order something as a precaution against being spirited away again “for tea.” But someone caught his eye—an uneasiness that made his back sting and his throat constrict. So he looked up.

One of the circus workers was there. She stood by the window, the afternoon light making even her clothes seem less common, more like the ethereal costume she wore on that day. Ciel felt steadily worse as unease changed to nervous dread. I feel ill. Even if I can’t control my body, though, I can still play the game.

Doll observed Ciel carefully, watching him as only the damned could, and her single visible eye was trained only on him. She seemed to make up her mind, and she walked forward with a boyish sort of
bluster that would have surprised him.

Ciel walked forward.

The Phantomhive boy made no sign of fear, and when he wished, he could stand taller than the rest; he would stand at ease in the power he would one day hold—he would be (as his father was) cool, contemptuous, condemning. All the world would bend to the child’s demands, raging, calculated though they might be. So he arrogantly hoped.

So it was that Ciel cut across the lobby to stop before her, heedless of the eyes of his classmates.

“Doll.” He looked on past her, and there one could see how her presence struck him. All thoughts of Sebastian with his comical ‘dissatisfied’ expression in the window fled.

Doll leaned away, her eye twitching as she moved. She was dressed in the school uniform, with a straight tie and neatly pressed shirt every high school girl in his school wore. She was wearing the standard slacks, though, instead of the girls’ usual pleated skirt. But she was not comfortably graceful as she’d been in the frilly skirts and high socks. She seemed to sink into herself, clutching at a bag.

“Is he here?” Doll asked, her lips quivering.

Ciel stared at her blankly. “Why are you asking me?”

Doll shook her head violently. In the seconds she did, the tightly coifed hair splayed wrongly. A hint of white, sterile cotton stretched over skin so pink it could only be ruined. Even that glimpse made her seem…nearly broken.

“You’re not even a first year.” She shook her head, and he couldn’t help but think that the words came almost thoughtlessly. “A junior high student. No wonder I never noticed you.” She gazed at Ciel, examining him at length.

Ciel stared at her, wondering how she found out. Has there always been a spy? Has the mass-media leaked it out, or are they better connected than I thought? Is that uniform fake…?

“You’re a student here!” He blurted out, then recovered. He licked his lips. In a rush of understanding, he remembered, and with the memory came the words. “Redmond mentioned that you’re on the school dance team a while back…”

This link between them made her smile and lean in. Some of her girlishness returned. “And you’re the boy everyone was talking about. Funny we never noticed each other before. Is it true the new teacher spanked you?”

Ciel did not like where this conversation was going. He coughed. “Let’s sit down.” He motioned her to the closest set of chairs by the window. When she settled, he asked, “How long have you been spying for Noah’s Arc?”

“I wasn’t spying. Father just wanted me to go to this school.” She pulled at the plain cotton eye patch under her hair self-consciously. She moved her hands away, carefully shifting her hair back in place. “But that’s not why I came. That man you were with… Sebastian Michaelis. He came for me the other night.”

So that’s what drove her out of hiding. And she hasn’t connected him with ‘the new teacher,’ either… Ciel sat rigid for a long moment, and then he leaned into his chair. What was my dad saying about me being safe here?, he fumed silently. Out loud, he only said, “Ah. Him. Is that who you wanted to know was here or not? Huh, what am I saying? Of course he is.”
“He wanted me to…anyway, he found me, and then I came back,” she whispered.

Somewhere in the café, a student dropped their spoon amidst shrieks and giggles. The normal sounds seemed far away, another word entirely.

*That can’t be the whole story.* Time to scare her into talking. Sweetness wouldn’t work any longer. “‘Father’ Tom Kelvin sent you to the others on a suicide mission. He expected people to die in that place.” Ciel paused, and considered her expression—*Her lips are tightly pursed— she’s unmoved, and unconvinced. Defiant, if anything.* So he pressed the point. “Including your classmates. He used you, all of you. What did he want—to topple the government from a department store?” Ciel didn’t bother to hide his scorn.

“He didn’t need us. It was pre-ordained.” Where Beast would have been vicious, Doll was sullen.

“So he made it your religion?” All of Ciel’s theories came spilling forth, ruthless, blameless, and barren of all softeners. “He took you in when ‘nobody else’ would, didn’t he? He gave you things. So you worshiped him like a god,” he accused.

*They say that what you hate most in others is what reminds you of yourself….of your failings,* his mother had told him. Her hands were soft, but her smile hard. That day, her self-hatred was more apparent than her love.

“That’s not it at all! And no one’s going to die,” she hissed. Her hands twitched. Perhaps he should have given her a tea…something to distract her.

“What about you lot? What if they get the death sentence?” Was he being cruel, or honest? Ciel didn’t know.

“No one died. You said.” Doll stuck her chin out. “Why are you tied up in this? That day, Father mentioned a boy…I mean, Peter and Wendy said….they said it was all for you….and the Michaelis wanted me to….well, I don’t think Wendy and Peter are safe.”

“Those two knew about me?” Ciel leaned forward. “What does that old man want with me?” Ciel whispered, keeping his voice low and quiet.

“I don’t know. I only just found out.” Doll gave a little sigh and twisted something in her bag. “It’s been a while since I came to school…I don’t understand why things turned out like this. We just wanted to show people The Way.”

“What do you know about Father?” He persisted relentlessly.

“What?” Doll started.

“He seemed to…know some things. Information most people aren’t privileged to.” Ciel kept his eyes on hers, though she refused to meet his gaze. Nevertheless, he barely saw the girl. Instead, he saw Kelvin, surrounded by police raving at the crowd, and Sebastian, covered in blood. “He knows the wrong people.”

Doll shook her head quickly, but said nothing.

“Why that day?”

“It was holy…”

“No. There’s more than that. *Tell me.*” Ciel snapped, forgetting to keep his voice low.
Doll seemed to notice her surroundings. She glanced nervously at her left, then to her right. Her visible eye brimmed with tears. “I don’t know.”

“That man led you on like sheep! He comforted and shaped you to be his slaves. What he did was vile; he used you—and other children, probably. He’s perverse, deluded, and greedy for power.” Ciel condemned the man he didn’t understand, hiding from his fear.

“Why…why do you hate him?”

“I don’t. I’ve never met him.” Ciel resisted the urge to look away, to rub away a burn that never really left him. He resisted, but barely.

“He’s not like that!” She shook her head. “He’s good, and kind, and wise.”

Ciel sighed impatiently. “He’s not what he says. He’s a liar. He hurts people!”

“How would you know?” Her voice was anguished.

“He knows my name!” They were both shouting now.

The café was hushed, except for a small cluster of teachers. But they weren’t teachers, or not all of them, anyway. Two police officers in pristine uniforms were walking steadily closer to Ciel and Doll.

“Don’t tell me…” Ciel muttered, someone…recognized her? Once again, information hadn’t been sent his way, even if it pertained to one of his classmates. If the police knew she was there—that she went to school here—they should have told me!

Doll too caught sight of the police. She sprang out of her chair, clutching for something in her bag again. She seemed torn between two actions—unable to come to a decision.

Something shifted to the side, and Ciel caught a glimpse red eyes. There was nearly no sound. It was eerie, how fast and silent he moved…but it was the bemused smile that kept drawing his attention.

She too caught sight of Sebastian and her eye widened in fear. She was like a tiny bird waiting for the instant to fly away. But instead of dashing past Ciel and running for a last, desperate escape, however, Doll lunged forward, something shone in the sunlight.

Ciel stepped back in surprise as the girl gave a feral cry and slashed toward Ciel’s middle. Ciel was vaguely aware of the fact that someone wailed with fright, that the police were running now, but they were too far. Doll was right there, a sharp knife in her hand.

Suddenly Sebastian’s arms were in the way, swirling Ciel out of reach.

Doll screamed, the noise guttural and wild in the back of her throat. She seemed completely crazed, the way she frantically thrust the knife toward the demon.

Sebastian simply caught her wrist, and the blade clattered away.

All of the café was screaming now, even as the police instructed, “Everyone. Please calm down and stay where you are. Stay where you are.”

Then the unbelievable, soothing words that neither child believed. “Miss…we only need to ask you a few questions.” The other police officer, put a firm hand on her shoulder to steer her away from Ciel.
They lied. Police and everyone always lie… Ciel felt a bitter anger he hadn’t felt since the aftermath of his tenth birthday.

Ciel glared at Sebastian. “Did you bring her here? Why did you even visit her—what were you planning, some more stress to get me to make that contract?” Ciel’s voice was shrill, harsh. What did he care if anyone overheard him? Maybe someone else could restrain the demon when he couldn’t.

“Sssh, calm down, little master. You didn’t find her charming?” Sebastian cocked his head to the side as he ushered Ciel to a (different) chair. “I would have made a contract with her, instead.”

Ciel was surprised with the angry jealousy this comment inspired in him. Why would he even offer his services to her? Ciel’s eyes filled with hurt.

Sebastian laughed. “You look like the maiden tricked out of her virginity.”

Ciel sputtered. He decided, despairingly, that ignoring Sebastian was seeming more and more out of the question.

“Just go away,” he demanded, trying to sound annoyed and angry.

“Why so sullen?” Sebastian asked, pushing a cup of tea into his hands.

Ciel looked away. Then he said, slowly, “If you can explain everything to my satisfaction…” he paused, and his blue eyes met Sebastian’s. “We might have something to consider.”

Sebastian schooled his expression into the perfect butler's mask. “Of course, my lord. Leave it to me.” Sebastian coughed. “Well, I believe the police wish to have a talk with all of these witnesses, and probably want to interview a number of the students who knew Doll. It seems your school may get some unprecedented attention, Ciel. Unless,” he licked his lips, “you make a contract and order me to hush it up, of course.”

Sebastian’s smile never looked more like a leer.

“It’ll be hours before I can go anywhere,” Ciel sighed.

“Ah, but that doesn’t suit my plans. How about we have them talk to you first? I’m sure your story hasn’t changed since the first time…” Sebastian drew closer to the remaining police officer. He reached forward, touching the man on the shoulder. Something happened between the two that Ciel couldn’t quite make out. A shiver went down his back, and Ciel wondered what tricks the demon was up to.

The police officer came over to where Ciel was watching with wide eyes. “Thank you for making your statement. I understand that you didn’t know about your classmate’s connection with the terrorists group?”

“She isn’t my classmate. I didn’t even know her.” Ciel gaped.

“I’m sure you’ll want to be going. Be sure to stay near the other students, and listen to your teachers,” The police officer instructed, frowning at Ciel in a half confused way.

Sebastian smiled at the officer in a patronizing sort of way as he ushered Ciel to the door. “I have something to show you Ciel. Come with me, and see if I can’t grant some of your desires.”

Ciel wondered if there was anything he could do to keep from following after the demon, but pushed that thought aside.
“Is it about Noah's Arc?”

“No, it's about your father.” With that, Sebastian didn't say anything more. He simply lifted Ciel into his arms, and as he had that night on the rooftop, leapt out into the night at unbelievable speed.

Ciel turned his face away from the stinging wind, and breathed in deeply. Sebastian’s hand curled around his cheek momentarily, but he made no complaint.

Sebastian’s touch was soft. He did not press Ciel anymore than that.

What have I just agreed to?
XXX A Last Desperate Move

Chapter Summary

Sebastian needs Ciel to fulfill the terms of the Challenge and seal the contract. But what can he do, when his chosen soul refuses? Why, take him home and tempt him, of course...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 32: Last desperate move
(Sebastian)

I stopped near the Phantomhive home, and set Ciel down. I gently leaned over him, pressing him up against a neighbor’s sidewall so that our foreheads touched. Ciel held his breath.

“I’m afraid our time to dance is limited, little master. I must leave you tomorrow evening,” I said.

Ciel shoved me away. “Tell me you didn’t come to show me this wall.” His cheeks flushed, and he seemed inexplicably breathless.

I chuckled. “I shall escort you in. Wait here while I turn the alarm system off, if you could? I’ll be right back. Try not to be abducted in my absence.”

Ciel’s biting tone trailed after me as I turned away. “You were right there the last time. Your presence doesn’t seem to make a difference,” he snorted.

“It does today.” I didn’t want to lose him now.

Shortly afterward, I whisked the boy away again, carrying him through the manor gates and up a flight of stairs. I had him pressed up against his father’s study door in the blink of an eye, so all that was left was to set him down and nudge the door open just a crack. There was a phone call going on.

Looking in on the scene, I contemplated Vincent Phantomhive. He was not a loud man. He didn’t roar his disapproval, and he didn’t yell his instructions. His calm demeanor was very traditional in fact, and amidst modern conveniences it struck me as quite...interesting.

“They’ve apprehended the girl.” Vincent seemed to be testing the phrase, requesting information without phrasing it as a question. As he waited for the reply, he caught his breath soundlessly. Whoever was on the other receiver could not have noticed his stiffening, or his shifting eyes as he waited for more information.

“What do you mean he had no additional report to add? Wasn’t the terrorist girl talking to him? She might have let some information slip— double check. I’m sure there’s a statement report there.” Vincent paused to listen to some response. “Yes, you said that already. Tell me what happened. I need to know how you caught her, if anyone else was hurt, and if you found out anything more about what they know about my son.”

Charming, that. It seemed he was keener on finding out what the evil-doers knew about his ‘dear
child’ than he was on learning what Ciel knew about the evil-doers. Did Ciel notice? I glanced his way.

Ciel leaned against me, stifling his intake of breath. He seemed unaffected by our proximity in his fascination with the conversation, and in his desire to hear more, he pressed close indeed. I caught him by the arm and held him so that I could hear his beating heart....

Ciel squirmed, shooting me a glare.

“Kelvin has been to one of my dinner parties, yes. I completely dismissed him.” Vincent ran a hand through his hair, frowning severely. “Who would have thought he was connected to the train station kidnappings? Have we found any more bodies? I can go out there myself…I have some ideas about where he would keep them.”

Ciel’s surprise was not complete-- he had surely suspected that his father knew more than he was letting on-- and he curled that little mouth into a frown. Secrets do not sit well with him, I thought, and wondered how to use that.

“We’re talking about biracial children, and immigrant children, right? Some of them were involved in international custody battles before they went missing. (*1) I think that some of the children who disappeared from the public records might have ended up in his hands. There could easily be more than a half dozen bodies. We can find some evidence if we look.” Vincent took an agitated step, and there was a scuffing noise on the wooden panels. “Unless he dropped them in the sea or buried them in a mountain,” he sighed under his breath.

I glanced down at Ciel. He was as expressionless as I’ve seen him, and no sign of sympathy showed for the ones closest to his age in this case...his lack of empathy suggested a few possible explanations.

Curiosity licked at my attention, but I focused instead on the child as he was now standing before me. If I could secure the contract... there would be time enough for answers.

I tapped Ciel’s shoulder, and ran two long fingers down his neck. “Useful, isn’t it? I could tell you so much more.” Ciel shivered at my touch. “Unfortunately, I see no reason to assist you without a contract any longer…what do you say, Ciel?”

He turned his blue eyes on me, uncomprehending.

“Will you make a contract with me, or wait until the world counts you ready to know of such dealings in your own time? What will it be—a contract, or ignorance?”

Ciel made to go back to listening at the door, gesturing for me to be quiet. Amusement mixed with irritation as I silently closed it, and I lifted his head so he’d look into my eyes. He won’t hear anyone but me now.

“Your choice.”

Sadly, that seemed to be the wrong approach for a fourteen-year-old boy planning on becoming a part of the underworld. Ciel stamped his foot. “You already know all of this, don’t you? You think this is some sort of classy temptation or something. Just tell me what you know and stop teasing me!”

I closed my eyes in exasperation and counted the seconds. Of course, my voice won’t carry when I don’t want it to, but Ciel is all too human. Any noise he makes carries like a stone in a case of glass. I had just enough time to make myself scarce before—
The door opened of its own accord, revealing Vincent Phantomhive. He was surprised into stopping mid-step, and motionless, he watched his son.

Ciel did not appear to know what to say.

Vincent was pale as the dead. “Ciel! When did you get here? Why aren’t you with the police in your school? How did you get here not an hour since— the, the capture?”

Another moment of silence as the two Phantomhives regarded each other.

When confronted unexpectedly, humans have the annoying tendency to tell the truth. “Sebastian,” Ciel said simply, falling back a step and trying to clear his mind. “Sebastian Michaelis.”

Damn all children for their good sense.

When I should have been safely shrouded in shadow out of sight and out of mind, the boy who gave me my name (my would-be master...) calling me broke the spell. I was clearly visible for all to see.

Vincent’s jaw dropped open. *It’s not very often you see that in person*, I thought. He looked at his watch again, as though more time might have passed to allow us time to have arrived in the country house. His brow furrowed, and before I knew it, he had a gun pointed at my chest. “Step against the wall.”

“Mr. Phantomhive,” I said pleasantly. “Good afternoon.”

I turned my gaze on Ciel. Had I irritated him enough to make him risk my capture? Or would he protect a trump card who told him things? Ciel remained silent, watching my every move.

Vincent’s eyes had the same look that Ciel’s did when he was put in a corner. He stepped cleanly out of the doorframe and pressed his advantage, skillfully moving so that Ciel was not in the line of fire. Surely, though, he would not shoot. The ricocheting fragments could very well harm his… precious…son.

His phone, abandoned on the floor, vibrated with the little voice coming out of it. “Phantomhive! What is the situation? Do you need assistance?” Streamed out with a few other questions in high pitched, nearly panicked Japanese.

I hoped Ciel would step on the damned thing, or at least push the “end call” button, but he remained where he was.

“Let’s talk about this at the station, Michaelis. If you have any information, we’re willing to listen to you.” Vincent’s hand was steady. He maneuvered himself in front of Ciel, as though to block him from me.

I watched the events unfold as still and removed as a statue. Would Vincent explain the situation away on his own? Some people could explain the impossible if given the barest opportunity.

“You will be explaining to me, Mr. Michaelis, exactly what your connection is to the current investigation, and you will tell me what interest my son is to you.” Phantomhive’s voice was dangerously low, but he spoke so slowly, with such an air of calm that Ciel flinched. I sensed the little one’s discomfort, but he wanted information more than he wanted me unhurt.

Ciel knew, after all, what little trouble bullets were to me.

“Did you enjoy the gift, Ciel? I’m sure daddy will be happy to share a bit more information now.” I
looked past the man and into those deep blue eyes.

I spared a glance for Vincent, whose finger squeezed around the trigger. He had the weapon trained on my leg, now. I ignored him, and cast another spell. One that would cost most of my dwindling energy. I spoke in a register that Vincent could not decode. Only my intended would understand the next words. “Call my name. Agree to the contract and I will come to you.”

* A step into the other, a whisper of wings few could see, and the taste of blood on my lips.*

The world blurred as I moved to disarm Vincent, kicking the gun out of his hand which sent a loud ringing shot and caused the ceiling to rain down around father and son. Ciel’s eyes were vacant, and Vincent’s wide with surprise and horror.

But the gun itself was misdirected, and the only lasting harm would be to Phantomhive’s pride. He was likely an excellent marksman ordinarily. *Ah, but even small revenge is sweet.*

I slipped away with a step, mist and darkness reaching in where it did not belong. They would never notice those tantalizing few seconds Hell found their world, but it would leak into their eyes and make them dizzy with despair or exhilaration, depending on the nature of the soul.

I hoped Ciel would moan, pant with the desire to see the door I opened. I hoped he would lessen his grip on this world and enter mine…

…but for the time being, I waited. A demon can always wait

Chapter End Notes

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*1 In the year 2009, 705 Children under 9 and 18,827 children and teens from age 10-19 were reported missing in Japan

Details: The missing persons numbers above translates to 6.4 children under 9; and 156.6 children and teens from a sample population of about 10-thousand people. This information is from the PDF titled (警察庁生活安全局生活安全企画課: National Police Agency, National Public Safety Commission of the Cabinet Office, Public Safety Plan Division) (Page 3, bottom chart) The chart heading reads: (missing people numbers from Year 2009 /Heisei 22 with a population sample around a hundred thousand) 《人口10万人当たりの行方不明者数（平成22年）》 (My translation. May not match the official English. If you know, feel free to tell me the bureau and department’s correct names)

A/N: thank you all for all of the inspiring conversations. Especially Snowfall and lovewithouttragedy; you have consistently been inspiration for me. :) I hope you enjoy what's left to tell....
Chapter Summary

The final day of Sebastian's allotted time, and The Contract must be made...but Ciel shows no sign of bending. Can Vincent keep Sebastian out, and will Ciel listen to Sebastian's provocation?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 31: The end?

The moonrise of my last day came.

I had so little substance left, practically unfettered and roaming the world for a lunar cycle with no sustenance. My shape seemed to fluctuate with each step I took. One moment my form was elongated—a black shape too thin and strange to be human. Then the next I was an echo of myself the day before—a more common height with black hair still, but with skin unnaturally white.

I crept in the shadows of the trees toward him, still sleeping in his family home. I perched on the windowsill for a long moment, basking in the moonlight, my eyes never straying. We could have been alone in all the world for that moment, I took so little notice of anyone else. I drifted in on the morning breeze and settled myself into his bed. I noticed that my nails too were longer and faintly curved as I slipped my arms around the slight figure of the boy. I buried my face into his hair, taking in the scent of him.

He stirred, stiffened, and opened his eyes.

Ciel let out a screech.

I laughed and held him all the tighter, bringing a long finger to his lips. “Shh. Good morning, little master.”

“I didn’t summon you,” Ciel croaked.

“I came anyway.” I chuckled.

There was a noise at the door just before it opened. The familiar figure of Bard was silhouetted in the moonlight, and I saw the raw truth of him. He is a killer, but one who feels compassion for his ‘brother’ soldiers and his employer’s son, as was evident due to his alertness to the noise and acted swiftly. “Everything ok in here, kid?”

“Someone’s in the room!” Ciel squeaked.

Bard flicked on the lights, his right hand reaching for a weapon in his back pocket. He stalked forward heavily.

“No smoke grenades, Bard. Asthma!” Ciel was on his feet, looking around his covers for me. His little hands clutched at the fabric, and his eyes were wide; he was near desperate. The look suited
him.

Bard muttered a half apology, and continued sticking his nose in all parts of the room. The odds-and-ends family was quite protective of the little thing.

I chuckled and left them to their search.

I spent the day watching him. The light dimmed as it became late afternoon, and still he did not call. From my vantage point in the tree, I looked through Ciel’s window.

I remembered Ciel sitting with his father, and then imagined the few minutes after I left them. Did Vincent hold his only child? Did he cry into Ciel’s hair, heaving with regret and looking for injury? Did his hands tremble as he thought how close he was to losing the boy? I could taste his regret, his sadness, and the fierce love that welled up in him even from here. He’d left after that, doubtless to harass the police into moving in the right direction.

I contemplated Vincent Phantomhive a little longer. I think that soul might be delicious as well...so much grief. But then, there was so much loyalty too.

I let my thoughts wander further still. Perhaps after I had the son, I could tempt the grieving father...a child’s form would do. I could present myself as a devilishly talented boy, a visage that would remind him of the missing one. There was a kind of elegance to taking entire families that appealed to me. But Ciel was first. He would always be first on my mind.

Vincent came into Ciel’s room around lunch. He was carrying a small cake set, and with him, Mei-Rin sported a pot of tea and cups. “Would you like a cup of tea?” he asked, employing some of his infamous charm.

Ciel nodded as he looked at his father distrustfully.

“Here or in the dining room?” Mei-Rin asked quietly.

Ciel shrugged.

Mei-Rin laughed nervously, but it sounded more like a cry to me. “We’ll pick up any crumbs Master Phantomhive, don’t you worry. You just enjoy the—whoops—”

Vincent prevented the cups and pot from crashing by the simple expedient of catching the rim of the tray, but the spoons were not as fortunate. Hot water splashed and metal clattered.

Ciel looked at the mess. He seemed to be thinking of something, for while the adults commandeered a table to arrange the sweets. He spoke softly in English. “Sebastian wasn’t your man then.”

Stupid question. He knew that already.

“Not so far as we can tell,” Vincent allowed grudgingly. “He hasn’t tried to—”

“—no.” Ciel interrupted. “He hasn’t emailed, phoned, texted or messaged me. As you very well know.” He looked his father in the eyes as he said it, arrogance and a challenge clearly expressed on his face.

I chuckled at the boy’s impertinence.

Vincent, unperturbed, quirked his lips in a humorless smile. “You’d tell me if he did?” He leaned against the wall.
Mei-Rin exited with a quiet word, closing the door with a look at Ciel. She seemed torn between her desire to defend the master of the house and comfort Ciel, but she lacked the words for either. So she left.

“He’s not with that…circus.” Ciel said slowly. “A free agent, I think.” He was giving away so little, but he had his father’s attention now.

Vincent closed his eyes, ignoring the prompt to treaty for information. “You said he was a demon.” His hands trembled very slightly as he covered his face. He stayed that way for a minute, and he seemed no longer an agent in the underworld so much as he looked a grieving parent.

Ciel regarded Vincent silently. “I could tell you everything,” He said boldly. “If you were to tell me more.”

Vincent looked up at that, and his face cleared. “You told me about the man she called Father. About Doll.” Had he now? That was foolish.

“Yes.” By saying it aloud, Ciel challenged the very reason why Vincent was in the room, instead of hunting shadows. Chasing footprints…

Vincent’s eyes were sharp, but his mouth was soft, forgiving. “I’m worried about you.” He said at last. “And…I suppose I should apologize.” His sigh filled the room.

“Yes.” Ciel agreed.

“…Grey didn’t find anything amiss,” Vincent revealed, watching his son with a trace of his old composure. He stood straighter, looking for sign of assent, or maybe satisfaction from his only son. “Michaelis was a private person, and so he didn’t leave any of the usual clues.”

Ciel snorted. “Grey was going to tell you, ‘no problem,’ then? Before…” Ciel code-switched at a furious speed between Japanese and English, pushing the natural limits of language with his insistent remarks. “You’re listening now because it was almost too late!”

Vincent abandoned his cool aloofness. He took several quick steps to his son, and at last I got a look at one of these tender family moments. “Ciel.” He grasped the boy’s shoulders, intending to hold him no doubt, to feel the boy’s breath on his neck and know intrinsically that Ciel lived.

But the boy stiffened. He flinched when he was touched, and only reluctantly presented a kissable cheek.

Vincent froze. Awkward, he dropped his hands, choosing instead to nod at the bed. “Sit with me?”

Ciel complied wordlessly.

“You know I’m supposed to tell you that it’s all right now…” Vincent said softly. “That it’s all a coincidence, and not to let you in on any more details of the case. It’s my duty, they say,” he looked off, “to reassure you that your fears are only in your mind.”

A moment passed.

He finally succumbed to the desire to grasp Ciel’s hand. Nothing like touch to make the world fall in on itself.

Ciel allowed this small comfort, and he leaned on his father’s shoulder. He would not relax, but he gave the semblance of a childish need to be coddled. Whereas Vincent saw his sweet, hurting boy, I
saw a scheming and intelligent soul. If only his thirst for vengeance was a little stronger. I could gladly take him into my embrace.

“But I’m not so certain…” Vincent finished quietly. “Not certain at all.”

Ciel closed his eyes, a pained expression on his face. It’s not surprising, really, that a child should be shaken by his father’s admission of weakness. Did he truly think his father could make it all right?

…maybe I should have attacked his family from the beginning. Subtlety, of course, so he’d never know it was me.

Then Ciel was at last returning the hug, leaning into his father’s arms and offering whatever fierce assurances those slender arms could manage. Ciel wouldn’t only want to be protected, I realized. He would rather be in control…for he simply didn’t want to lose what he had left.

Fascinating, but not high on my priorities.

Just then, Mei-Rin opened the door. She turned pink at the sight of her Master-of-the-House actually showing signs of softer emotions. “Ahh—” she exclaimed, uncomfortable and awkward. “I…um…brought spoons…”

Vincent waved a hand vaguely, apparently unable to speak.

She wavered. “I’ll…um…leave them on the table…” she tiptoed out.

When the door closed, Ciel said, cryptically, “I don’t think we’ll have to worry about Sebastian much longer.”

"Ciel." From my viewpoint, Vincent looked up, some of the fear and desperation fading to make way for exasperation. “What on earth could you gain from keeping information about Sebastian from me? You realize he is a threat.”

Ciel scowled. "Don't try to bully me into giving you information like one of your informants. I'm your son!"

Vincent sighed, shifting his weight so he could face his son. "I'm sorry you feel that way. Ciel, I just want to know more about the situation so we can think of a solution."

I resisted the urge to snort. I doubt that Vincent could come up with any lasting "solution" to my presence.

"You won't believe me." Ciel’s face was blank, and he looked at a place just past his father’s eyes.

Vincent raised an eyebrow, and waited.

Ciel was silent. He said in a quiet voice, “I remember that you told me, once…that by saying nothing, people will often feel compelled to fill the silence, and thus reveal more than you could find out than by interrogating them.” He met his father’s gaze, and his voice was hard. “How am I different from any of your low-life informants?”

After that, Vincent couldn't get another word out of him; the damage was done.

“…have some cake?” Vincent tried. “It’s your favorite.”

I peered with interest at the cake, wondering if it was. Ciel seemed like a boy who changed his 'favorite’ every month.
Ciel glowered, and turned away. He steadfastly ignored the invitation.
I waited, and drifted, amused as Vincent’s temper got the better of him. He finally left some minutes later with a quiet invitation to talk if Ciel needed to.

Time passed.

The sun began to set, and the moon with it. Soon it would be hidden from this face of the world, and the sky would empty at last. The deal would be done. I concentrated to stay there as the edges of my form nearly crackled. The terms of the Challenge were near as binding as a contract, and the time was nearly up.

All this for only one soul. But what a soul it would be…

The servants were taking shifts again with their watches, and the house was bustling with the activity. Only Tanaka kept to the lower floors, and the others took their turns standing, pacing, guarding their precious botchan. He was only a child. Fairy tales and older stories promised his innocence. I wanted him for myself, but they did too. Most everyone loves a child.

I thought of touching his cheek with feather-soft hands. I thought of looking into his blue eyes to my red, and I thought of my tongue tasting his. Tasting him.

Ciel. I called, pushing my desire into the name. I pulled at him with the promise of memories taken. I held those memories Agares took in an open hand, offered them to him. Ciel, I whispered with memories shared.

It is a small thing to summon a human. Much less difficult or perilous than summoning a demon. But humans can choose to answer or not, and Ciel?

He answered.

“You treasure information above all else, don’t you?” I whispered, and my voice was as rustling leaves on the wind.

Although I was right before him, Ciel looked around, uncertain of my direction. “You really are leaving, aren’t you?” His voice was hallow, tinged with bitterness. “You didn’t tell me it was because you were weak. Can’t you even manage to stay longer?”

I touched him gently with the memories. They flashed in his eyes, turning the right (the stronger of the two) a brilliant violet. The left eye was unchanged. Curious...tantalizing, even.

“Do you remember naming me?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said, confused and overawed. The memory I reminded him of was sticking in his mind like thorns. He might even be partially blind in the one eye. Was it a result of the spell, or was he damaged before? I wondered.

“You started something then. I gave you the keys to myself by allowing you to name me.” I shook my head. “Such powers at your fingertips...but at every turn, you slighted me.” I stepped forward, and something burned. “Rejected my contract.”

Ciel, to his credit, did not tremble. Perhaps he saw my eyes, perhaps my teeth. “What will happen to you?”

He was ever curious. I was silent for a long moment, weighing my options. I could answer, or...I could let him wonder. A cloud slowly drifted across the face of the moon, sending a last moonbeam...
“Nothing you could offer me is worth the price,” Ciel said. He shook his head, just as Doll had.
“You want my soul, don’t you? It’s a Faustian contract.”

“You say these words as though they mean something to you.” In an instant, I cupped his chin in my hands, and the contact strengthened me. I breathed on the one eye, sharing what little I had left. But it couldn’t take hold without the stubborn thing’s consent. “Will you be a player in the game, or a piece left to be captured?”

Ciel was silent and still. He had no objections then. Hadn’t for some time, I realized.

Even so, the damned must choose their own path. “I was sure you’d walk unflinchingly, your back against the light….into hell…at the promise of a crown of victory,” I told him, softly. I gave up on restraint and traced the shape of his lips, looking for something there. “Is it because your father still lives that you were able to recover that day?” I leaned forward, and our foreheads touched. “Why didn’t you summon me then?”

“Sometimes I think I died that day,” Ciel admitted, and his hands came up to meet mine, pulling at my fingers. “And the only part of me that’s left is….,” he seemed unable to put it in words.

I looked down at him, impassive. Human suffering is a delight to taste. Thirst for revenge, broken innocence, these things wet my tongue and carry a spice like none other.

“Maybe,” he finished lamely. It was all he could say for a time.

I twisted a piece of his hair. “It’s too late for maybes…” I told him. “Call me back when you are older…when you are willing to dare more.”

But I would miss his childish impudence. I would long for the taste of a heart unfinished and unrefined, and a defenselessness encouraged by the unknown world. Children’s souls are sweet, sour, demanding.

I wrapped my arms about his shoulder. “You could be the king atop a mound of corpses with me as your servant. There would be no information we could not find together.”

Ciel looked up at me, and I thought I saw understanding there. “Cleanse with fire,” He said, unexpectedly.

I didn’t know what to make of his words. He did not elaborate.

“The moon has set. Goodbye, Ciel Phantomhive.” My lips were on his slightly open mouth. A stolen kiss, burning yet with promise.

He tasted of wistfulness, old despair, and undirected anger. I would take it with me into the dark.

Ciel, outraged, thrust a hand against his mouth and yelled something indistinct.

As I left the world, the wind howled a song for me, the moon hid her face. And the boy hid his eyes. My laughter bent the trees in the window, so wild was my amusement. I let too much of myself out in that laugh, and the world trembled for it.

It was time to meet the challenger again.

I left, tasting disappointment along with regret. Ciel’s lips had been, after all, very sweet indeed.
So! What did you think of Sebastian spying on Ciel before he left? :D Any parting thoughts on Vincent and Ciel's home-life?

...This is a good stopping point if you feel like stopping.

...and there is a short interlude coming up before I went on hiatus. Arc II starts soon.
Interlude

(Ciel)

“Ciel!” Mei-rin called out. “I brought you a sweet. Your father’s still conferencing…” She smiled nervously; clearly afraid Ciel would react wrongly at the mention of Vincent. Vincent, who she felt should be home, and was *not*.

“He’s trying to find out things,” Ciel said quietly. “He’ll be back soon enough.”

A moment of silence passed between them.

“Do you need me to air out your sheets?” She asked brightly. “Or do you want to call him? I don’t think he’d mind.”

Ciel shook his head. “He spent all day with me. And he’ll be back tomorrow.”

When she left, Ciel turned back to his silence. His room seemed stifling, no longer welcoming with its old comforts and soft colors. He left his designs half-finished on the table, and he went to sit in the tree swing at the side of the house.

“Hellooooo!” Finnian called out, marching around the garden with long branch-clippers. “Ciel! Are you busy?”

“What, Finny?”

“Master P. will be home for dinner!” Finny shouted, relentlessly cheerful.

Ciel nodded and looked away. Finnian might have chattered for a moment longer, but Ciel wasn’t listening, so eventually he was alone again, left to think.

Things were, Ciel decided, decidedly quieter without a demon around.

He looked without seeing the family garden as he thought of all the troubles Sebastian had caused. Sebastian’s interference at school caused Ciel to lose a lot of his ‘quiet, good boy’ reputation, what with rumors of corporal punishment, near-sexual-harassment experiences, and the general irritation of having the whole school notice him.

But then there was the whole Circus affair. *I would have gone to that event even if Sebastian wasn’t bothering me,* he thought, *and then where would I be?*

The thought was a chilling one.
But didn't he keep things from me? He snuck around my father's investigations. He snuck around school. He even went to Doll, and who knows what he learned?

Uncertainty and fear clung to his heart, making his chest heavy and breath catch.

While he was talking to Doll...and after...what did he find?

At the same time, he thought, What would they have done with me, if Sebastian wasn't there? His chances of sneaking out undetected were slim. Ciel knew that. Some things became glaringly obvious and previous held ideas seemed naïve after what he'd been through.

He sighed. He really should be celebrating...without a demon to drag him to unexpected outings; he would have time to cultivate his reputation. To consider what he wanted for High School.

"Why?" He wondered softly, touching his lips, then rubbing at his eye. It pulsed with the phantom of pain. “Why was he so interested in me?”

Now that I know about things like demons, I can’t just forget that they exist. Even father doesn’t seem to know about those things… Ciel felt dizzy, contemplating a world he didn’t understand.

Ciel felt his eye again, and remembered. “Will you be a player in the game, or a piece left to be captured?” He clenched his fist. Was it even a choice?

“What price would I pay to join in the game?” Ciel asked the cold sky. Not even the wind had an answer.

Ciel considered the night sky and the pale moon so far away and thought. “Sebastian,” he whispered, and held his breath.

Fin.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you are enjoying this story! It was a LOT of fun to plan and write. It’s one of the more water-tight plots I’ve written (in spite of a slow-ish beginning), so I’m decently happy with it, though I’ll probably go back and edit casually for word choice typos etc as I reread it.

Just for the record, (MANGA SPOILER…….) I started writing this story back when it was plausible that Agares could have been a demon. *sigh*

On a side note, don’t you love it when someone gets the better of Sebastian? He tries too hard to be perfect. :floating: But then, Ciel doesn’t seem like he’s won either…. *tries to sound mysterious........*
Confronting Undertaker

Chapter Summary

Sebastian is brought to Undertaker's court. What could Undertaker have planned for a
demon bound to serve him for a month? Meanwhile, Sebastian watches Ciel...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Book Two

Chapter 33: Confronting the Undertaker

(Sebastian)

The air was chill. I had expected to labor in Hell, devouring spirits and forging alliances for a proud,
untired demon, but there I was—languishing in a musky, shadowy room at the behest of an
(apparently renegade) eccentric Reaper. His taste in décor was as deplorable as ever, and the spider
webs, mysterious beakers, and recreational coffin were at the center of the visitor’s eye. If one looked
past those, I wondered, what might one find?

But alas, the Reaper spoke, jerking me from my contemplation.

“Undertaker.” I reluctantly knelt before the reaper. “I am at your service…for one month from this
day.”

“Hmm, well I don’t know about that. . .” Undertaker drawled. “The Phantomhives are old associates
of mine, so I don’t think I’ll be needing my month of service just yet.”

More’s the pity. My eyes flickered up to his face, and he leered at me. He looked the picture of
satisfaction, and the old scar ran deep and thick against his pale skin. I listened.

“It’s much more effective to wait…give me time to settle my affairs and let Phantomhive senior
forget all about you.” With the long overcoat sweeping behind him, he stood before me in a few
skittering steps. He let his long, silvery hair brush my face where I knelt. I tried to hide my distaste.

“I very much doubt that he’s going to forget about me, Undertaker.” I paused, and he took liberties—
namely, he traced those long nails across my cheek. Did he expect me to flinch? To jerk away? I
refused to give him the satisfaction. “Even if you were to wait a year, the Queen’s dog is hardly
going to forget me after I infiltrated his home,” I remarked, and his hands wandered to trace my lips.

“But Ciel will be older…” Undertaker frowned, and again, two icy fingers traced patterns on my
cheek. “And certainly he will not forget you. Do you think your contract will go a bit better with me
calling the shots?” He laughed, long and high. It was a sound like the wind, long and distant, but
filling the ears with a sound that penetrated the bones. He looked at me, and his green eyes glistened
behind the ridiculous hat. “Oh, but the things you will do for me…this may be the most interesting
experiment yet.”

He stepped back, moving disjointedly as a spider might to languish on the coffin. The wood was
lovingly polished, and if I breathed in just so, I could smell the grave dirt. A man of peculiar interests, the Undertaker. His bone-white hands twitched, and he looked thoughtfully at me.

“I think I’ll keep your name the same…” he announced. “So, Sebastian. Go on. Rest a while. Answer my call and be obedient…and I’m sure you and I will have a grand time.” With that, he opened the lid of the coffin, and slipped inside.

With as clear a dismissal as that, I could only watch the shadows grow. Hell’s door beckoned, and with a secretive ‘master’ such as this? No others would realize my humiliating defeat…perhaps things were not as bad as I had first suspected. I lifted my chin.

Black feathers surrounded me, and a taste of ash settled the affairs. I was gone from that place, bound again for the silence and despair of the Hells below.

“Sebastian…. it’s time.” Undertaker sang out, his voice carrying even to the depths of hell. Reluctantly, I answered his call.

I gave an ironic bow. It wasn’t wise of him to keep my old name—it gave Ciel a higher priority that wasn’t much under the word of the Reaper. Another month on earth without a contract, and little hope of securing one. Even in the Undertaker’s office, I felt the wind howl in response to my desire, and my frustration.

Undertaker was dressed in a suit today, but the effect was ruined by his sloppiness; the jacket wasn’t buttoned, and his suit trousers were too tight around the hips, and too long around his boots.

“It’s February, just so you know. Little Ciel has just about enough time left in this school—as an almost innocent junior high student—as you have with me.” Undertaker gave a little bow of his own.

I stood straight and immobile, letting my servile posture speak nothing of the irritation I felt.

“Things will be complicated if the Phantomhives discover my…shall we say nature? And any information I choose to withhold from Vincent will remain undisclosed. That is an order, Sebastian. Ciel … is a more difficult matter. Do not betray my plans,” Undertaker gave a leering smile, and his yellow-green eyes glittered. “But I’ll let you speak with him at your own discretion… in a week, we’ll say. Until then, nothing outside of your duties. You can fob him off, but not have any heart-warming conversations. Or arguments. I order you to ignore Ciel, Sebastian.”

As unappetizing as the idea was, I agreed with a smile. “Yes,” I bit back the ‘master’ on the tip of my lips… the Reaper was not, after all, any master of mine.

“One more thing… do what Agares tells you, will you? We have a new position for you in school—librarian. Ours happens to be taking a “child rearing leave.” She will be coming in one day a week to help you adjust for a while. Your new contract is for six months.”

“Forgive me for saying such,” I paused, and allowed a glimpse of sharp, white teeth to show, “but I will only be with you for a month. Something tells me Ciel will be attending a different school next year, with the circus girl likely to show up again.”

“Oh, little Doll? I’m afraid we’ve expelled her for her attack on a student and teacher. She will not be here next year…”

“Indeed?”

“Um hmm. I have a few errands I’d like you to run… Agares tells me you’re well known for being
fastidious...you will be a great help to managing the school, I think. I also need you to pick up a few things. Restock my apothecary as well, would you? And check to see I have enough baking goods in stock at the café and the shop."

I gave him a long suffering look.

He clapped his hands together. “Oh, how I love this school...so many eager minds...so many loyal, busy teachers to order around,” Undertaker snickered. “For today, make sure you bake the pastries before 6:00 am—they need time to cool—but finish the bread by 7:00. The dorm students do love fresh bread...perhaps you could do Halloween themes?”

“Valentine’s would be more appropriate,” I said.

“Hm, well, make some of those too. Remember to do some Japanese decorations—make an iron crown with flaming candles next to a hammer with a stake! They’ll love that.” (*1)

I vaguely wondered what ghost or monster would dare to wear such unappealing—brutish, even—weapons. Whip and high heels are much more tasteful...Ah well. Perhaps Ciel wouldn’t come to the café for the next week...

The library, however...Ciel seemed likely to visit if only for use of the school computers. It would be hard to avoid him once he realized I was in the school.

“Well? Go on then. You’ll need to hurry if you’re going to make the morning meeting.”

By the end of my third day, Ciel still didn't seem aware of my presence in the school library. I had been, after all, careful to let the student library assistants check out books to the students who came...

Unfortunately, my luck didn't hold.

I was taking a stack of newspapers to the office, when I heard a familiar voice squeak in surprise. I didn't need to turn around to know that it was Ciel. I finished my task with inhumane speed to slip out of sight. But after that first sighting, it was only a matter of time before he found out about my reappointment.

Sure enough, Ciel was stalking the library during his lunch hour, once more searching for an opening. An opening that I was reluctant to give, with my new orders. As amusing as a game of cat and mouse could have been, I couldn’t play my cards right with Ciel sneaking along so early in my sentence.

Ciel slid into view not long after he first discovered my presence, standing between the bookshelves as though he had more right to be there than I.

“Sebastian? Stop pretending not to hear me. I want to talk to you and I will. Or else I’ll send Grey in after you,” Ciel said, his tone surprisingly conversational.

I declined to answer at first, attempting to find a loop hole in my orders. Ah yes, ‘only talk to the boy in an official capacity…until the first week comes to a close), so technically, I have some leeway. “May I help you, Mr....”

“Oh please. Where did you disappear to? And why are you back now?“

“If there are any students wishing for help with either a computer or finding a book, I recommend that they ask a library assistant. I’m afraid my schedule does not permit—”
“I saw you helping a student not ten minutes ago. It’s just me you’re trying to avoid.” Ciel scoffed. “Answer my questions, Sebastian.”

“I’m afraid discussing personal matters with students is frowned upon, Mr. Phantomhive. Besides, officially, I was on health leave.”

“My dad saw you in my house. He shot at you.”

“Is he quite sure I was there? I believe you both are mistaken.” I said, smiling in an unassuming, politely servile way.

Ciel’s frown deepened. He shook his head and scoffed, unable to say anything for a moment. I could smell the fear and loneliness on him, so much stronger than it had been when I left him a little more than three months ago.

The time had not been kind to him. I imagine without me looking over him, any close-calls would have been...close indeed. Did the Circus troupe try and capture him? Did he see any of the missing children his father guessed about?

The thought of little Ciel Phantomhive, so alone and vulnerable, reaching out for me. Because he had called me. Once. While I waited for permission to come to my quasi-contractor. But if he called me once, he might again.

When Undertaker sent me back here, I also learned that he was no longer on the list of students for “guaranteed transfer to high school level,” and instead was listed under “転校希望” Student Transferring to another school. He would leave, but what did it matter? I would only stay for the Undertaker’s month.

I looked at him dispassionately, and secretly wondered what sort of long-term reaction my absence would have on him. No doubt he viewed it as “abandonment” and followed by “silent treatment.” My lips curled upwards.

I could see the words he wanted to say (flitting behind his eyes) better than he could, He shifted from one foot to the next. “I know what I saw. I have evidence--” he began.

“Do you?” I raised an eyebrow. “Please remember...I was on health leave abroad...”

“In hell, you mean--”

“...and I have been graciously offered a place as librarian, seeing that I have the qualifications.”


I turned away. “Please see the library assistant if you need something. Otherwise, return to your homeroom, as lunch is ending,” the bell chimed musically, just on time, “as we speak.” I gave him another smile.

Ciel scowled and made his retreat.

I wait just long enough for him to walk away from the library when I pool some of my energy to aid me in remaining unseen. Seeing that Ciel already knew I was there, it wouldn't be too much of a risk to do a little bit of investigating on my own.

Undertaker might have his eye on me, but he seemed nearly as interested in Ciel as I was. I doubted he’d limit our interactions so much, as long as we continued to...amuse him. In any case, I was very
curious to know what sort of trouble the boy had gotten up to in my absence.

I walked soundlessly down the hallway, cloaked in wind and silence. A human eye would overlook me as though I were merely air.

I would soon have fresh insight to Ciel's little world…

Chapter End Notes

Footnote (*1) The artifacts the undertaker wants to be made into sweets…the artifacts describe here are the “(gotoku 五徳, a tripot used in a hibachi brazier to support the kettle) with three candles [burning on the legs, which are inverted], which the person wears on his or her head. Undertaker also describes a kanazuchi, 金槌 (a mallet or hammer) for nailing the waraningyo (voodoo doll) into a sacred tree found in a shrine. The ritual one someone goes through to seek vengeance. It is said to be so dangerous that the person who does the ritual runs the risk of becoming a demon his or herself. The rest of the costume includes a white kimono, and according to some sources, a mirror, a comb and a sword.

Read about the history of the ancient vengeance ritual by googling “hyakumonogatari” or omamorifromjapan (which I quoted.) search “ushi no koku” to get you directly to the section you want. This ritual was also featured in the 2001 film “onmyouji” and more recently, in the drama “Yorozu Uranaidokoro Onmyouya e Youkoso” the 2013 drama staring Nishiki Ryo (see episode 4 about the waraningyo/voodoo doll)

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A/N: Hi! Long time no see! :) Comments for the weary author? :D

How do you find my Undertaker? What sorts of things do you think he'll get up to? :D
XXXIV. That Librarian, Snooping

Chapter Summary

Sebastian returns to Ciel's boarding school to find that Ciel's life hasn't been as uneventful as he first suspected. Sebastian snoops, all the while attempting to abide to the Undertaker's rule of "no unnecessary contact" with the said boy. How will Sebastian get those answers?

Chapter Notes

A/N: thank you for all the lovely conversations!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 34: That Librarian, Snooping.
(Sebastian)

Ciel may not have been consciously aware of my presence behind him, but he seemed more than a little aware of the many eyes following him. More eyes than mine watched him make his way to his home room, though none approached him.

Young faces turned like flowers, and conversations stalled as he slid open the classroom door.

A few turned away purposefully, as if trying to continue as they might have before, when I first met him. But mostly, they watched him out of the corner of their eyes, as though Ciel might do something unexpected at any moment. The thought was certainly an interesting one.

When I'd left him before, they were sympathetic, not suspicious. When had their sympathy turned to fear?

Something has their attention...was it still the old news of Ciel being targeted by Noah's Arc, or has something else, something more fresh garnered their attention? I wondered. More than one girl eyed him with interest. But was he elevated in their eyes, or a source of curiosity.

"Ciel!" McMillan stood up to greet him. That boy at least seemed the same as ever. “Soma-senpai (*1) came looking for you during lunch. Did he find you?"

Ciel shrugged. “No.” He was more withdrawn than before, not even trying to pretend to be a cheerful, boringly normal junior high student. He came off as bored, or perhaps a touch arrogant. The effect was irritating as it was charming.

McMillan's tiny frown deepened, and his round face seemed more adult-like when worry lines creased his forehead. “Don't you--”

“He'll find me eventually...Soma always does.” At McMillan's disapproving look, Ciel pulled out his
cellphone as he sat down. “He's sent me a half dozen messages....don't worry.”

“You found out about Professor Michaelis,” the boy's eyes shown with awe. “He's back on duty, you know.”

Ciel snorted. “Mm.” He settled into his desk, moving his things around and glancing irritably at the clock.

I tilted my head, considering. Did Violet's remark about Phantomhive senior being with the police carry so much weight? Or was there something more convincing that McMillan was thinking of? Either way, Ciel had gone a long way from being thought a harmless, and somewhat sweet boy.

No longer was he the one gathering information about his classmates and being admired only for his British heritage. Instead, he seemed to have become a local aristocrat. I wondered at the story behind that.

Ciel glanced over his shoulder at McMillan in a way that suggested a few things; this wasn't the first time McMillan had said such a thing; Ciel hadn't come up with a way to dissuade him from that line of thought; and, that all protests would be ignored. Ciel huffed.

I smiled, amused.

“...have you talked to him, then?” Ciel asked quietly. His eyes shone.

“No,” McMillan said cheerfully. “I thought I'd let you...though I don't know why they didn't let him come back to the history department... he was on medical leave, wasn't he? From being shot? I heard that he had a hairline fracture in his neck or his spine or something! But I also heard he was in a coma...” he trailed off, finally noticing precisely how amused Ciel wasn't.

“You should go ask him yourself.” He allowed stiffly. “I would be interested in what he told you.”

Ciel turned away again, his small hands tightly wound together. “I heard there's an interesting new section in the library...”

I snorted. Interesting wasn't the word....

“What? I didn't notice a section.”

“The youkai, Japanese monster, section! There's even an artifact shelf! Professor Michaelis is supposed to have a speech and short lesson available, too.”

Ciel smiled. “A lesson?”

McMillan nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah. I think he only does it after dark or something? It's supposed to be really scary...”

At that moment, the history teacher entered, and the students began to meander back to their seats.

“Good afternoon, class.” Professor Grey intoned, beaming at the students in that particular way of his. He looked down at the class notebook, then back to the class seating chart. “Take your seats please...”

“I'll have to ask him about it then.” Ciel murmured noncommittally.

“Do you think he'll come back?” One girl asked, not bothering to lower her voice. “To teach?” She snuck a glance at Ciel, though her target was a girl a row to the left and behind him.
Ciel shook his head, and made himself busy fishing his textbook out from his desk.

Grey's eyes scanned the class, but he ignored the girl's outbreak. “We'll be finishing up World War I today, so everyone get your pens and notebooks out...” he smiled a little. “If we finish the lecture, there's a movie clip at the end, so let's get cracking, shall we?

The students obediently did as he instructed.

Ciel smiled thankfully at his father's informant. Curiously, though, Grey hadn't said more than the obligatory greetings or well-wishings. Odd, I thought. But then, Agares does have a...way...with correcting people's perceptions. Doubtless the other demon made some...adjustments on Undertaker's behalf.

I lingered a moment longer, but there seemed to be nothing else to hear. I would listen at Ciel's door another time, and his actions would tell me more about what exactly occurred since I was gone.

I left with a quiet turn of the wind, and no one saw me leave.

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“Shut your mouth and stop looking at me!” Ciel hissed. “You don’t belong here!”

I was, in fact, looking at Ciel when he said this, but by no fault of my own.

After all, the Undertaker expected me to accompany the dorm students in the required Fire Safety session, so there I was, free to over hear whatever interesting tidbits Ciel might divulge after school. Instead of ignoring me (as he had all the previous month I was here), or observing me for whatever he might learn, though, Ciel had snapped. Whatever he could gain from that, I couldn’t discern. Perhaps he was under too much stress due to the upcoming change of school.

I resisted the urge to snicker, or tease him outright; instead I gave a bow, and continued with my duties. “Students, please continue into the study room for the fire department's lecture.”

Ciel walked stiffly, and Redmond barely missed a step. As they continued down the hall, I heard them continue talking.

“What were you thinking, speaking to a teacher like that?” Redmond admonished, frowning at Ciel even as he adjusted his neck tie.

“He’s a temporary librarian!” Ciel snapped.

“Ciel, you've been strange recently…ever since that party, it’s almost like you’re another person.” In anyone else’s mouth it might have sounded concerned, but when Redmond said it, it only sounded like a petty complaint. I wondered how he had snuck back into Ciel’s graces after his failed attempt at blackmailing Ciel a few months earlier.

“If there's nothing else for you to add,” Ciel said crisply, slipping into polite Japanese language, “then I'd like to continue with the others...”

His use of the Japanese formal language was a bit of a surprise-- I suppose it has the same effect as Victorian sitting rooms...put distance between yourself and the listener (or visitor, as the case may be) with elaborate (or at least lengthy) phrases.

“You really ought to stay at our school,” Redmond continued. “Do you really want to leave just
because your cover is blown?"

“What cover?” Ciel said waspishly. “I never said my father was anything but what he was.”

“You let us think he was working with the police, not a secret agent.”

Ciel snorted. “He isn't a secret agent.”

“Nevertheless, we can’t overlook your behavior as long as you’re with us. Whether or not you’re transferring, you have to respect the school rules and regulations,” Redmond continued, ignoring Ciel’s temper.

The two of them disappeared into the study room, while I continued ushering the stragglers in.

I may be curious about Ciel’s recent escapades, but there’s no way I can take it by force…

There was a gift, one that Agares has stronger than I, that was similar to the Reaper's ability to read memories. I suppose Undertaker gave it to him, but he had not deigned it necessary to bestow unto me.

Even still, I felt my eyes flutter as I considered my would be prey. The Undertaker may have given me a good move after all…avoiding him seemed like the best move at the moment. The boy would seek me on his own.

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(Ciel)

The students who weren’t on familiar terms with Ciel Phantomhive would all look at him when he came in. It was this attention that spurned the reconciliation with Redmond…their families wouldn’t want a feud. Even today—especially today, because Sebastian was walking about there, in the same room as him. Ever so visible.

“They say his father brought Professor Michaelis back as a body guard…he must be good, if even after he got such bad injuries they want him back on the job.”

“Good? Or the only one available? He’s like the prince of the underworld isn’t he?”

“No, he’s got to be some yakuza heir. He’s no yakuza.”

Ciel frowned. The dark prince. The dirty noble. The black noble. All the different names bored teens and preteens were coming up for him were equally appalling. It brought a bitter taste in his mouth.

Ciel slid his eyes around the room, watching Sebastian as he played at being a waiter. Ciel was positive that Sebastian knew-- a thought that made him feel at once furious and anxious. What was Sebastian planning on doing with the information?

Sebastian appeared in front of where Ciel was stirring milk into his tea while he stood at the counter. Sebastian was as quiet and unassuming as a high-class servant, his face as un-revealing as a mask, but somehow more pleasant to look upon.

“It's been a while...thought you had stopped doing that,” Ciel remarked, a frown twitching on his lips.

“Good morning, Mr. Phantomhive. Would you care for a croissant? We're doing a special today.”
Something gleamed behind his dark eyes, and Ciel wondered what was going through his head.

“Have you already gotten information about me then,” Ciel asked, his voice even and calm. He took a croissant from Sebastian.

*What's with that expression...why is he smiling...* Ciel couldn't help but think.

Sebastian's hair fell loosely over his face. “I overheard an interesting conversation, young sir. You might be curious to know what your classmates are saying about you....” When he looked up, Sebastian's smile was as poised as ever.

“Why are you so interested in my reputation?” Ciel played for time. He could guess what the demon was alluding to.

“I don't.” With the pause, Sebastian's smile only widened. “I only mention it because you do...and I seem to remember an accusation when we last met...” he tilted his head. “Something about me pulling you into trouble.”

Ciel looked away. “You did.”

Sebastian stepped close, two fingers hovering near Ciel's neck. Then he relaxed his posture and stepped back. “You seemed to manage to have difficulties even without me...” he murmured. “I suppose you have your share of enemies. Unless you think I can organize the world above while I lingered in Hell?”

Instead of jerking away or falling back, Ciel stepped forward, his small hands pushing on Sebastian and forcing him to balance the tray carefully. Ciel's expression was tight, nearly unreadable, but anger and fear must have moved him.

“You know about that.” Ciel hissed. “You swore you would protect me--”

Sebastian caught Ciel's wrist, pulled him closer still, and felt his heart beating unsteadily. “Only if you sealed the contract.” Sebastian's voice was icy. “Which you did not.”

Sebastian straightened up, and gave a little bow. “I have my orders. I am not to speak to you except about school business for this first week.”

“...Clearly there is some leeway there, if you can mention hell, and getting me into trouble...I'm starting to wonder how binding your contracts are.”

“It's an agreement which I am obliged to obey, but not compelled to. This is not a contract...”

Ciel regarded him, raising one eyebrow. “Why are you 'obliged to obey'?”

“...I am not required to answer that question,” Sebastian purred, enjoying Ciel's annoyed scoff.

“...let's play a game then. A theoretical position, if you would. If I were to call you now, would you consider that an opportunity to break your current contract and start a new one?”

“I must ask you to wait. Call me again in one month.” Sebastian held up a long, slender finger, looking more sly and amused than before. This, Ciel thought, was the face of a mocking tempter, not the cool and polite facade Sebastian presented most of the time. Sebastian seemed as wild as he had that first night in the window-- a memory he mysteriously did not have until Sebastian appeared in another window, that night he left.
“...we were speaking in the hypothetical. I will not be calling you.”

Sebastian made a noncommittal noise. His dark eyes glinted in the morning light, both knowing and taunting.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Senpai, also spelled sempai, is an honorary title given to students (or coworkers, or club members) who are older than you. Usually. It gets complicated if it’s for club, and one person has been a member of the club longer, but is actually younger...(laughs) it makes people go “?? But…you’re younger than me...” Anyway. In this case Soma is both older and a grade or so above Ciel.

so! How will Sebastian learn what he wants? When will I update next? I don’t know~
Ciel remembers

Chapter Summary

Ciel Phantomhive thought he was the least conspicuous in a private school full big names. When they all come together though, whose family is targeted? What will Ciel do without Sebastian to help him?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 35: Ciel remembers

(February 2014)

Ciel remembered the Incident everyone was talking about, but not discussing out loud. He took a slow deep breath, and sipped his tea. It could use some more sugar, he decided.

(December 2013)

It was a wedding of one of his father's friends— Ciel couldn’t quite keep straight exactly who Yuri Aoki(*1) was, but both his father and Ciel were invited. The ceremony had finished, and Ciel moved with everyone else into the reception hall, feeling like he knew very little about either bride or groom.

As was typical in a “Western style” wedding, the guests were dressed in their finery for the wedding. Everyone was talking loudly after the ceremony, and the meal was set just so in the polished, pristine room. Even the flowers seemed to be extensions of the white space. Ciel thought it was beautiful but cold.

“Ciel!” One of the others exclaimed. “It has been so long since I've seen you...oh, you look darling!” She barely spared a glance for his father. “No matter what you wear, you always turn out well...even if it’s a dress!” She laughed at her own joke.

Ciel stiffened at the reminder. He fair suspected that department store fiasco had leaked more than a few photos...

“Do you know the bride?” He asked, casually fishing for more information.

“Isn’t she related to Bluer? His oldest sister Lily, I think. Or was it Yuri? But isn't this hall beautiful? But of course, I want a gorgeous church wedding, and two dresses.... a party dress, and the wedding dress.” She sighed, happily.

Ciel nodded absently. That would explain why so many of his classmates were there...

The girl made a delighted noise, and started moving in the direction of another girl her age. Ciel barely noticed her go.

“Is she one of your classmates?” Vincent asked quietly.

“What? No, I don't think so...she looks a bit older, don't you think?”
Vincent made a noncommittal noise. “Ah. She's lost an...earring?” He frowned, his gaze focused on a shiny bit of metal.

Ciel followed his gaze. “Oh, so she did....” He glanced up. “I'll return it to her...” He scooped up the little thing between two fingers.

Vincent started to reply, but Ciel stepped out of their area, and someone else immediately took the opportunity to hail Phantomhive Sr. with a question.

Ciel walked through the crowd, smiling at acquaintances, but waving them off as he searched for the girl. Mina, he thought her name was. He seemed to recall her in some relation to...Soma?

He tried calling her name. “Mina!” But she had nearly danced away, laughing cheerfully with whoever's arm she clung to. Ciel too was swept into the flow of the room, following the clusters of people gravitating for the dance floor or the tables.

“Mina!” He called again, clutching the earring. “You dropped—”

Ciel found his path rather rudely obstructed. He looked up to see a blond man looking down at him. “Is that for Mina? I think I saw her step out into the garden...” His smile showed too many teeth.

Ciel was starting to feel something, some pricking sensation of suspicion that he couldn't quite explain when the man clapped him on the back, and began to lead him to the garden.

Ciel tensed, visions all flying on broken wings, memories of the day in the shopping mall, and the events following That Day his mother died.

“Here, I'll show you...” the man was saying, but when the door closed behind him, all other party noise was blocked out.

There would be too much going on inside. Who would notice if Ciel stepped away? If he was taken away? “No, it's all right.” Ciel jerked his arm to the left, attempting to free himself. “I...I think she knows my friend Soma...I'll just give it to him....”

A panicky feeling fluttered around his chest, closing up his throat.

The man with the shining grin just kept walking. Ciel could no longer see his face because he was turned away, pulling him on.

Ciel found his vision blackening, his limbs seeming to freeze. While this didn't stop his assailant from pulling him, it didn't make it easier, either.

His mind was in a haze when he heard the man grunt in surprise. Ciel saw something roll away. A cricket ball? He turned to see his father already moving out of his pitcher’s stance. Soon after, his father’s strong hands pulled him away from the garden door before releasing him.

As he watched, a half dozen men in suits were coming towards the pair of them. Ciel noticed their muscles rippling under their shirts, the menacing way one man held out his fist. Ciel’s mind raced, calculating the apparent disadvantages they would face. The men were all bigger than his father, and Vincent would need to try to avoid hurting any of the guests or the furniture. Those thugs would have no such qualms.

Ciel would later remember it as a blur of movement—the men coming in, their faces unreadable, and their breath too fast.
Vincent must have heard something, would have known about this, wouldn't he? How could he not? In spite of the best connections in Tokyo, Vincent Phantomhive watched as the men pulled out their weapons and absorbed the first intruder into their numbers.

The man turned around to face Vincent, hiding a bloodied lip behind one hand as he straightened. His smile was more arrogant than before. He looked over his shoulder at the rest of the men, then forward to the glass doors. Unsurprisingly, they were far enough away from the main party to be relatively unheard.

Vincent cleared his throat, and gave a thin smile. “Azzurro Vanel, isn't it? I don't think you're cleared for the guest list. Might I see your invitations?”

Vincent stood closer to Ciel than he had a second before, and so when he addressed the group, it was with a hand firmly on Ciel's shoulder.

“You want your son safe then, do you?” Azzuro spat. “Well, we can talk things out, can't we?”

One of the larger men came closer to Ciel, close enough that Ciel could see his hands. Such rough hands don't seem to fit in a room filled with fine things. A sense of vertigo, not knowing where or when he was kept him glued to the spot. Is Sebastian among these intruders? Or is it the men from that time? Ciel broke into a cold sweat.

Ciel fought the urge to laugh. He instead turned his attention to the surroundings. What was there that he could use?

In the meanwhile, Vincent slowly turned around, letting his weight fall evenly. He leaned forward, then followed slowly with his feet, shifting Ciel and himself subtly. He seemed more certain of what would happen than Ciel did.

So it was that when the men advanced further still on the pair of them, Vincent was able to turn away from the brunt of the force, and take Ciel with him when he did so. There was the feeling of air passing by his cheek, but not so much as a glancing blow. Ciel was impressed.

That was when the wedding guests noticed the commotion. A woman gave a high pitched scream, and a quiet hush came over the assembled people as the bride and groom stood from their table at the center.

“Who is that over there— is that a fight?” One of Bluer's sisters, Ciel thought. There was a quiet murmur at that, and snatches of conversations overlapped each other.

“Is that security? I didn’t know there were so many—”

“Where is the staff?”

“My God, he’s got a knife!”

“But the Aoki family couldn’t possibly have invited— “

Bluer's voice in particular caught Ciel's attention— he hoped to catch his senior's eye in fact, and the boy said, “— Ciel?“

Vincent caught another man's arm as the fool attempted to take them off balance, neatly sending the man into a fellow assailant. Instead of coming one-after-another as a villain in children's stories might, they came in clusters and pairs, trying to overwhelm the elder Phantomhive with brute strength.

“Agni!” Soma's voice cut through the drone of the crowd, pushing forward when everyone else was
stepping back. “Get Ciel!”

“There are cameras here, you know,” Vincent said conversationally, as he sidestepped two, and hit another on the back of his knees. “Witnesses that see you attacking me. What,” he gasped as one man hurled himself against Vincent’s shoulder, “is the point of this very public attack?”

Even throughout all of this, Vincent managed to keep Ciel out of the way.

The rat-faced man, snarled at that. He looked as though Vincent had punched him directly. “Just come quietly!” he hissed.

“Too late for that,” Ciel looked around. “Help us!” He shouted at the crowd, and swallowed his words as he saw familiar faces already stepping forward. They would be safe from the man. Did dad call him Azzuro? The thought distracted Ciel.

Bard, Mei-Rin, Finnian, and even Lau and Lan-Mao were approaching, bringing members of the wedding security with them, while he looked around again, trying to spot the tall, turbaned figure of Agni amongst all the guests. Ciel thought he spotted Double Charles pushing guests into the far side of the room.

Azzuro Vanel, Ciel finally recalled, started to look more panicky than rude. “Shut up,” the tall man barked.

Just before Ciel could properly gloat, strong arms bore Ciel out of the fray— Agni, it was always Agni acting on orders, who was there to brisk Ciel out of the fight.

Through it all, he could hear his father talking. “I don't think we have anything to negotiate. The police are already coming— calm down, and don't escalate your charges, hm?” Vincent's smile was cold, and he was convinced that they had already won.

“We've still got you,” Aurro snapped. “We'll have your money yet, Phantom——”

Then Vincent was doing something, moving forward much as Ciel had seen Sebastian do that day in the department store, and he grasped the man's wrist, kicked his shin. The knife clattered to the floor.

Ciel blinked. The buzzing around him had grown to a tidal wave of noise, and then it had settled over again. His vision came back into focus.

Vincent put his hand on Ciel's shoulder when they were rejoined by the servants. He said nothing; just looked at his son with such intense emotion that Ciel couldn’t fathom what he was thinking or feeling.

Ciel wavered under that gaze. “…thanks,” he muttered.

“How did you know?” Mei-Rin frowned, her eyes sharp despite her glasses. “What——”

“—was it their suits?” Finnian wondered.

“Nah, it was the knives. They walk like men with weapons,” Bard disagreed.

Then Bluer broke their little circle, crying out, “Are you all right?”

“He's fine.” Vincent offered a cool smile.

“We have the situation under control,” Bard added with a toothy grin.
Bluer finally noticed the servants, their stances, their hands that didn't shake, the strength of their arms and determination. He nodded again before looking at Ciel. “You should sit down.”

Ciel only laughed, uncomfortably aware of all the eyes on him. This wasn’t the end. Not for Ciel.

“The clock is ticking, Mr. Phantomhive. You’d best make your way to class.” Sebastian peered into Ciel’s eyes, noting the vacant expression. Ciel didn’t seem aware of anything in front of him.

Ciel snapped, his jaw trembling and his eyes bright. He seemed only to barely see Sebastian. Strange, Ciel thought, looking up as he shook the memory off him, *how as far as I know, no one who was actually there said anything to anyone. And yet somehow the whole school found out.*

He suspected that was how Sebastian heard about the whole incident. “Why are you bringing that up?” Ciel demanded. He had the sensation that he’d lost time, and it did not sit well with him.

Sebastian gave an empty smile, and moved away.

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(Sebastian)

“If he’s going through all that trouble, surely it would be best for him to transfer. And his father supports the decision. His first choice school is a good one, too…” Ciel’s homeroom teacher pressed his lips, nodding. “It can’t be helped! It’s a pity to lose him, but…”

I added tea leaves to a pot, arranging the cups on a tray while I waited for it to steep.

With a bit of subtle questioning, and no small amount of eavesdropping, I pieced the story together. Once I knew what Vincent had done, it seemed they gossiped about nothing else. Knowing these details, the behavior of the students suddenly seemed to have new meaning. The teachers seemed little better.

“What was it they called him? The English lord?”

Another teacher guffawed. “No, it was the English gentry. No that’s not it…”

I hid a cruel smile. They didn’t even have any interesting information to offer.

The students had turned Vincent’s actions into some sort of legend, and began idolizing the man that could do such things. The son, too, took on a new light— instead of the shady figure they knew before….he was…what? A dark prince?

The thought made me smile.

Ah, but Ciel used to think they thought him innocent. He was suspected then, and confirmed now, to be somehow related to the underworld of the city. Who else could deal with assailants so efficiently?

I turned my thoughts back to the task at hand. The tea properly brewed, I poured two cups. “Principal. Vice principal.” I gestured to the tea. “Would you care for a cup?”

Agares smiled thinly. “The tea seems a great deal better lately. Did we change brands?”
“I’m afraid I use only what was already there. If you’ll excuse me, I have a business trip.”

“Have a safe trip,” Agares said wryly.

Of course, it wasn't a business trip so much as a ridiculous outing orchestrated by Undertaker. I took my portfolio, and prepared for my first task of the day. It shouldn't take too long, I thought wryly. Undertaker cannot possibly think of a task to keep me for more than a few hours— any more delicate tasks (such as tempting Ciel...) were surely out of his grasp of imagination.

I looked at my smart phone, reading the encoded message. My eyebrow twitched. I was to be going to the outskirts of Tokyo, to make contact with...one of Phantomhive senior's people, no doubt.

My phone beeped again, signaling a new chat on Line. I opened the program and saw Undertaker’s attached doodle of himself snickering. The .GIF moved obnoxiously.

**Death Scythe:** you don't need the Key, do you?

This task would be more difficult than I first assumed…I sighed, and prepared to leave. The information in my hands was not as volatile as the location…

As soon as I left the school campus, I thought I felt the eyes of a curious student. But the pull of his attention and suspicion could only mean that it was only one person, and not one among many. I imagined the eyes to be a peculiar shade of blue. The very child everyone gossiped about, our little dark lord-ling himself was out to play.

Well, well. How much more difficult this task would be with Ciel following me. I smiled, and was never more relieved that I could interact with the boy more freely.

What an adventure.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Yuri Aoki: Lily Bluer. Actually, the only one of Bluer’s sisters named is Adela, but she’s younger. If you recall, Bluer is a nickname, and Aoki is his actual family-name (in this fan-fiction only). He is usually referred to as Bluer. She (Yuri / Lily) is older than Bluer.

A/N: I couldn’t come up with a good screenname for Undertaker. If any of you brilliant people have something better than DeathScythe, please do let me know. My other option was Sotoba, but I thought that would confuse people…

Anyway! Flashback including Vincent. ♥ Sebastian, out to do who-knows-what for Undertaker. :) Look forward to the next, though again, I can’t promise quick updates. I am really low on inspiration lately—so if you like, leave a review to inspire your tired author? Ciel has cookies.
That Librarian, on delivery

Chapter Summary

Sebastian is out on delivery. During these meaningless (macaron-topped) errands ordered by the Undertaker, Ciel notices. Shenanigans ensue.

Chapter Notes

A/N: thank you all for the well-wishing, Soulless-lover, who commented on 12 different chapters, thank you. You kicked my bum into gear for finishing this one. :D Of course, Snowfall (your persistence inspires me too!!), just_curious (you made me GRIN), and Techno Turtle, you are so sweet. ♥ Just had to mention you all again.

Also thank you Carrie for being inspirational and amazing all at once. Betas. I love ‘em.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 36: That Librarian, Whimsical.
(Sebastian)

Playing-delivery-person-for-the-Undertaker was amusing for the first fifteen minutes that I was able to lead Ciel astray.

He followed me doggedly, nearly-expertly tailing me as I left the campus. He was so intent on being sneaky that he didn’t seem to notice that I directed him to a “game center.” Which in the local language was another way to say “arcade.” Ciel watched me closely, his cobalt eyes sharp as he hunted between the claw games, and even ventured up to the racing and shooting games on the first floor. Then he saw me leaping out the door on the ground floor and out of his reach.

“Hey!!” He shouted. Surely he huffed and puffed to catch up.

I nearly lost him near the post office. I suppose his little legs simply couldn’t keep up with me. But by that time I was cozied up in a nearby café, transmitting seemingly useless information about what-passes-for-nobility in this area. One of the highest bidders for this information was the petty crime organization; there was a notable amount of information devoured by them. Reach, they may have, but power? Hardly. Unless of course, the Undertaker was only giving me the inconsequential information. Particularly about the Phantomhives.

I lazily texted:
[@]WaruTDL
“The Phantomhive household uses three times the amount of laundry detergent as other household of comparable size.”

I quickly followed up with the following:
[@]TokyoDarkLords
“For a family with a personal chef, they order a substantial amount of takeout. Furthermore, their
garden is in a state of ruin and replanting exponentially more than surrounding households.”

I looked up, watched Ciel disappear out of view, and let myself out of the café and incidentally, into his line of sight.

“Sebastian!” Ciel puffed, sweetly out of breath.

“Your inhaler, young sir,” I reminded him. I gestured at the breast pocket of my own vest.

“I don’t need it!” He brushed my concerns aside.

I bowed, backed up two steps, and ducked into a rather convenient group of job-hunters, notable for their all black attire and plain footwear. In times past, I would have suspected them of professional mourners, but this was entirely the wrong assumption for the modern day.

I walked nonchalantly with them for a ways. Then we parted company as I made my last stop to deliver a parcel. First, to pick it up.

Meow. A delightful specimen of feminine beauty arched her back, looking at me with honey-colored eyes. She was sitting on a green tarp with a dog bone for a marker on top. She moved, being an agreeable sort, when I approached.

I took just a few minutes to soothe her before traipsing off again.

Ciel, poor child, was unable to follow as he had a rather unfortunate allergen attack. I could hear him sneezing for nearly a block.

This delivery was not far; it was merely on the other side of Tokyo. Even without the distraction, it would have taken Ciel hours to commute using the train lines. He would be hopelessly lost with no more hints from me. My phone beeped as I made it through the doors. I paused to check the message.

DeathScythe: pausing to smugly gloat on your progress?
Demandols: No.
DeathScythe: Well don’t stop now.

. . .before you head in, drop by the sweets shop on the cover. Add this on the corner of the package. (he inserted a rather ridiculous picture of himself holding a pink macaron)
. . .and that’ll do the trick.

I sighed, turning away just as someone glimpsed me. Taking a detour to retrieve the macaron now? It would have been simpler to tell me beforehand. Nevertheless, I was repeating myself a few minutes later. Needless to say, both watchmen were watching me curiously, as they’d witnessed my, ah, hasty retreat.

“What’s this?” The doorman asked. I instantly dub him Doorman.

I bowed, but offered no words of explanation. Instead, I turned and stepped into the shadows before they could properly make sense of it, or memorize my features.

“What the?” The other one, rather taller and considerably rounder, mirrored Doorman’s befuddled expression.

They exchanged glances, and Doorman eventually said, “Do you think we could eat it?”

In the picture I sent to Undertaker (no need to exchange words if I could avoid it), Doorman and his
companion were not altogether happy. They looked flabbergasted, in fact, their eyes were overly large and their noses running in the chilly February air.

I lazily pushed send.

“It’s not the goods,” the second man continued. “Those are in the box, wouldn’t you say? I think we can eat it.” He looked at the Pink Macaron.

“But what if it’s a sign…?” Doorman’s brow wrinkled, and I left them to the debate.

Undertaker’s humor was decidedly odd. I pondered it as I returned to the school while he heckled me for more direct quotes. For the most part, I ignored him.

Ciel found me again at the school gate. I smiled down at him, wondering what he would think at the various errands Undertaker had me on.

“Sebastian,” Ciel began, his sweet smile belaying the annoyed tone, “I need a book to study for the entrance exams. Get me a good one.”

“Are you interested in going to purchase one? I could take you to a very interesting shop. However, it's after five, Ciel. I have no obligations.” Let him seethe on that. “I would be very interested in hearing your demands and orders when you take on the mantle of master.” I put a finger to his cheek. “Until then.”

I left him standing there, shivering and shouting rude comments.

o0o0o0o

For delivery, the tag read in stylish copperplate.

This new assignment seemed less innocuous... I fingered the black ribbon surrounding the manila file, my eyes flashing. I had the distinct feeling that Undertaker was testing me, somehow...

The logo of a phoenix on the folder seemed altogether less playful than the colorful macaron on the previous package. I considered the phoenix, with its rich symbolism and history. Immortality, rebirth, and let us not forget fire. These things reminded me of Ciel Phantomhive, which could very well be what Undertaker intended.

“Um…”

I looked up from my desk, and smiled at the latest student invader. “Study tables are open on the far side of the library,” I remarked blandly, feigning ignorance to the gaggle of giggling girls following the first.

“He’s here for him isn’t he?” One of the girls whispered when they were a few aisles away. “What do you think about it?”

“I dunno…” one girl replied while the others made so-called ‘cute’ replies consisting of airy breathes and musical sighs. “It seems…strange. Like the underworld is expecting an attack or something. He’s a bodyguard, isn’t he?”

“No, of course not,” the first girl hissed. “He’s probably another dark noble, you know.” She turned to look back at me, and I favored her with a devilish smile.

“Please keep your voices down, ladies,” I admonished, pressing one finger to my lips.
Of course, one of the girls had to run into the nearest bookshelf, upsetting a display and tangling her hair in a mobile (a Noh stylized devil, a book, a cat, and a girl in a frilly dress). “Oh!!” She exclaimed loudly.

I closed my eyes. These children.

“Professor…” one of them warbled. Apparently I’d taught her before. “I’m so sorry…”

I had her untangled and leaning on my arm in an instant. Feeling Ciel’s eyes on me, I dipped her with a slight twirl. Ciel would be watching of course, perhaps wondering what it would be like to dance with me. I had her on her feet again soon enough though, and glanced briefly at where Ciel was standing.

As predicted, his expression was not a happy one.

“Michaelis?” A voice called from the front of the library.

“Ah, Professor Grey…” I left the girls without another glance. “The book club members will be here after they complete their cleaning duties,” I informed him. “If you could kindly watch the desk until then?”

“Yes, yes, and lock up at five. I remember,” Grey remarked. He looked at me with fresh eyes, and very little of the competitive nature he’d had before. If anything, I would say he looked sharply, suspiciously at me. Strange, that. Especially if Undertaker had worked his memory magic. “Good luck on your business trip.”

I smiled my thanks and nodded, escorting him to the library desk. He kept himself at an appropriate distance away, and his demeanor was nothing but proper. We exchanged no more words, and when I went back to my delivery (the envelope), I realized something interesting. Ciel Phantomhive was not where I’d left him. In fact, he was exactly where he oughtn’t be.

“What is this?” Ciel asked, holding the crème envelope. Kitten-like, he’d found it. Trust him to find his way to the only bowl of milk.

I patted him on the head in as condescending a manner as I could. “Now, now, Ciel. You’re too old to excuse pawing other people’s things. Off with you now. I have school business to attend to.”

“Who are you delivering it for? And where? There’s no address.” Ciel frowned. “Shouldn’t you be using school envelopes if it’s school business?” He took a step forward, the foolish thing, as though his stature could intimidate me to say anything more. “You’re lying.”

“And how the young sir hates lies,” I purred, “though he whispers little else.”

Ciel glowered, furious. “Tell me.”

I took his face in both hands, one hand’s fingers reaching over his scalp, the other taking purchase just under his chin. I tilted his face up in just the way I would begin a contract, or end it. I wouldn’t say ‘he didn’t smell of fear,’ then. But he also felt of ambition, and pride. I leaned forward, my lips parting.

“No,” I answered.

“He’ll see you,” Ciel hissed. “Grey is just over—”
“He’s not looking.” In one smooth move, I took my envelope back and turned Ciel away, giving him a little push toward the door.

My cellphone blipped. DeathScythe: the aurora society. 第一号館の窓口。(Building 1, window office.)

Another irritating .GIF laughed fiendishly at me.

“Who’s contacting you?” Ciel asked, suspicious as ever.

“One of your father’s contacts.”

Ciel actually gaped. Then he sputtered.

“I would consider telling you,” I purred, “in return for some information.”

Ciel wavered.

“What happened on that day?” I asked him.

“Librarian.” A high pitched giggle interrupted the scene. “Are you prying?”

I sighed, turning to look at the interloper. One moment later and I was looking at him, my back straight and hands at my side. “Principal.”

“Principal?” Ciel blinked several times. “No, Sebastian, he’s in charge of the café.”

I perhaps lost a touch of my professionalism as I erupted into snickers. He had fooled me, too, after all.

Undertaker leaned casually against one of my bookshelves containing the demon and spirit exhibition artifacts. He grinned at Ciel in that way of his. “Principal? I do enjoy that job.”

Ciel looked at a loss for words yet again.

“Things are not as they appear,” I told him.

Undertaker shook his head imperceptibly, but he waved one finger at me as though I were a naughty child. “Tsk, tsk, Sebastian,” he drawled, his voice dropping to a low croon, “don’t tease the child.”

Ciel looked as though he wanted to be teased. “If you’re the principal,” he said, “you have been the whole time I’ve been enrolled. You’ve known my father since…well, always.” He looked up, blue eyes swimming with anxiety, panic, and something older than our little relationship. “Sir.” He stepped forward. “Don’t tell him. Forbid him the information, even if it’s in my file. I don’t want him to know.”

I regarded Ciel Phantomhive with some admiration. How had he guessed? How had he known that Undertaker could do this very thing?

Undertaker laughed again, and I saw a few heads turn to stare at him. “Don’t find out about Mr. Phantomhive’s tragic past, his traumatic experiences, or otherwise pry into his ten-year-old memories, Sebastian Michaelis.”

I turned my back to Ciel, facing only the Undertaker as my eyes flashed red. “Yes,” I said simply.

Undertaker smiled and closed his eyes. The scar on his face never seemed so pronounced as it did
then, and I turned away from it.

Ciel continued to look at the pair of us suspiciously. Perhaps he didn’t know whose power he just borrowed. Ah, well. Perhaps he would figure out who held my leash because of it. And it was only for a month. I could pry as much as I wanted afterward. The trick was, though, getting Ciel not to give up on me in the meantime.

“Mr. Michaelis, I came to remind you of the *kimodameshi* (*1) later this evening. The test of courage,” Undertaker purred. “You are to take part in it. You did remember, didn’t you?”

 Seeing that I had not been informed of this until that very moment, I couldn’t very well say anything. I just looked at him, awaiting instruction.

“The gym teacher who was supposed to be overseeing it is out with influenza. You will be taking his place organizing the Test of Courage. It’s to be held in the traditional *washitsu*, Japanese style room with *tatami*-mats, in a seminar building. The maps should be enclosed.” He nodded at the envelope, as though it really had anything to do with school. “You need to go check the facilities out and talk to the owners so that you’ll be prepared for this evening. It takes an hour to get there, and don’t forget—” he started to turn around, his long silver hair swaying as he went, “—bring that demon mask of yours. The students will love it.”

Ciel raised his voice. “Undertaker,” he said with as much authority as his small body could manage, “I’m going too.”

“Fine.” Undertaker grinned. “I’ll add your name to the list…”

I smiled at Ciel. “Until later then.” I bowed at him.

From across the library, I heard a not-very-quiet voice. “They’ve been talking forever…”

A hissed *quiet!* at that. Followed by, “What do you think they’re saying?”

“I wanna talk to Professor Michaelis!!” One girl whined pathetically.

And then, “Girls, be quiet.” That of course was Grey. “This is a library, not your home.”

Ciel, instead of blushing or looking embarrassed, threw a dirty look in their direction. He raised his chin.

I took advantage and slipped out.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) *Kimodameshi*, 肝試し. A test of courage. This sort of test usually involves couples or pairs of students, ghost stories, and sometimes people popping out at you like in *Haunted Houses*. Otherwise, it’s a walk in a scary building followed by a scary story in a dark room. People do these before big events: usually before entrance exams, so Ciel is just the right age for it.
A Haunted House

Chapter Summary

That Librarian's duties have never lead him to a stranger design. Watch as he organizes a haunted venture.

Chapter 37: Haunted House

(Sebastian)

This will do, I thought, sliding the envelope into the mail slot of the appropriate building.

Even at this late hour, employees lit their offices, one or two venturing out into the cold February air to enter one building or another.

The facilities were clean, and very modern. All around me were honey colored beams, spiral staircases and glass windows appropriate for the smattering of trees on the grounds. Some ways away from this artistry, the practical and sterile blocks of cement seemed to be from another age entirely.

The Aurora Society was enamored with death and life. They were probably doing something not entirely legal in its many facilities. Officially, it was a research facility though, and so they got away with much of this experimental work with little or no fuss.

On a whim, I followed a man who had just left one of the buildings. He stopped by a security box, stayed a moment and came back out again. Curious, I decided to do the same.

Inside, there was an elderly guard, several security screens, and most promisingly, a box of keys.

But a moment later, I left with a pocket full of keys to copy and explore with at the next opportunity.

None of this information was required for delivering the envelope, of course, but I didn’t like the feeling of being left out of the loop. If Undertaker was interested in this society, after all, it was best to be well informed.

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"Yes, we usually tell this story-- it's quite frightening, I'm told," the events building representative prattled on.

Inside the small building not far from the school, we sat around low tables in what functioned as a classroom for students. Why they should want to leave school to study as a group in what could be a passable hotel (by student standards) was beyond me, but this particular custom seemed popular among third year students studying for entrance exams.

The fact that we were there to entertain instead of strictly study, seemed to have escaped the representative's attention. That would not do.
"Well, sir, I'm sure stories of people dying in the distant past are quite frightening when told with the right...flare, but I'm afraid," I looked around the neat rows of tables, "another story may be in order. If you'll excuse me, I think I shall do a bit of research...and make preparations. I doubt I'll intrude on you and your staff."

One of the young men had the presence of mind to look disgruntled, but he swiftly masked it with a mask of compliance and gratitude. "Of course." He gave a slight seated bow. "Would you like Sato here to show you around?"

Sato, a primly dressed young woman with baby-cheeks and a half-awed expression, tensed noticeably at the suggestion. She bowed her head.

"It shall not be necessary. Thank you for your assistance thus far." I rose without the fuss that these humans usually did, half-stumbling into tables and pushing awkwardly off while they regained their balance. "I'll see to it that the children are properly entertained, and off the premise on time."

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(Ciel)

Soma could not keep his wide eyes open for more than a few seconds. He kept blinking rapidly. Finally, he managed, "But we were going to go to that sweets shop you like."

Soma stole a glare at Agni. "Ciel didn't say he was going," Soma accused.

Of late, Agni had taken to visiting the dorms in the common areas before the curfew was enforced, seeming more concerned with the safety of his ward (and said ward's friends) than was strictly necessary.

Soma's eyes glistened a bit as he tucked his chin in a hair, lips trembling as he demonstrated a full pout. "If Ciel can go last minute, I want to go. I want to join!"

Ciel looked suspiciously at his friend. His shoulders tightened. "You're not an examinee."
"So? It's not fair that I should be restricted just for that. It's just for fun, right? I'm sure there'll be at least one more upperclassman."

Ciel looked to Agni for support, but as usual, the tall, severe-looking young man was having trouble seeing anything wrong with his charge's demands. Ciel was about to protest again when he felt the slight pressure of a hand on his shoulder.

He turned around to see Sebastian leaning into him, but not looking at him at all. He spoke to Agni instead. "I'm not certain that I could organize something that is up to Prince Soma's standards," he said modestly, a smile tugging at his lips. "I'm quite certain there is still room for the young master's friend. Please, feel free to join in on the events." His sly red eyes were properly downcast, but Ciel was quite certain he was angling for something.

"Hah. You just want Agni's help preparing because it was thrust on you last minute," Ciel accused.

Sebastian's lips twitched, but his gaze did not waver. "Agni and I have had the pleasure of working together before on an event, it is true. He has the most exquisite skills for preparing fine Indian dishes, and his courtesy knows no bounds." His mysterious manner was marred only slightly by the teasing quirk of his lips...

"I would be honored to help," Agni was quick to assure. His eyes actually glistened with loyal fever.

"I could not intrude," Sebastian insisted.
"Great!" Soma chirped. "You two go do that business stuff, and me and Ciel will go to the sweets shop! What time do we need to arrive?"

Kimodameshi

Several hours later, Ciel and Soma walked up the narrow path from the bus stop. The building seemed mostly well cared for, though old, and in this lightening, more than a little creepy.

But perhaps that was because of the reason everyone would gather.

The cold air prickled his skin, sending sharp tingles of electricity down his fingers.

“No one’s here yet. But I was sure the time was for 7 o’clock....” Soma said, his voice rising in complaint.

Ciel said nothing. The lack of other participants seemed somehow ominous-- would the demon do something to his classmates? Together, they walked down the path, and Ciel thought he saw things moving just beyond the tree-line. "They're probably already inside," Ciel said quietly. He barely dared to raise his voice above a whisper.

His eyes stuck on a paper and straw ward-- the kind of thing one usually saw near a shrine, celebrating the gods in large trees. Somehow he thought this was more to pacify something...could it be that Sebastian wouldn't be able to enter the grounds?

Suddenly, from behind him, he heard someone scream. It was a short, high-pitched thing, and the sound of it made Ciel's heart race-- until it was followed by raucous laughter.

"Is that your phone?" Ciel thought he heard McMillan's voice some ways behind him.

Ciel motioned for Soma to wait.

"Whose phone is it?" Soma frowned, looking at his own smart phone suspiciously.

"You're supposed to put it on manner mode!" One of his classmates called (loudly) from behind. "Phantomhive, didn't you read the pamphlet?" Cheslock loped up casually behind him.

Ciel ignored him, slid his finger over the "Answer" button, and held it to his ear. "Hello?" But there was no answer, and when he dropped his hand to check the connection, he found his screen locked on "shut down".

"Weird," Soma commented, completely unperturbed as the others started babbling furiously.

"You don't think it was the ghost, do you?" A girl in their year asked.

"Wait, wait, wait, Phantomhive, who was that?" Cheslock demanded.

"No, listen!"

Ciel put the phone to his ear, gesturing for the others to be quiet. "Where are you now?" The voice on the phone asked. "Hey, where are you?" It seemed on the verge of laughing, and oddly familiar. It almost sounded like one of the voices of a Japanese student who they went to school with.

He took the phone from his ear, suddenly aware of the unnatural silence. And the lack of any of the
usual keys to a cellphone conversation. There was no static.

As he put the phone in his bag, a voice laughed somewhere near the woods.

The students gave cries of alarm, half thrilled, and half afraid. As one, they walked speedily to the seminar room.

When the door at last shut behind them, there was only the sound of the doors, of students shifting and rearranging their bags and coats. Slowly, they started to look around for the teacher or organizer, asking of each other,

"Have you seen Mr. Hiragi?” and "Wait, did we get the room wrong?"

When the lights flickered, the door creaked open again. In the darkness, it was hard not to tense, to lean away from the figure that approached.

"Welcome," a smooth voice said. There was only the sound of footsteps on the tatami floor.

The lights flickered as though someone drew a shutter over them, and then revealed a tall lithe figure dressed in an old-fashioned black suit. Victorian, if Ciel had his guess.

He frowned stiffly as he eyed the effect. From the tight vest to the silver pocket watch, he looked entirely too out-of-era. *Whose butler does he think he is?* Ciel wondered. *And those gloves. Aaaarg.*

"Now that you have all arrived, we can begin. Welcome to your last *kimodameshi* as Junior High Students. Prove your courage today, and certainly your entrance exams or year-end tests will seem that much easier.” Sebastian smiled disarmingly, as though he were doing something as straightforward as selling a good luck charm, rather than essentially guiding them through a haunted house.

Ciel’s classmates murmured all around him, excited and curious.

“Each student, please draw a number. There are two of each numbers in this pack, so you will walk through the building with whomever has your match...that's right, draw a number...” Sebastian held out a number of slips for the students to choose from. As Ciel had come to expect, Sebastian used a heavy-weight, ecru colored (or maybe cream colored) paper, and the numbers looked suspiciously hand-written. He eyed them as the students in front jostled to be the first to take their chances, and held back.

Ciel drew number four. He was neither first nor last to choose a paper, so when the girls exclaimed “No way!” he assumed that she had simply been paired with someone she did not prefer.

“But there’s only 14 of us! Soma made us an even number—” Cheslock was saying.

A cold chill went down Ciel’s back. “So who’s the extra?” Ciel looked around, swiftly counting the members.

“Someone must have joined in late!”

“What if it’s a ghost???”

“There’s no way a ghost would draw lots, you idiot.”

Sebastian cleared his throat. “I’m sure all will be made clear shortly. For now, find your partner.” He watched as the pairs moved around to make 7 groups, leaving Ciel still standing alone. The whispers
started up again.

“Shouldn’t we take roll?” A girl asked nervously.

“Did you see that horror anime Another?” Cheslock asked the boy he was paired with. “Maybe it’s the dead one. The dead student who joined us…”

“Shut up, Cheslock! Nobody in our school died.” There was a moment of relieved shuffling as they settled back into their places.

“Now that you all have your partner to walk by your side in these dark halls…” Sebastian carried on in a vaguely taunting voice. He sounded darkly amused, but never once did his gaze wander to Ciel. “…Let me share with you a bit of the local history.”

Sebastian began a haunting tale of a woman who died in a fire. She had been thought to be a witch, Sebastian said, and had not been on good terms with the villagers when she was alive. And so, she became a wailing spirit, fast to curse any and all she believed connected with her untimely death, and then curse anyone who disturbed her grave.

“Her grave, you ask? It happens to be in the forest we passed to come to this study center.”

All around him, the students whispered, and one girl gave a shriek. “In the woods? Was that phone call from the ghost?”

“All right!” Sebastian said, much too cheerfully. “Line up with your partner, and prepare to take tour of the building. Try not to scream too loud—we wouldn’t want to disturb the ghost. Pair number one, please go this way. Your path will be clearly marked, so kindly don’t stray.”

The first pair left, whispering and tittering as they went. And so, group one, two and three left one after another until it was Ciel’s turn.

“Where is the other four?” Sebastian said, cruelly pronouncing the number “shi” rather than “yon” as any other teacher would have. To Ciel and all the other Japanese speakers, it sounded as though he were asking, “Where is the other “death?”

Ciel turned to the rest of the students, only to be met with white eyes of unimpressed classmates. They stared after him without a glimmer of pity—mostly suspicion on their childish faces. Ciel lifted his chin, treating it like it was a challenge. “I don’t know,” Ciel replied carefully. “But I’ll go on my own.” He walked forward, setting his slender shoulders as he went.
Chapter Summary

Ciel continues into the Test of Courage, expecting demons and ghosts. What will come of it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 38: The Test of Courage

(Ciel)

There was a flurry of whispers as soon as he reached the door leading to the outside, and Sebastian’s eerie smile followed him out of the seminar hall. Sebastian had come with him for a few steps, murmuring a cryptic: “Stay to the path, Phantomhive. Shadows follow you.”

Ciel went through the door and paused, wondering at the night air. He didn’t bother to reply, knowing Sebastian wouldn’t listen.

The dark path before him certainly suited the requirements for the Test of Courage. It looked as though it was straight from a ghost-story. A banshee or a Japanese ghost would be equally comfortable in the dark forest that lurked just beyond the building, and thoughts of Hansel and Gretel also sprang to mind.

Hesitantly, he began to look for the signs of where he was meant to walk. He found them in the form of little white stones, and they sketched the way as far as he could see. Ahead of him there was a fork in the path. On the left fork, a larger stone with a rope tied around it served as a quaint reminder that ‘this way is blocked,’ (a custom from traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony, Ciel thought) which successfully kept students from turning a wrong way. Ciel was soon under the white moon again, watching the indigo sky turn a deeper shade. He stepped onto the dirt path, and wondered briefly which way to go.

The wind seemed to laugh at him.

Soon he caught a glimpse of the trees again. With the knowledge of the local legend, the copse seemed ominous, the trees too straight and dark. The closer he got, the darker it seemed. Is that a… sacred tree? He wondered, and his foot collided with one of the stones. It went skittering into the underbrush.

“Hello?” he called out quietly, hoping no one saw him destroy the path. He made the pretense of walking closer to the trees and with that moment, certain he saw what looked like a thick hay-spun rope the same thickness as his arm. The tree was circled with it, confirming his suspicion that it was considered sacred in the Shinto faith.

“Guess it’s not cursed after all…” Ciel breathed a sigh in relief. That ghost story was just another trick of Sebastian’s.

The wind blew. It felt like the touch of the dead, and its chill bit him to the very bone. Ciel hesitated
for a moment longer, and then steeled himself. It was only a tree, and obviously there was no grave nearby. Moreover, he needed to replace the path-marker, or he might lead another student astray. He bent to go under the fence, and saw a sign: ‘Leave your paper here under the rock.’ (*1) So It was part of the test, he thought.

Carefully, Ciel lifted the stone. He was struck with the image of the straw-ropes swaying gently in the breeze. If he hadn’t had the foresight to hold the other papers down, probably they would flutter all around him like so many leaves in autumn. Ciel left his paper with the others, and then made his way back toward the building.

“What’s this?” He muttered to himself. The next part should be inside. Just one last chance for something creepy to happen…

Ciel looked to see if there were more white rocks to follow, but none caught his eye. He stood on tiptoes to peer into the glass pane of the door he stood before. At first, it seemed that there was nothing inside, just a long empty hallway. The building seemed particularly poorly lit from this vantage point, and the hallways echoed oddly. Perhaps the next step was to go back inside…

He opened the door and stepped through.

There was an empty hallway with several study rooms, and there was a quiet hum that made it all seem normal again. Then he glanced away, until something flickered at the corner of his eye. His head shot back towards the door, just in time to see a figure at the end of the corridor. A tall figure wearing a white kimono with long black hair seemed to be standing perfectly still.

His lungs felt like they were burning because he held his breath so long staring at the unusual sight. That has to be a teacher. A teacher in costume to help make this a scary adventure. This is a school sponsored event...it's a teacher in costume trying to scare me... Ciel tried to cling to his old disbelief in ghosts, magic and anything paranormal, in spite of knowing it was not entirely true because of Sebastian. But even a demon wouldn't take them anywhere with a real ghost, would he?

Then the figure began to turn slowly, and Ciel knew that he must not let it see him. Sebastian was nothing if not a demon. Ciel suddenly had the feeling Sebastian was perfectly willing to summon a real ghost to their school event.

Ciel ducked inside one of the study rooms. He shut the door with a hasty push, and crouched to the side where he could still see the door, but was not directly in front of it. If he looked up at the right angle, he could see out into the hall. He peered out that window and noticed the figure had drawn closer unexpectedly fast. It was no longer at the end of the corridor, but standing before the door. Through the milky-white glass, Ciel could only make out the whiteness of its clothes, the paleness of its features.

His body felt heavy. As he struggled to make out details, to think of a way out of the abandoned classroom, Ciel’s vision swam. The vertigo that had plagued him whenever someone roughly grasped his hand, or so much as touched the sensitive skin on his back, returned. He rested his weight on his heels, feeling the blood coursing through his veins, and darted to the side as the door jerked. Uncomfortable thoughts of that night made him feel short of breath; panicky.

There was a taste of icy cold air wafting in from the crack, and it rattled again.
Ciel, rather than being pinned to the spot with fear, was ready. His blue eyes were wide with concentration, and he stood on the balls of his feet. He balled his hands into fists.

The door rattled again, and this time light poured in from the hall as it reflected off the white fabric of the figure.

Ciel closed his eyes. When nothing supernatural happened, he opened them hesitantly. A familiar teacher, dressed in modern clothes, stood before him.

“Congratulations.” It was Charles Grey, Phantomhive Senior's representative and lookout at Ciel's school. His smile was faint, as though he could find several amusing anecdotes just in the way Ciel was holed up in the classroom with his small white hands curled into fists that would pose no threat. “You have successfully completed the Test of Courage,” Grey informed him. He stepped aside, the smile fast turning into a grin.

From beyond Grey, in the semi-darkness, a quiet laugh echoed. Ciel recognized it in an instant, and Sebastian soon revealed himself, his mocking eyes practically glowing in the dark. “I'm afraid you have returned out of order, Mr. Phantomhive,” Sebastian tskeled softly. “Pairs six and seven have already found their places here...” Sebastian was beside Ciel with supernatural swiftness, and then his strong hands were supporting him again.

Ciel finally noticed the quaver in his shoulders. His cheeks flamed.

“You ought to reassure them of your safety,” Sebastian remarked, and that strange half-smile of his distracted Ciel from an angry retort.

Ciel swallowed and cast his gaze on Grey. He raised his eyebrows, demanding an explanation wordlessly.

“I trust there was no problem?” Grey was regarding Sebastian with mild suspicion, but nothing like the annoyance Ciel usually leveled Sebastian with.

“Well, let me go back in,” Ciel said gruffly. He couldn't exactly explain everything with Sebastian right there. He just gave Grey another significant look, and hoped Grey would mention something to his father. Not that it'd make any difference, Ciel thought, annoyed. Damned if you do, damned if you don't, he thought ironically, remembering the Contract he refused. Aloud, he said, “Is everyone meeting in a different room?”

Sebastian followed Ciel's gaze, and he showed the pearly tips of his teeth. “Just through these doors. You'll find the students getting ready for the final address. Please, go on in.”

“We'll take role to make certain you are the only student who was late,” Grey added, shooting a curious glance at Sebastian.

When Ciel entered, a strange hush fell over the students. After a long moment, Ciel broke the silence. “Sorry I'm late. Were you waiting long?”

Then the whole room began to chatter, and the mix of language and voices made Ciel's head hurt.

"It was him! I knew it!"

"No, no, what if he's a real ghost?!"
And Soma's characteristic, “Ciel~!! Are you ok?!”

"What?" Ciel interrupted, pursing his lips. “What are you talking about?"

"Well,” one of the older boys began. Ciel recognized him as a popular soccer player. “You saw it, didn't you?”

"You saw the figure?" Another girl prompted. “That person that was here. The person in the corner."

"No, it couldn't have been him.” Ciel's classmate Sato shook his head. “He's way too short, yeah?" The playful spin on his words was lost in the following tumult. “Also, the voice was weird.”

"You were standing just there!" someone accused. “You were standing right there, and it was like something was wrong with you.”

"No, he was outside! Nothing was in here with us.”

"It was someone else.” Another voice shot back angrily, too fast for Ciel to place it.

"But it was his voice, wasn't it? And what was wrong with his neck?"

Surprisingly, it was Cheslock who explained what they had all seen. “Everyone got back, except you, we thought...that you were in here with us. But then we heard someone say. 'Everyone is here.' And we saw something that looked like you...except that it was ...dark. And it laughed, and it couldn't have been you... And then it was like it wasn't there at all…” Cheslock froze as the door opened a second time.

They looked on in quiet horror at the black figure that walked, one slow step in front of another, to the head of the group. Sebastian smiled in that sardonic way of his, and in the light it seemed particularly well formed for a demon. Then he dropped his gaze, as would have been appropriate for a Butler of Victorian standing, and waited for their attention.

From the open door, Grey gave a grand smile nothing like Sebastian's. “Congratulations.” He repeated his salutations from before. “With this completion of the Test of Courage, each of you has gained some small amount of self-reliance and aptitude to continue even in the face of difficulty.” He looked up at Sebastian, but when the other didn't continue, he finished with an awkward smile. “We wish you the best of results on your future exams, be they at our fine school, or on the Entrance Exams elsewhere. In comparison,” here he wavered, and finally gestured for Sebastian to say something, apparently at a loss.

“Simple sheets of paper with problems like those you have faced in every classroom will seem easy in comparison,” Sebastian finished smoothly. “You will all surely perform at your best. Please. Let us go now with our hands clasped tight against the horrors of the night, and hold our heads high...” he gave a soft chuckle. “The worst of it has passed.”

Ciel ducked his head, walking swiftly toward where he'd left his school bag. He shouldered it just as Soma came up beside him.

“That was scary!” Soma beamed, but despite his apparent excitement, he patted Ciel once or twice as though to check Ciel was really there. Or maybe he was looking for injuries....

“It was just a walk in the dark,” Ciel muttered. “I don't know what they're talking about...what voice? Where?”

“You would make a scary ghost.” Soma commented vaguely, but pushed the question aside. “You
aren’t a ghost, and you obviously weren’t here like they thought you were, and it was probably another kid. It wasn’t you, and you’re not dead.”

“Why,” Ciel began, “oh, never mind. But it sounds like you’re trying to convince yourself, not me.” He was annoyed.

“We have to walk back now, right? You’ll be coming with all of us?” Soma asked hopefully.

Ciel shook his head, knowing he needed answers more than he needed the company. “I promised Professor Michaelis that I’d help clean up,” Ciel muttered. “Seeing that he's been,” he paused lightly, “such a big help recently.”

Soma nodded his understanding, but his face fell. “He's probably got Agni, Professor Grey, and maybe some other people though,” Soma argued.

Ciel felt a cool presence behind him, and slight pressure on his shoulder made him wince. The chills returned, and his breath caught in his throat.

“I would be most grateful if you could stay but a moment, Ciel,” Sebastian murmured. “He shall not be long, Soma,” he added. “Agni would not approve of my keeping such a young child away from the others at this hour.” His lips twitched.

The panic that had risen in him was slow to calm, and the rushing and chattering of his classmates flowed over Ciel like the rumbling of water over rocks. He was barely aware of the time as they all filed out, nor was he conscious of the looks they gave him. Finally, they were alone again, and Ciel remembered exactly how disconcerting being one-on-one could be if your opposition was a demon.

He isn't exactly my enemy. Ciel mused. But who is to say he means me no harm?

Sebastian took two steps forward, his dark hair casting strange shadows on his face in the light. The moon shone in just the wrong way, casting Sebastian's already pale complexion into something unearthly. He knelt before Ciel in one smooth motion, his Butler's tailcoats fluttering like banners.

“Grey is waiting just outside the door.” Sebastian raised an eyebrow. “But I have a puzzle for you, Little Earl.”

“I'm not an earl,” Ciel replied automatically.

“Young master.” The irony there was palpable. “My first week is up,” he remarked, and said nothing further.

Ciel waited for a while before demanding explanation. “Why does it matter?”

“All contracts have rules,” Sebastian replied cryptically.

Something clicked in Ciel's mind. “You've been here a full week.” Ciel stopped to consider it. “Therefore?”

“Find me,” Sebastian demanded, and then he cupped Ciel's chin in one hand. The other hand was free to trace an unknown design on Ciel's eyelid, and then one on his lips.

“Let go!” Ciel demanded, breaking away as soon as he could.

“The others await.”
“I was supposed to be helping you,” Ciel reminded him, feeling awkward. “If I don’t…”

Sebastian was shoving a small box full of glimmering white stones in Ciel's hands. He staggered. “Oh.”

“Deliver that to Agni, and consider your duty fulfilled.”

“I want to know what you're doing here,” Ciel said as he shifted the box. “I will find out.”

Sebastian only smiled, and this one was ill-suited. It showed only the red tongue against an unnaturally white face, and his red eyes gleamed with it. “And you would control me.” Sebastian tilted his head.

Ciel turned away without saying anything, his heart pounding. Truth told, he did not know why he insisted on staying with the demon. He supposed running away was out of the question-- none of his other attempts had worked. But was that reason enough?

“I will still have you,” Sebastian assured him. “If you only give me an opening...”

Ciel closed his eyes and turned away. “I will know everything,” he said, though it was not a real reply. It was a clumsy attempt to distract Sebastian, and he knew it. “Good night.”

“Sleep well, my lord.” Sebastian replied, and all the night filled his voice.

As Ciel rushed from the room and down the beaten path, the moon seemed to stare down at him cruelly. The biting wind had a message, too, and it was more than Sebastian's laughter. The world watched, and it recognized this game.

Ciel ran, struggling to catch up with the others.

Chapter End Notes

So, I have been tired a lot (times ten~~), and this story is hard to write recently. Comment please?

(*1) In tests of courage, there is often a place for participants to leave something to show they actually did it. In some cases, they take something away instead. For instance, you might be asked to add your name to a list, or you might be asked to bring something back.

(*2) I have no idea where to cue this note, but most doors in school related buildings are sliding doors. Secondly, they have windows about at head height, and the glass is opaque; the ones I’ve seen are not necessarily shatter-proof or gun proof, just as an interesting fact. You need a key to lock them, and as far as I can tell, you can only lock the doors from the outside. EEEP, Ciel, why did you go in????

A/N: Sebastian’s first week of not-talking-to-Ciel is up. He made his move, he almost kissed him (sort of), and he secured him in a locked room. Also, Sebastian has a key to the Aurora Society. Dundun-dun.

…tbc…
His Would-be-Master, resolved

Chapter Summary

Sebastian has the keys, and wishes to investigate the society. Ciel's memory block is triggered by the Undertaker.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 39: His Would-be-Master, resolved

Grey would be a top class spy, if it weren't for the fact that he thought his office was soundproof, Ciel thought to himself, very slowly sliding the door to the history office open.

“Yes,” Grey murmured, but the handy bookshelf blocked Grey's view of Ciel, “and you know how he gets. He was set on attending, so things simply happened in a manner that allowed him to attend.” Grey paused, listening to the person on the other end of the line. “There was a slight incident… I was unable to determine his whereabouts for nearly half an hour…”

Ciel stood very still, just to the side of the door, so his shadow wouldn't block the light. They were talking about the Kimodameshi, the test of courage just that past night. Vincent was doubtless on the other end... Ciel strained to hear his father's response.

“Michaelis was in charge of the event. No, he didn't show any signs of...distress... or even anticipation or excitement while Ciel was away. He only seemed a bit superciliously concerned--something that caused the other students to assume Ciel was in on the planning, I think.”

Ciel frowned, annoyed. Is that why they overreacted? You would have thought they saw a real ghost...

In his irritation, though, he must have shifted, because the poster behind him made a slight crinkling noise. He froze, hoping Grey would have missed the sound, but this time Grey's voice didn't cover up Ciel’s mistake.

Ciel breathed easier as Grey continued. “He did ask that Ciel stay afterwards, but only for a few minutes.” There was a long pause, tempting Ciel to peek in.

Right at the stern visage of his father's incognito servant.

“Ah.” Ciel shuffled backward in surprise. “Hello Professor.”

Grey closed his eyes and said, “Yes. I'll call you back.”

With those words, though, Ciel felt a surge of frustration, a desire to get answers. He lurched forward and swiped the mobile out of Grey's hands.

“Hello?” He strained his ears for a dial-tone, or some other sign that his father had already hung up, but sure enough, the Phantomhive curiosity was strong in Vincent too. He hadn't hung up.
“What are you talking about Sebastian for?” Ciel asked finally, after deciding that his father wasn't going to give away information on his own.

“Hello Ciel. This is a private call, you know.” Vincent sounded more amused than annoyed. They both waited for the other to speak, but in the end, it was Vincent who spoke first. “We’re keeping an eye on you, is all. And Sebastian, though vouched for, is rather...unusual.”

Ciel prickled at this. “Vouched for?” He repeated, incredulous.

“Yes, by one of my other contacts at your school,” Vincent allowed.

“Who?” Ciel put one hand on his hip, the other still gripping Grey’s cell phone.

“I'm not saying over the phone,” Vincent teased.

Ciel paused, reflecting on this unexpected response. Rather than the angry, mistrusting parent Ciel had to fend off in autumn; Ciel was faced with an altogether unworried father. This suggested that Vincent's memory was suspect-- just as Ciel's had been until that full moon in October.

“What do you know about Sebastian Michaelis?” Ciel asked bluntly. He wasn't in the mood for subterfuge, and besides, being vague left Vincent plenty of room for lies.

“We've had this conversation before.” Vincent started sounding annoyed. “Anything with Sebastian is immediately a complicated and convoluted affair, but he means you no harm.”

“Your memory is suspect,” Ciel accused. “You don't remember everything that happened.”

“I wasn't there for everything that happened,” Vincent replied snidely, “and someone refuses to talk about it.” He sounded amused again.

There was a knock on the open door. “Excuse me, but as Ciel's former assistant home room teacher, I find myself obligated to remind Ciel of his commitments.” Sebastian had one gloved hand to his chest, over his heart in some mockery of servitude. “Ciel, I believe you are meant to be sitting an entrance exam from 9:00 at your second choice school in the Tokyo area.”

Grey eyed Sebastian with his usual disinterested look, another thing that had changed from the past fall. Why didn't I notice until now? Ciel wondered. Grey used to be very competitive with Sebastian now that Ciel thought of it.

He allowed himself to be maneuvered out of the room.

“I don't really have an entrance exam today, do I?” Ciel frowned.

“You do. But wouldn't you rather come with me? I have something secret to show you...” Sebastian smiled at him, pressing one finger to his lips. “I'll tutor you especially for the next week before your entrance exam to that other school...you needn't sit that exam if you'll pass the exam for your first choice, after all...”

“Wait, you want to tutor me?” Ciel put his feet down, refusing to be pushed any farther from the history office. “And I have plenty of time to get there-- it's only 7:30!”

Sebastian smiled to himself, a subtly mocking look that Ciel wanted to knock off his face. "Are you no longer interested in collecting information about the Tokyo underground?” Sebastian purred.

Ciel felt his resolve waver. It was only too easy to let Sebastian sway him, when everyone else still
"Good morning! Hello, I'm the textbook representative from Oxford press. Is Professor Michaelis here?" A blond salesperson smiled from behind a box labeled OXFORD PRESS HEISEI 26.

"Ronald, at your service." From behind a pair of angled glasses, Ronald widened his eyes in surprise. "I was certain we'd spoken before...you're the history teacher, aren't you?"

Sebastian sighed. "Not any longer."

"He's the librarian now." Ciel said cheekily, wondering who the man in the neatly pressed black suit was. Certainly not a teacher.

"You can do anything, can't you? But we still have you down in the history department...I guess I need to make note. Who is the main English language history teacher now?"

“Grey.” Sebastian watched Ronald with more interest than he usually showed the adults of the school. Ciel wondered at the man’s strange aura.

“Er, right. Library! Even better.” Ronald grinned. "I'll set these here for now, and we can go discuss your copies our line of Graded Readers and the popular English magazines."

Sebastian frowned. "You are familiar with the school's layout?"

Ronald only grinned. "I've been Oxford Press's representative for this school since last April. I know it fairly well."

"Then meet me in the library. I'm afraid I have student business to attend to first."

He's planning on leaving the guy there... Ciel realized. Sebastian only ever acknowledged his teaching job between the hours of 9-5.

Ronald's eyes flashed, but he nodded. "Of course, Mr. Michaelis. I'll go get my library samples on my way."

Ciel watched him go with some amusement. When he was out of earshot, he asked, "What are you planning? Where is this secret anyway?"

Absurd snickering filled the hall. "Yes, what is this secret?" Undertaker put his claw-like fingers on Ciel's shoulder, making him jerk away.

"Gaaah, you scared me!" Ciel said, much flustered. Ciel glanced from Undertaker to Sebastian, a cold shiver running down his spine. First the book salesman, now the Undertaker, who was apparently the principal. He wasn't sure what to say.

"We were just on our way to the library," Sebastian murmured demurely, ignoring the question.

Ciel found the tone of voice offensive, knowing what Sebastian was usually up to. "Um, did you need something, Undertaker?" He asked warily.

"Walk, and talk..." Undertaker sing-songed, and the scar that stretched from his eye to his cheek seemed starker than usual. Ciel wondered how he'd gotten it. "You were talking about secrets."

"I'm afraid a young person's secrets are not meant to be discussed in the hallway, principal." Sebastian shrugged. He walked with his back straight as a Victorian butler's, but his expression didn't quite fit. Too sly and expressive for a "properly" stoic gentleman or gentleman's servant.
"Hmmm," Undertaker chuckled to himself. “Well, perhaps you can fill me in, Ciel. You know I always have time for you.” His unwavering smile was unsettling, and Ciel was reminded of a predator’s feral grin.

"I don’t really know what to say," Ciel muttered, glancing out the window. From the guest's parking space, the blond salesman was carrying a rather large box. Ciel wondered briefly if the young man would be as surprised to find them in library as he would have been.

"Sebastian. Tell me what you were going to say to Ciel." Undertaker's smile was like a crescent moon, titled at an odd angle.

Ciel felt dizzy. The words echoed, rearranged..."What did the demon say to you?"

The touch of cold hands, the feel of grass beneath his feet.

Months ago.

Ciel remembered.

He found himself standing barefoot outside, standing on cold grass. When he looked up, the cool splay of stars stared down on him, and the icy air lit his lungs aflame. He stared on in silence.

“Ciel…” the voice was familiar. Undertaker, his father’s informant and the school café owner, spoke to him as if in a dream.

Ciel turned, wordless. He had no memory of going outside. He did not speak.

“What did the demon say to you?” Undertaker stepped closer, his long fingers at the ready. The moonlight cast his skin to a pearly sheen, more otherworldly and eerie than he’d ever seemed before.

Ciel looked away. “The demon…” he said quietly. His voice was barely his own—he felt more like the child he’d been all those years ago, stolen away in the night and helpless. Something had deadened his sharp senses and suspicious nature.

“You named him,” Undertaker purred, and at last he was close enough to pull Ciel into a tight, constricting embrace.

All the breath left him as Ciel felt himself turning away. “I didn’t name any—"

“Sebastian Michaelis, Agares told me.” Undertaker laughed. “You have funny choices in names…and in companions.” He peered into Ciel’s eyes, and his dark nails scratched lightly at soft cheeks.

“Put me down,” Ciel ordered.

“…we can’t have this ending too soon.” Undertaker mused. “I allowed Agares to steal some of your memory…it is something he does, you know…usually only with the aged. He makes them forgetful, see?” He giggled more. “But you might remember again.”

Ciel shook his head. He didn’t understand the dream, but he didn’t have to. He knew enough to tell when he was being misled. “I—"

“Forget, Ciel. Mistrust the demon, not me…turn all your worries on him.” Undertaker soothed. “Do that, Ciel, and we’ll all have a wonderful laugh…” With that, a cold hand pressed around his throat, and a wooden stake—long, thin, and decorated with ornate kanji characters—touched his eyes.
The sensation of choking was upon him with a searing headache that would leave him irritable and sore for days, but he would remember nothing of it. It was blank, dark, and indisputably strange. For a moment upon waking, his mind would be blank. A shroud of numbness fell over his shoulders trembling, and he would take a few shaky breaths that sent shards of flashing light through his brain.

Ciel would look again, and see only the usual, the mundane. He wouldn’t notice the hellfire in Sebastian’s eyes, or the dangerous promise he wished to make.

(February 2014)

Ciel had walked as if in a dream, but now he was awake. He remembered everything.

He took several steps away from Undertaker, away from Sebastian.

Undertaker had just ordered Sebastian. Sebastian had obeyed.

What is going on here? Dumbfounded, Ciel felt dizzy, and all together incapable of listening to whatever it was Sebastian and Undertaker were saying.

"Go away," he ordered, but neither paid him much mind. Undertaker only laughed, and Sebastian merely guided him into the library where the blond waited.

"Who's this?" Undertaker purred, his eyes shining as he took in the box and the young man.


His father didn't know. Undertaker was Vincent's contact, his informant, but he didn't know about his involvement with Sebastian...or with Ciel...

"I'd best head back to the office...we have a perspective junior high student event today..."

Undertaker practically crept away, his hands comically held out and up in the manner of a Japanese ghost.

Sebastian and Ronald talked, while Ciel tried to process the events that transpired in the past few minutes. Months. What had Sebastian said after the test of courage?

"I have a puzzle for you...All contracts have rules..."

Sebastian wanted Ciel to figure this out. He didn't mind that Ciel had seen Undertaker ordering him about-- he had, perhaps, intended it.

Sebastian was as precise and efficient with the sales representative as he was with anyone, and was back in scarcely a few minutes. Ronald looked disgruntled. Had he been declined, or asked to fill a difficult order?

Ciel's heart hammered in his chest, and he felt light-headed. Sebastian had a way of bringing Ciel's anxiety and anger to the forefront of every day, and he did not need this now. Not when he had exams.

Ciel lashed out against the feeling of helplessness, and began to put the pieces together. Sebastian had interrupted a conversation with Vincent, who was looking in on Ciel. But he offered an outing instead of sitting exams, which suggested he had information that...what? That Ciel was meant to share with his father?
Or was it all just another trap to lure Ciel into a contract? But no, Sebastian had a contract with Undertaker, and... all contracts have rules.

Maybe Sebastian wanted out.

"Take me there," Ciel ordered. "I want to know everything."

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Japanese ghosts, for some reason or other, are said to hold their arms extended from the elbow at their sides except for their hands, which are limp from the wrists. The way Undertaker holds his arms out with those overly long, billowing sleeves (ex. Volume II, p. 58) gives me the impression that his wrists are limp, like a ghost's. My perception of him is likely coloring this interpretation, but meh.

A/N:
So, Ciel has remembered something important about Undertaker, and made the connection on exactly who Sebastian’s new master is. Now what will he find when Sebastian takes him gallivanting?
Chapter Summary

Sebastian takes Ciel to investigate the mysterious Aurora Society, but will he leave the boy to the wolves?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 40: The Aurora Society

(Sebastian)

I took Ciel’s hand. His startlingly clear eyes darted about at the simple movement, and he seemed more distracted than the situation called for. True, I had at one point jumped from a building with him once before, but really.

We stood opposite the research facility, not-quite teeming with activity, due to the early hour. “Wait a moment,” I gestured. “I need to make arrangements for your viewing.”

I took a side path, carefully avoiding the mechanical eyes of the security cameras and made my way back to the little booth where the guards were. Infiltrating it was no more difficult in broad day light than it had been before. I brewed them a fresh pot of tea, adding some herbs to suit my purposes.

I waited, and then, in a few minutes, I returned to Ciel. “Straight this way,” I said with a smile.

Ciel only made a small noise of exasperation, which showed how bothered he was. Curious, that. Then again, perhaps he’s putting together the trail of bread-crumbs.

“What are we looking for?” Ciel asked quietly.

“We are here to observe. I am still...new...to this time. You can point out some oddities in this institution,” I said, unable to keep the slight smile from my face. Let the little boy think he’s here to help me.

Ciel huffed in response, and turned his sharp eyes on the buildings. His gaze lingered on the row of low-cut hedges around one building, and he arbitrarily walked closer to it.

“We’ll be viewing the facilities remotely for your safety, young master.”

“I’m not your master.” Ciel looked at me sideways.

A delightful feeling crept up my spine. Ciel suspected. He was so distrusting, so eager to see the conspiracies hidden behind pretty words... What had he figured out? Or was it still only a blind objection to my contract?

Fortunately, the security box wasn’t far. I let Ciel in, not bothering to hide my copied set of the master keys. “Have a seat. The members of the security team are...otherwise occupied.” I gestured.
They lay sprawled over their keyboards, heads lulling and feet inelegantly splayed.

Ciel glared at me and asked out of the corner of his mouth, “Are they dead?”

“No.” I laughed outright. “Why would they be?”

“Get them out of sight.” Ciel said imperiously. “Don’t hurt them.” He took the only empty seat, and began to peer at the multitude of monitors.

I did as he asked while the little boy made himself at home, and in a matter of minutes I was back at his side. “And what of interest have you found?” I teased, affecting an old-fashioned dialect.

Ciel snorted. “In the three minutes you were gone? They have a series of smaller buildings situated around the main hall. There appears to be hospital-like equipment in buildings 5 through 8, but I can’t make out what the other buildings are for.” He leaned forward, showing a tantalizing bit of neck as he did so.

“Have you guessed the purpose of this institution?” I leaned in close to him, as though to get a better look at the many screens.

“I was thinking hospital, but...there aren’t nearly enough people here for that. Hospitals have huge staffs...so...research? Some kind of research facility?” Ciel bit his lip gently, and I felt the desire to lean in closer.

“What is the matter with you?” Ciel snapped, scowling at my inattention. “Someone just left building four, and I don’t know how often people come in here, so I think we ought to leave.”

“Is something bothering you, Ciel?” I asked smoothly. “You are speaking entirely too quickly...”

“Didn’t you bring me here knowing something? Just tell me so we can leave,” Ciel answered, not slowing down even a little.

I smiled, and brushed his long fringe away from his face. “I told you,” I breathed, and his eyes fluttered, “I don’t understand everything of the modern world.”

Ciel jerked away, nearly dancing with irritation. “Then let’s just go look around. Getting a look with our own eyes is bound to lead to something. Oh, but before we go....” he smirked. “You have become an expert hacker, haven’t you?”

I quietly denied any such thing, but smirked through the words.

“So copy down anything you’ll need to redirect the feed. It mightn’t be good now, but you might want it later,” Ciel ordered and fished around for a memo pad and pencil.

I frowned. “Copy...what, exactly? The film? Passwords? The names of these guards?”

Ciel pursed his lips. “The IP addresses, the location of the servers...the company brand of the equipment. I don’t know! Whatever hackers use to break into footage, or move cameras to record--and get--information they want.”

“I believe you have been watching too many doramas (*1). Hacking is not really that simple...and many of the cameras locations are physically fixed. I cannot, in fact, make them record anything but the doors they are placed before.”

Ciel gave a frustrated sigh. “You just made that up. You don’t know that... I bet a real secret agent of
the queen could get me information from these computers and cameras.”

I chuckled. “Are you trying to play off my pride? While it would be no difficult matter for a librarian of my caliber, I have no reason to do these things... You still have not made a contract with me.”

“Then why did you bring me here, if not to show off? Didn’t you want me to figure out who’s controlling you and what evil things they’re up to?”

His feet kicked under the table, making him look all the younger. Perhaps his nerves were getting to him.

“You assume their actions are...evil?” I taunted.

Ciel stopped his fidgeting. “Let’s go and find out then.”

In the next few minutes, Ciel made his way around the room, randomly reading things aloud before deciding which building to explore. He took me out of the area with a confident lilt in his step so that I hardly would have guessed he was nervous. But I could practically taste it on him: Ciel’s emotions were as twisted and tangled as they’d ever been.

Though I have little patience for Vincent Phantomhive and his over-protective ways, he does seem to have instilled a few measures of basic sneaking methods. Ciel did not scurry from shadow to shadow like a child in a film; he walked boldly without affecting a nervous air. If anything, he was calmer outside than he had been inside, and so no one would notice anything amiss. Assuming, of course, that children ever came to the complex.

“After you,” Ciel said, gesturing at a building with a low-cut hedge. How he chose that one over any other, I couldn’t say. “Is there a magnetic-strip security key, or is it on your key-ring?” He asked.

“Ciel...” My eyes flicked to our right. “I think we should start walking back,” I said conversationally.

“Why?” Ciel asked suspiciously.

“Come along...”

“Not without knowing—“

“Your voice is too loud,” I interrupted.

“Then get us out of here.”

But it was already too late. Some official looking man was walking swiftly towards us. “Which building are you meant to be in? You shouldn’t be wandering around like this…it’s not good for your health,” the man was saying.

Ciel froze, his eyes widening with realization. “I’m not a... a patient. I was here to see Doctor, Doctor...” His memory seemed to fail him, though I was certain he had written the name on his memo pad.

Ah well. Ciel was certain to get out of the situation fine. I left him there, wondering if Undertaker had already noticed my first offensive move against him.

When I returned to the senior high school, it seemed there was little of note. Ciel hadn’t been reported on during the staff meeting, and the students were no more curious about him than they usually were. So it was something of a surprise to hear his little feet treading along behind me when I
approached the facilities.

“Back for more, Mr. Phantomhive?” I teased. “You really should stay home.” That suggestion would keep him here more certainly than asking him along a second time. The thought made my lips twitch.

Predictably, Ciel bristled. “These facilities aren’t any of your business either. Who are you to tell me what I can do?” He put his hands on his hips.

“You slow me down. I’ll have to keep you safe and out of trouble in addition to finding out what...my contractor has to do with this place.”

Ciel’s eyes lit up. “You weren’t asked to come,” he accused. “You just wanted to know, so here you are.” He had a rather clever smile. “You’re baffled by certain pieces of technology, and don’t have enough experience to recognize certain signs in the modern world. If I come, you’ll learn more. It probably has more to do with me and my family than you anyway.”

I let the bit about being “baffled” by technology slide.

“There’s a security guard very near here. Kindly remove yourself before you are forcibly removed again. I will carry on,” I suggested, fully aware that this would keep him close on my heels rather than encourage him to leave.

Sure enough, the little imp was close on my tail. As I noted before, he was able to move with more discretion than most boys his age. He demonstrated his skill when he passed through the first door just behind me.

I motioned for him to be quiet.

“Something’s going on outside,” one of the guards was saying, “so we need to be on alert. That might have only been the warning.”

“Nah,” the other disagreed, “they got caught, so they won’t be back. Nothing to find anyway.”

Ciel’s eyes glinted in the moonlight. Thinking this might attract attention, I pushed Ciel up against a wall. His breath came in soft little puffs next to my hand.

He eventually turned his face aside, annoyance written clearly in his eyes. When I let him straighten, he shot me with a glare. “Well,” he said, but I didn’t give him time to say anything else.

With one hand on his shoulder, I led him through a narrow path, this time avoiding the area where someone had caught us before. “This building should prove interesting...most of the security cameras are concentrated here. You reported seeing medical equipment from screen 4, I believe. Do you remember?”

Ciel nodded slowly. “Yes...” he struggled to make the connection, perhaps wondering why I was focusing on that. “So?”

“Right this way, please.” I opened the side door.

Bemused, Ciel followed. His heart beat fast, and he asked, “What floor was it? Did you catch?”

“Third floor.” I guided him along a delivery route conveniently bereft of cameras. Coming to the main hall, I walked swiftly and raised my step a little higher than usual, lightly touching a small black box.

I landed with little fanfare, but Ciel hissed, “You. Did not just push that camera.”
“What else would you have me do?” I smiled at him, and he scoffed, apparently not impressed.

This late at night, only the night staff was up and about. The first floor was filled with meeting rooms, a waiting room, and a large room presumably meant for admitting emergency vehicles. “Research facility or hospital, this is interesting... I think that’s their equivalence of the Accident & Emergency entrance.”

“I believe it’s time for a costume change,” I decided.

A quick glance around the room revealed a line of lockers, and another jerk and a pull later, I broke the lock on one and opened it to reveal a neatly pressed doctor’s jacket. The heavy, starched fabric rustled as I took it, and I looked briefly to Ciel. “This should suffice?” I queried.

Ciel nodded briefly. “Yes. That should be fine.” He frowned then, and said, “There ought to be a tag of some sort. Something you pin to your pocket or hang around your neck. The hanging kind usually has a key.”

“A...key?”

“A magnetic strip keyed to open certain doors,” Ciel supplied impatiently.

“You should put some hospital slippers on... maybe even a gown? The security guard from earlier believed you to be a patient.”

“When I was wearing my regular clothes. No. I’m not changing,” Ciel glowered.

I chuckled at his expression, and merely replied, “As the young lord wishes it.”

I pulled a slim clipboard from the top of the locker, and started looking again for more useful things. Ciel fished a small metal something from his dark hair, and proceeded to pick the locks of the other end of the lockers. Of course, it was a simple thing to assist him, and we had to name-tags secured in minutes. One I put around my neck, the other I gave to Ciel to hide under his clothing. “Just in case.” I smiled at him.

Ciel did not look pleased with my gift, and he shuffled with it idly until he got it to fit unnoticeably behind his shirt, snuggled between the layers of button-down and his BitterRabbit t-shirt (self-designed, I wondered?). “What would I need it for?”

“In case you can’t keep up” I informed him, eying his short legs and already uneven breathing. We hurried through the door. “We should take the stairs. Each elevator is equipped with a mirror camera. The stairs, however, I think I can...avoid. If you would stay very quiet...try not to ask questions or say anything. There's something odd about this place...”

Ciel nodded briskly, falling behind me with an easy step.

The hallway was suspiciously lacking personnel. I expected to see or hear nurses, patients or night security walking the hall-- if only from the corner of my eye. Instead, I noticed a...stench. Something cleverly hidden by cleaning products, and subtly masked by the currents of recycled air.

Ciel, though he made no note of it, seemed affected as well. He labored to breathe more than he had outside, and a slight wheeze sounded when he took the first stairs.

A research hospital? I thought, Or a morgue? I grasped a bit of the scent as I thought it, recognizing it for what it was.
I lifted him to my shoulder, quietly pressing a finger to my lips.

On the stairs halfway between the second and third floor, I heard it. Some faint sound of wheels squeaking on the linoleum...an IV stand, unless I missed my guess. A patient? But what patient requiring an IV would take the stairs?

Ciel's breath caught in his throat, and his grip on my arm tightened. He shook his head tightly, and shifted as though he wanted to be released.

One step. Creak. Another. The air dragged by, and the sound of it carried the faintest tinge of roses and some chemical.

I flew up the stairs, and kept a steady hand on Ciel. I could feel his heartbeat through his wrist, taste the curiosity on his breath, and the tingling fear that seeped out through his sweat, though it was not cold. I was sure then that our target and the noise were intersecting, and that there would be no way to avoid it, whatever it was. I offered a sharp smile in that direction.

It was a child... a girl with tangled hair who kept her face downcast even as she turned, not towards me, but towards Ciel. She seemed to sense something, though it seemed she didn't react to sound or sight. She lifted her head, and opened her mouth...

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Dorama is popular net-speak for J-Drama (Japanese Dramas, aka, a Japanese TV drama.) (I imagine K-Dramas, C-Dramas and T-Dramas also have some rendition of it, but since I don't speak those languages, I dunno the comparison, or if they also apply to dorama...) J-Drama is a Japanese produced drama, which of course have different tropes, cliches, and expectations than other countries' films and TV shows.
Dangerous Girls and Deadly Medical Treatment

Chapter Summary

Ciel and Sebastian find untold horrors in the hospital halls. Can they defend themselves and stay undercover?

Chapter Notes

Warning: There is gore in this chapter, but it’s not excessive. Rather like the Ship Arc for the manga on a smaller scale.)

Chapter 41: Dangerous Girls and Deadly Medical Treatment

The doll-like girl, pale and bandaged, lifted her head. She opened her mouth to scream, and the noise rang in my ears like a tiny banshee’s cry, making Ciel clutch at me harder than before.

His sense of self-preservation must have kicked in, for he swung his legs out of reach. “What?” The word flew out of him before he could remember my warning not to speak, and then he pressed his lips together tightly.

She stumbled forward, her mouth open. The wail dissolved into a moan, and unexpectedly she turned her hands against herself. She tore shallow grooves into the flesh of her face, leaving red welts behind her with the force, and she started to sob. She reached out, wordless with her pitiful cries for Ciel as though for reconciliation.

I rushed forward to pull Ciel away, to get him out of the girl's path. I half expected her to sniff loudly, or for her ears to twitch at the sound of the sudden movement, but she seemed attracted by some other force all together. She lunged for Ciel once more, and I casually stuck my leg out to trip her.

“What's wrong with her?” Ciel gasped.

I shook my head stiffly. “I cannot say with certainty,” I allowed and side-stepped out of her reach, “but I suppose she is near death. I smell the sickness on her, but I cannot say how she yet moves.”

“We need to get away from her. We came here to see the facilities,” Ciel reminded me.

“Yes, my lord,” I teased.

I kicked her feet out from under her as I made for the door, earning a quiet but intense, 'hey!' from Ciel. “You need to be careful. She could bring us up on charges!” Ciel squirmed, no longer interested in staying protected in my arms. Did he think to save her, or to get away faster?

“I doubt she has the presence of mind to remember our faces, much less make a coherent claim.”

The patient moved painfully slow towards us, dragging one foot. She opened her mouth and made a
terrible teeth chattering moan, bearing her teeth and stretching her fingers after Ciel.

As I reached for the handle, it opened from the other side. I narrowly stepped back, taking in the figure before me.

He was a slender thing, and so pale. He looked at me without expression on his face, and he met my gaze without so much as a flinch. “What are you doing?” He asked in a strange tone, and followed up quickly with, “asks Oscar.”

I blinked once before deciding that the young man was likely another patient, or perhaps a slightly-off assistant. “We require assistance,” I informed him.

I turned my gaze to Ciel, as though scolding. “You really should take the elevator. You know you’re still very frail.”

Ciel glared murderously, but said nothing.

The young man had patterns of snake-scales on him, I noticed absently, and there seemed to be something writhing in his pockets. A serpentine young man, all said and done, and so I mentally dubbed him 'Snake.'

He nodded in the meanwhile, and looked down the stairs while craning his neck. “I see,” he said, and took several steps forward.

“If you could see to the young woman there?” I asked, even as I stepped farther away from the girl, already moving towards Ciel.

“Yes, Doctor,” Snake said clearly, and then muttered under his breath, “says Keats.”

I took the opportunity to open the door leading to the next floor, adjusting a camera as I went.

As Snake's soft footfalls hit the stairwell, I realized something heavier was heading our way. The footsteps were blunt and distinctly unwary, so I could deduce that like the other patient, these pursuers were lacking some of their reason. Curious though-- what could have given us away? How could they have found us so quickly?

Ciel took a sharp intake of breath. “There’s more of them… more girls acting…” he hesitated. “What’s wrong with them?” he whispered. “There’s four of them, and one of them has an IV, and wires hanging off her. Is this a sanitarium? Or a hospital? Move Sebastian.”

Sure enough, one of the children did have a plethora of cords hanging off her. “They don't seem to treat their patients well... Do you notice any medical staff? I think this floor is entirely unoccupied save for those children.” I examined the four, frowning. Something about them...Their actions struck me as strange, and the lack of medical professionals stranger. But something else... I shook my head. “I can easily outpace them. You want to see the facilities, not the patients, correct?”

Ciel nodded briskly. “Keep them busy. I'll see if I can find a room without...intruders.” He stepped lightly toward the floor I had more-or-less been heading for, and fumbled with his card-key. He was able to tune out the noises of the patients rather remarkably, and his determined expression kept drawing my attention.

It was no matter, though. “If Snake could manage a single girl as I assumed he could on the stairway, a Librarian of my caliber could certainly deal with four deranged patients. I could push or move until he or she was suitably out of reach. It was all rather like a child's game, and it kept the smile on my face.
Behind me, the door gave an electronic beep noise, and the handle turned as Ciel called, “Got it. Stop playing and get over here, Sebastian!” He was frowning; I could hear it in his voice.

“Yes, my Lord,” I said amiably. “Let me check for cameras,” I suggested.

But Ciel didn't wait for me, the foolish boy. He walked right in, his eyes fixed on the patients, who suddenly seemed to be more energetic. A boy reached for me, his mouth gaping, and his fingers bared like claws.

Ciel hastily stepped into the chamber, and the door shut behind him.

I frowned at the boy now attached by his teeth to my arm. “What have these doctors been doing to you? Or are you always this charming?” I questioned, even as I slammed the boy's head into the wall.

Oddly, this didn't seem to affect him; his jaw seemed to be fixed in position.

I grasped him by the jaw with my other hand, exerting perhaps more force than necessary. His jaw made a popping noise, and then a crack. His mouth now gaped like a thing from a horror story. The other patients were scrabbling after Ciel in the door. I brushed the boy aside, and kicked the feet out from under the patients. If a dislocated jaw didn't stop the boy, then knocking them all over couldn't do much harm.

I swiped my own key card, and waited for the beep. The machine blinked red, rather than the green light for Ciel. This did not bode well.

“Ciel,” I called calmly, “open the door.” The boy had wandered away from the door. He was probably exploring the room, poking his nose into files and examining equipment, or otherwise looking for clues to the real reason for the facility. Finally, Ciel noticed me and gestured impatiently at his own key, and then to me.

I shook my head. “My key doesn't work. They may have been alerted to our presence and limited the number of doors that will open without maximum clearance.” I casually struck down two of my attackers as I spoke.

Ciel said something rather loudly, but thanks to the impressively heavy door between us, the effect was barely more than a muffled “aaaargh.”

I examined them for signs of what gave them such unnatural tenacity and strength. They seemed pale, were in a hospital, and didn't seem to use their senses to move. Were they some sort of creature, some animated dead, perhaps? I gave an experimental sniff.

Ciel made his way toward me, his lithe form framed against the pale, blue light inside. He was distracted, to be sure, by the sight of the children swarming around me, but I certainly noticed the papers tremble inside, and felt a tremor as yet more heavy footsteps hit the cold tile. Inside, since I could not yet hear them.

He mouthed, “You're too slow,” as he turned his hands on the handle. Ciel glanced behind him, fumbling his key. It was then that I noticed he had something clutched in his hand, and more than a few papers stuffed down his shirt. The silly boy should have brought a bag if he had planned on stealing anything...

Finally, the door burst open. As one, the children turned towards Ciel, no longer interested in me.

Behind him, I hear the voices of men, shouting at one another. “Are they armed?” I tilted my head,
and finally gave such a blow to one child as to stop him moving. He crumpled to the floor at last.

I gave such a blow to leave his face no longer recognizable. Blood streamed from the massive hole in his face, gore spattering both myself and Ciel. Ciel shuddered, going completely white.

“They started coming in from there. There’s more doors, and rooms with lots of people coming out. Sebastian, they have gas masks. We need to,” he gave a startled noise as one of the children lunged to him.

“Why are they so fixated on you?” I wondered aloud. As I spoke, I cleared the doorway and closed the portal between the deranged children and ourselves.

The pounding footsteps began to arrange themselves as actual presences, and then I could hear their breaths against the strange gas masks.

One man spoke hastily, “—the children have-- “

While another man cut him off with a sharp wave. “Secure the exits,” he said.

“Sir, some of the more successful batches are here. We need clearance to take action!”

“I'm giving clearance. Don't break or touch the medicine!” the first voice barked.

I looked down at the little boy in my arms, and realized what he must be holding. “Would you be the new Pandora?” I breathed in his ear. “To open what you do not understand?” I almost wished that he would. “That vial you're holding may be why those children are as deranged as they are, little Lord.”

But Ciel wasn't listening, or couldn't hear for the violence going on around him. I disabled the remaining assailants, having grasped the fact that I must strike their heads to stop their supernatural assault.

Ciel again wormed out of my grasp, nervous with both my proximity and all the noise around him. By then, he should surely hear the men approaching, and if his expression was any judge, he was starting to get nervous.

At last, the men breached the threshold, forcing the door (which Ciel seemed to have managed to jam) with the butts of their guns. The men looked like some sort of creatures from a post apocalyptic nightmare—a combination of man and technology. Their 'gas masks' reminded me of the plague masks in old Europe, while their plastic suits reminded me humorously of modern rain coats.

“This is security! Put the boy down, and raise both your hands where we can see them!” The man intoned, his voice somewhat distorted by his mask.

Ciel obediently raised both hands slowly. Like the devious little thing he was, though, he managed to deposit the vial somewhere on his person. “What's going on?” he asked in a high, clear voice.

I smiled and furthered the distraction, but instead of taking me at my word, the soldiers acted-- they readjusted their grips and fired.

The noise was louder than it had any right to be in the confined space, but less explosive than it had been centuries before.

Oddly enough, it wasn't a mass of lead or metal alloys careening for us-- it was a stream of energy, a compressed force that stole my attention and licked the air with fiery heat. I let it rip through me, curious at this new technology. The sensation made my jaw relax and eyes un-focus.
“Clear!” the police called, and my eardrums hummed with the excess energy. Electric, I thought. My mouth tasted coppery, and I wondered if I was bleeding—why though, I could not say.

As I allowed my body to slump, Ciel lurched away from me, his ungainliness highlighted as his elbow struck the nearby infrastructure. “Aaa—” he cried out. His limbs flailed and he fell, his hands unconsciously moving out to break his fall. The vial cracked at the impact, releasing a strange smelling mist that hid Ciel from view.

I left Ciel there for the moment, choosing to press forward rather than risk him being shot from behind as we retreated. These assailants seem much more human—disarming them was as simple as breaking their wrists.

I raced into the room Ciel had found so enticing, reaching for samples to tuck into my pockets. Before me, there were indeed many more doors and hallways here, a few opening to reveal the missing medical professionals, hastily holding gas masks to their faces. I fixed their faces in my memory, and dashed back outside.

I found Ciel unconscious on the floor, looking curiously... smaller. His plump cheeks were the most fascinating shade of milk and cherry blossoms; not something I'd expected to see on the young man who spent half his time wandering the streets of Tokyo, and the other half under harsh manmade lights. He looked very...soft. I reached to smooth his small childish hands, thinking of kitten paws. I pressed experimentally, hoping that the chemical's magic had produced little claws as well.

Instead, I was treated to a sharp, “Sebastian!” from an all-too-childish voice. I remembered the other children-- ruined things with no minds of their own, their souls likely fled long before-- and decided that finding a reversal was undoubtedly in my interest.

Who could say how long this charming, childish visage would last....

“What a small master you would be,” I chuckled. “You look no older than eight.” I laughed. The noise was something primal, like an ancient and wild piece of nature. It seemed to clash rather entirely with the sterile unnaturalness of the facilities. “I wonder if you'll become like those children who attacked us.”

Ciel gave an anguished and terrified noise, rendered into something of an adorable squeak do to the size of his vocal chords. “I will not! This has to be something else...”

I stood, surveying the room one last time. There were a few samples that looked promising, and with two quick steps, they were in my hand.

“I'm sure we have some time to figure out what to look for,” I assured him. “Trust me, Ciel...I will see you through this.” I smiled at him with all my teeth. “And then, you will surely owe me a Contract, no?”

Ciel made a negative noise in the back of his throat, both demanding and terrified. “Let's go. Take me home!”

“Of course. I couldn't leave you here without my contract, little Lord.”

We left the premises, my priority changing to speed rather than stealth. They would only see a black shadow racing across the screens, and would be too late to stop me from leaving.

We left the Aurora Society at our backs, heading for the Phantomhive manor.
A Tiny Child

Chapter Summary

Sebastian takes Ciel back to the Phantomhive home so that Ciel can send a digital report. However, the house isn't as empty as he'd like.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 42; A Tiny Child

(Ciel)

Ciel clutched at Sebastian, keeping his eyes tightly closed as they neared their destination. Where would the demon take him? School? Or home, like he’d asked...There was something in the way Sebastian had been acting that made Ciel wary of returning to the school, but as he neared his home, he wondered if it was the best option. Would Ciel even be able to return to normal? How could explain what had happened to his father?

“Young sir,” Sebastian put a hand under Ciel’s chin, tickling his skin with the light touch. “We’ve nearly arrived. I took the liberty of making use of the rapid trains, and so we’ve gotten to your village.”

Ciel tried to scoff, but instead it came out as more of a cough. “It’s not a village,” he grumbled, and his voice was high and sweet. “So what are we waiting for?” Ciel demanded.

Sebastian laughed softly, but the sound was far from friendly. “Shall we go in, little boy? Or would you prefer to head elsewhere?”

Ciel scowled. “I already told you-- take me home. If my dad’s there...” He pursed his lips, still desperately trying to think of a plan.

“If your father is there, you show him the files you took, and explain what we saw. I will remain your shadow,” Sebastian suggested, his eyes glinting even though his expression was polite.

Ciel squirmed out of Sebastian's arms, but the few steps he took toward the gate made him dizzy. He dug through his pockets to find his key, and by the time he found it, the buzzer was ringing in his ears.

“Who is it?” Mei-Rin sang over the intercom.

“I have my key,” Ciel said, unlocking the servant's entrance.

“Shouldn’t we announce ourselves? They will notice us coming in...” Sebastian cautioned, holding Ciel by the shoulder to prevent him from opening the door.

In response, Ciel just waved him aside. “They wouldn’t call the security company, so any trouble will be easily avoided.”

Sebastian chuckled into a hand. “I suppose she will recognize you once she sees your tiny figure...
“Your face is still rather recognizable.”

“It’s not funny,” Ciel squeaked.

The garden was designed in a new fashion. As Sebastian had noted in his random messages the week before, Finnian’s explosive gardening habits were running large. He was examining a Camellia tree and its large pinkish blossoms when the door burst open.

Mei-Rin’s petticoats, as old fashioned as they were, were designed to hide arms, but she wouldn’t fire until she confirmed who stood before her. She gave a little shriek, “Ciel???” The gun lowered as she skidded in the dirt.

“Keep it down!” Ciel hissed. “I need to go inside.”

“Of course!” Mei-rin bobbed her head in understanding. “Mr. Sebastian! I thought you were working with Grey and Undertaker now...”

Ciel whirled to look behind him. “Didn’t you say you’d be out of the way?”

Sebastian shrugged. “When did I say I’d stay out of sight? Do you find my presence... unwelcome, perhaps? Young master, shouldn’t you keep your most loyal servants informed?” Sebastian teased.

The door closed behind them, and Mei-Rin examined Ciel’s now much-too-large school uniform. “How did this happen?” She exclaimed, rocking back on her feet.

Ciel’s clothing rustled under her hands. Mei-Rin leaped backwards. “Er, Ciel, you aren’t carrying anything unseemly in your pockets...are you?” She blushed red behind her glasses.

“There are valuable documents here...” Ciel shifted the paper from his pockets, oblivious to what the maid appeared to be thinking. “I have important information about the Aurora Society...”

“The Aurora Society, Ciel?” Mei-Rin’s brow furrowed. “I don’t think we’re investigating any societies at the moment...”

Ciel shook his head furiously. “There were patients who’d been driven past insanity, and security willing to—”

“—willing to neutralize any threat to a perceived infiltration,” Sebastian interrupted. “I’m afraid I was investigating the Society, and Ciel here... followed me. I apologize most sincerely for being unable to keep him in his school,” Sebastian continued, looking most regretful. “His condition... appears to be the result of some of their,” he searched for words, “treatment. He seems fortunate, however... some of the children we saw there were in much worse condition.”

Ciel scowled up at Sebastian, irritated that he made it sound like it was Ciel’s own fault for coming along. “You never would have known what files to take if I wasn’t there,” he insisted. “We need to move in quickly before they change headquarters or have time to cover things up.”

Ciel looked to Mei-Rin, and then to Tanaka, who had just walked in. Ciel straightened himself, forgetting that he was even smaller than usual. “Can I count on you servants to help with this task?”

“Yes, sir!” Mei-Rin replied enthusiastically while Tanaka nodded silently. “But, um, maybe we ought to get the details from you, and you can handle reconnaissance via media links?”

“Yes, young master, you are rather small,” Tanaka said. Sebastian snickered.
“I’m sure they will have worked out an antidote to their...drug. Or it wears off with time or something?” Ciel huffed, trying to reason his way into coming along.

“Shall I scan and transmit these files to send to your father?” Tanaka asked, using the same tone he used to ask ‘One or two sugars?’

“You can get me some clothes that fit better,” Ciel demanded. “I’ll handle the electronic report.”

“But sir...” Tanaka murmured.

Ciel bristled. “Whatever it is they did to me, we can’t be sure it’s safe. It could have a slow reactor, or without certain elements added to the treatment, I could lose my mind. I will not wind up like those...things....”

“Of course you won’t, young master,” Sebastian was quick to soothe. He put one hand on his shoulder, and gently steered him toward the sitting room.

Ciel rounded on him. “You have no idea! You didn’t even know what they were doing there,” he screeched, his own high-pitched voice bringing back uncomfortable memories. His eyes stung with unshed tears.

Sebastian looked on, his face impassive. He leaned forward just an inch, as though to breath in the aroma of Ciel’s emotions. Those feelings that a demon like Sebastian would find incomprehensible, but all together alluring. “Having a hard day, little Ciel?” he all but purred.

The question hung between the two of them. Then the tension snapped as a door opened with a shnick. They froze, listening carefully for any sound of pursuit.

“The Security System said someone entered the house while I was out. Who have you all invited in during your work hours?” The voice of Vincent Phantomhive sounded from the second back door.

Ciel froze next to the computer, and began to frantically look for someplace to hide.

“I had to reschedule my visit to the police office just to see what you all are up to,” he continued, still not showing his figure (presumably to provide as small of a target as possible, Ciel thought).

Just as Ciel was processing his father’s careful ploy and deciding what to do, Sebastian moved quickly. His hands wrapped around Ciel’s shoulders, and he picked up the small child and tucked him into a chair. Then he was just as swiftly gone again, meeting Vincent in the hall.

“Good afternoon, Mister Phantomhive,” he said quietly, “but I am merely here for a house visit. I apologize for any inconvenience, but I was not under the impression that any security measures had been broken. What exactly did the message say?”

“Professor Michaelis! Aren’t you supposed to be at school?” Vincent gave a carefree laugh, which surely meant he was Suspicious.

Ciel wondered how to best handle the situation, no longer thinking about the email he had been meaning to send. Vincent saved him the trouble of deciding where to go by entering the sitting room.

Sebastian gave a half-mocking frown that should have been chagrined. He looked ready to start with another ornate explanation, to start layering the lies until something made sense, but Vincent didn’t give him the chance.

Vincent laughed. He seemed no closer to drawing the concealed weapon (he must have been
considering it, Ciel thought), but he mostly looked surprised.

“What are you doing in my house?” he said, again with scarce little emotion.

Vincent focused on Sebastian, still dressed in a slightly old-fashioned suit, and his expression fluctuated. It was like watching someone through a wall of water, blurred and with a delay between what happened and when Ciel saw it.

“I’m here...” Sebastian paused and looked for all the world conflicted, yet concerned. “I’ve risked everything to bring you your son and this information.”

“My son?” Vincent’s voice was bright and strong as steel. He looked Sebastian up and down. He flexed his fingers-- a tell which meant he was thinking of drawing his weapon.

“My son is in school. He has an Entrance Exam. What would you have to do with any of that, and moreover, why would you bring him anywhere?”

Ciel stood up, pushing away from the chair. He frowned, and folded his arms. “You asked me to come. You wanted me to pass on information to my father,” Ciel accused. “Stop trying to make yourself look good!”

Vincent stilled, his hands finally dropping to his sides. He slowly stepped forward, his mouth working around a word impossible to get out.

His distress did not register with Ciel, though, and the little boy with round, cherubic cheeks only glowered harder at Sebastian. “He had a lead. The Aurora Society, so, we were looking in on them.”

“On children,” Vincent said slowly. His eyes unfocused, as though he were considering something, making some connection that Ciel could only guess at. There was a moment of silence, and Vincent turned his dark gaze on Sebastian again. Anger flitted across his features, hardening his jawline and narrowing his gaze. He opened his mouth to scream, to yell—

--and something came over him. It was like a magic scarf was tied over his eyes. His body went slack, his expression dull, and then he looked up, a sardonic smile on his lips.

Vincent began to laugh, to smile at Ciel’s appearance. “But aren’t you tiny... I don’t think I ever noticed that you were so small when you were this young...” He knelt before his son, laying one hand on his dark hair. “How do you feel? Do we need Emergency Services, or the closest...expert?”

“I don’t think bringing his case to the police or the hospitals would be the best idea. If the organization gets news of our...escaped clinical trial participant...we would lose the opportunity to bring local law enforcement to the scene,” Sebastian cautioned.

Vincent looked at Sebastian, his eyes distrusting and flat. “You think that would be the fastest and best way to control the situation? For all I know, you’re a plant working for them. I haven’t heard anything about another agent from the Queen...”

“What exactly do you remember about me, Mr. Phantomhive?” Sebastian smiled, this time showing his teeth.

Ciel blinked several times. One of these things is not like the others... he thought, realizing that Sebastian was again speaking in riddles. Was he talking in hints? Or did he merely have no better way to refute Vincent’s questions than a blatant change of topic?
“That is irrelevant,” Vincent snapped, and shifted his gaze back to Ciel. “But I shall certainly keep this conversation in mind. You’re digging your own grave, Michaelis.”

“You’ll find that I have much to offer you, Mr. Phantomhive. A man of business, as I see it. We could do great things together... with me as your dog, your duties would be much simpler.” Sebastian kept his eyes locked on Ciel, even as he addressed the older Phantomhive.

Ciel stopped breathing, his tiny hands clenching as he looked at his father, shock written all over his form. On a child, his reaction looked pitiful, but his voice was steady. “Sebastian Michaelis,” he seethed, “you will keep your damned services to yourself.”

Sebastian looked legitimately surprised. A burst of laughter bubbled out from behind his lips, and that crimson tongue peeked out again. “Quite, young master.”

“What?” but Vincent didn’t have time to further his questions-- there was a knock on the door.

“That should be the security company,” Tanaka surmised, having just entered the sitting room. “Your old clothes are on your bed, young master.”

Ciel shuffled awkwardly toward the door. His trousers were already folded over more than three times, but still, there was too much fabric to make walking easy. His father caught his arm gently, but restrained himself from anything as normal as tousling a child’s hair.

“Go and get the door,” Ciel muttered. “And then come upstairs and bring me news on doctors and whatnot, or I’ll assume you’ve given me up for dead.” The cynicism was distinctly out of place in such a high register.

“I’ll get the door,” Tanaka intoned, and he followed Ciel out the door.

There, alone in the hallway, they stood between the stairs leading to Ciel’s bedroom, and the main entrance(*1). Ciel looked at his family servant, and the two exchanged a look. Tanaka smiled, and raised a snow white eyebrow. Ciel began to make his way towards the front door, knowing that Tanaka would allow him to satisfy this small curiosity.

He looked at the video feed on the door entry intercom, and pushed one button to reveal not the outer gate, but the entrance-way. One camera was just outside the main door, and another at the entrance-way.

Ciel jumped back, seeing the Undertaker grinning broadly by the gate.

Undertaker moved in an odd wiggling motion, and beckoned at the camera. “I apologize for neglecting to visit...” And he gave another wide, toothy grin.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Japanese entrance-ways are called *genkan*. This is the place where you take off your shoes. It's usually connected to a closed-off hallway or it is a small closed-off-by-sliding-doors room. This style house was designed to move some people out of the private parts of the house-- guests will not be asked to chat at the entrance-way; they
will be moved to the foyer. But there's no need to invite the delivery-boy or other "not guests" inside your private space. Interesting stuff, house design. Power play~

A/N: Feed your Zombified Author reviews and she'll push up the daisies smiling once more. (bad pun.)

as Undertaker would say, “we’re dying for your thoughts.” (heart.)
Chapter Summary

Ciel is trying to learn everything he can from his father and Undertaker, but they have other plans. In the meanwhile, Sebastian takes Ciel to an unexpected doctor...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 43: Undertaker Consults Vincent Phantomhive

(Ciel)

Ciel leaped back from the intercom video, giving a small squeak. "...It's Undertaker... I'm going to get changed..."

Tanaka murmured his customary, "Of course, sir." And meandered in his grandfatherly way back to whatever he was supposed to be doing. Ushering the guest to the sitting room, perhaps.

Ciel found the journey up to his room slightly more taxing than usual. Of course, this was to be expected, since he was much smaller than before.... Ciel chewed his lip, but forbade himself from considering the implications of the unexpected elixir of youth.

True to his word, Tanaka had found a suit that would fit him. Unlike the everyday wear he would have worn when he was actually this size, it was expensive fabric in an antiquated cut. It was probably still in some drawer somewhere because normal things, he suspected, would have been thrown out. Whatever sentimental value Vincent attached to this was likely in relation to his late wife. Ciel swallowed uncomfortably, unable to remember if this was designed or tailored by his mother.

Ciel fingered the collar cuffs, and resigned himself to a few minutes buttoning many buttons before confronting the Undertaker. A prospect he didn't much relish... Ciel wondered how and what to tell his father...

*First, he decided, I'll listen to whatever it is they're talking about. Then I can respond to that. It was a much easier course of action than considering what else was good to say.*

He didn't dare stand directly by the door (too obvious), but instead tried listen from the side-- sort of down the hallway and on the opposite side the door would swing open.

Unfortunately, the adults seemed to collectively notice when Ciel was attempting to eavesdrop.

Tanaka opened the door, and after only briefly searching for him, addressed Ciel. "I've prepared tea, young master."

Vincent looked up from the discussion; he looked sharply at Ciel, considering. He was the only adult who paced the room, so the others couldn't see his reaction.

Undertaker laughed softly. "It has been a while since I saw you this small..." he covered his mouth
with the black nails. "But don't you look charming in those ruffles and buttons. Is that one of Rachel's designs?"

Sebastian was just barely able to cover his flash of interest.

"It is," Ciel said neutrally. "What brings you here, Principal? Is it really ok for you to leave the school like this?"

Undertaker favored Ciel with a particularly toothy smile. "I had business in the area, Ciel. And I work uncommonly fast; it's no trouble at all if I visit an old family friend."

Ciel vividly recalled the other times Undertaker came to their house; it inevitably involved copious amounts of sweet oddities and weird humor. Rather than let Undertaker stare in silence, Ciel gave Sebastian just the opening to talk freely-

"Strange gathering we have here today... Undertaker, my school's principal, Mr. Michaelis, my former teacher and current school librarian, and my father... who rarely leaves a case to come home." Ciel sat down on the most comfortable chair, and politely accepted the offered cup of tea.

Sebastian gave his best polite smile. "I'm sure it's not all that unusual for the principal to visit your father, Ciel."

Ciel hummed, noncommittal.

"As for myself," Sebastian said demurely, "I was busy with my new employer," he nodded in Undertaker's direction, "looking up some rather interesting circumstances. I hope it will all become clear very soon, but am thus far eager to insure your own safety..." he stood. "Shall I--"

"Wait," Vincent murmured, turning away from the window. "That was a lot of words to say not-much-at-all." He frowned.

Sebastian gave another smile Ciel knew to mean he was planning some devilish move. "I merely mean to say, it is expected of my employer to work quickly. That he should hold you in such high esteems is surely a mark of character..." Sebastian looked serious now, and looked at Undertaker and Vincent in turn. "I am of course, only under a temporary contract... very unusual circumstances you see. Perhaps when my contract has expired..."

"You make yourself sound easy when you put it like that," Ciel grumbled.

"I wouldn't mind contracting with you, Mr. Vincent Phantomhive. The young master here doesn't seem to appreciate how difficult it is to find new recruits just yet." Sebastian smiled his crooked smile.

Ciel bristled. "Sebastian is hardly recruit material," he argued, and his words sounded strange in the high, childish register. "When Sebastian sticks his nose in, things get complicated fast, and all too many people notice what ought to be private business. He's certainly top-class, but he takes every opportunity to show it. He's a show-off and takes entirely too much notice to himself!" Ciel belated and realized his throat was starting to hurt-- whatever effects the medicine had, it seemed to make him weak in all accounts.

Undertaker chuckled. He flourished a long sleeve, and pulled out a jar of something. He mixed it into his tea with fastidious attention before he dribbled it into his mouth with a show-man's air. "Would you like something for your throat, Ciel?"

Vincent smiled in Ciel's direction. "That's the most childlike you've seemed all day." He quickly covered the distance between them, and inexplicably, touched his cheek before peering into his son's eyes. "Hmmm... your pupils are rather dilated... We need to get you to a doctor... how about your aunt?"

Ciel shook his head. "I'm fine. We should arrange a-- " he stopped himself, looking at the Undertaker.

Undertaker chuckled. "My specialty is more in the dead than the living, I'm afraid. But in a pinch, I probably have the most medical knowledge of those gathered in this room." His smile never seemed more like a leer.

"We must be going, then. With this sudden transformation," Sebastian paused for the three adults to survey Ciel's scowl, "there's no telling how quickly other side-effects might set in. We need to leave sooner rather than later. I trust you will see to the documents?" He looked to Vincent for confirmation.

"Yes, yes..." Undertaker agreed, looking at Vincent from beneath the veil of his fringe. "We should discuss the case, Vincent. Sebastian, see to it that Ciel does not attempt to eavesdrop on private conversations. You shouldn't eavesdrop either," Undertaker wagged a long-nailed finger at Sebastian.

"Yes, Undertaker," Sebastian replied automatically.

Vincent watched the exchange with a distracted air. He led his guest from the room after a long glance at his son, and frowned softly. "Be careful," he advised. "And rest well." Then he firmly shut the door behind him, undoubtedly giving more instructions to Tanaka and the other servants as they moved through the house.

Ciel scowled after him. "Well. I suppose we'd better take our chance to sneak out now; you would follow that order to the letter, wouldn't you?"

Sebastian did not reply verbally, but he did smile.

"Take me then." Ciel said with a smirk of his own. His eyes were sharp and demanding. "Before I change my mind."

Sebastian scooped Ciel up. "It seems you may be a touch heavier, little master... could it be you are growing?" Sebastian teased. "Perhaps I should bring your regular clothing along as well... we would hate for you to outgrow these."

And once again, Ciel found himself moving at impossible speeds, traveling across vast distances. The familiar landscape of his childhood home, gave way not to the urban sprawl around Tokyo, but a steadily more mountainous landscape. Ciel tried to stay awake, to watch their progress slow again as Sebastian wrapped him in his coat, but his eyelids were so heavy...

...and he only awoke again when Sebastian wrapped sharply on a heavy wooden door.

"Wha..." Ciel startled, uncomfortably aware of his proximity to the demon. "Where?" he squinted and turned the stronger of his eyes (the left one) to the plaque. Chinese Style Herbs and Acupuncture it read.

He jolted upright; it wasn't his aunt's office, cozily lit in downtown Tokyo-- and he breathed in deeply-- the cold mountain air carried a crisp chill that burned his lungs.
A stern-faced woman opened the door, tall and slender but with narrow eyes and a pinched expression that booked no nonsense. "Yes?" she said slowly, as though Sebastian were thick. "Aren't you coming in?"

Sebastian smiled his devilishly handsome smile and deliberated, "I wish to speak immediately to the young Lady Doctor." He lowered his eyes, but his mouth was still quirked upward. This did not please the woman, who Ciel was guessing to be the desk attendant...or whatever they're called. he thought fuzzily.

Sebastian put Ciel on his feet-- who stumbled and had to pull at Sebastian's arm to keep from falling — and pulled out a document from his breast pocket. "This should suffice." He handed it to her with both hands, and lightly bowed his head.

"Get in and out of the cold," she said eventually. "Dr. Midorima (*1) will look over your files, and I shall have her on the phone as soon as possible," She finished at length, though her expression was no more hospitable than it had been at the first.

She shuffled them in through the main waiting room and into a private parlor-- all of it built into a grand old Japanese style house, Ciel saw. It must have been renovated from a manor house; the lacquer and sliding doors that matched the western-style chairs in an odd Edo Period sort of way. He was barely tall enough to see most of the more interesting documents (some of them ancient, hand-written things) of the earlier Doctors of the family.

"Weren't we going to my aunt?" Ciel asked at length.

"Your father's contacts have her listed as quite exceptional. I thought her expertise with rumored illnesses and curses would be more beneficial than hunting out your surgeon aunt," Sebastian explained, his voice irritatingly confident.

Ciel felt his vision blur as his eyes unexpectedly watered. He thought he saw the unexpected sight of a doll-like girl careening towards him in a low-tech wheelchair.

"Boys!" The girl's small face lit when she saw Sebastian and Ciel. "Oh, it's a little boy. And he needs to be seen to the examining room, Hilde." And so the tiny girl became a whirl of action, ordering both Sebastian and Hilde about the room.

Ciel barely had time to consider the unorthodox treatment (was she chanting?) before he slipped into a deep sleep.

(Vincent)
"It is rather unusual for you to come to me, rather than wait for me to seek you out at your shop," Vincent Phantomhive said casually. He examined the enigmatic eccentric who went by the name 'Undertaker.'

 Undertaker leaned casually against the wall. “I suppose it is...”

"Does it have anything to do with the allegations Ciel made about a research hospital that hasn't even been mentioned before today? Or are you here with some more information about the missing children? (*2)"

Undertaker laughed. "You never did pull your punches." He turned around slowly, his expression frozen in that mocking grin. "Don't you remember all the times I've helped you? What could I possibly have to do with another hospital?" His hands closed over his mouth with another heaving laugh. "Besides, Ciel should have reminded you-- I have many duties, and even as exceptionally
"Not unless it was particularly amusing." Vincent countered, his expression thoughtful. But he couldn't think of exactly how Undertaker could be involved. Nevertheless, it was always best to let Undertaker know precisely where one stood on an issue; he blatantly overlooked all but the most straightforward of demands or questions.

Vincent spread out the papers and broken vial Ciel had brought back with him onto his desk. There were a few confidential patient reports, and some kind of memorandum about some treatment equipment. Vincent didn't recognize the drug names. "What do you make of it?" Vincent said after a moment.

Undertaker scuttled over, his long hair swishing as he leaned in. "Hm." He still had the teacup and jar of sickly-sweet (additive? food?) in his hand, and it looked precarious in his grasp.

Vincent caught the jar deftly as it started to fall, saving it all from an unseemly and sticky demise. "Those long nails aren't good for precision work, are they?" He quipped. "Fortunately, the documents were spared."

Undertaker opened the jar, and stuck a finger in, seemingly carelessly.

Vincent looked on, amused. "If you're being intentionally obnoxious, you'll be vexed to learn that I already have digital copies of all of this. Ciel-- or perhaps Mei-Rin or Tanaka-- sent me a digital copy to my secure server. The report was quite shocking, but somehow I don't think even your network would have received wind of it yet..."

While he stuck one of his oldest contacts with verbal barbs, Vincent thought about his son's odd behavior that day. For a boy who vehemently denied being interested in his father's work, Ciel had had a turn of heart. After his mother's death, and Ciel's own abduction a few years earlier, he had understandably withdrawn. He had become sullen, prone to spend time alone, and seemed to distrust any and all adults before he came to dismiss them out of hand as uninformed idiots.

And then Ciel came home in the middle of October just before getting involved in a terrorist situation in a Tokyo shopping mall. He vaguely remembered Ciel turning up unexpectedly again at the end of October, and having the servants on high alert for the remainder of the month. Why was that? His head hurt; it was like a sharp light was flashing in and out of his eyes, or a thin needle pressed against the nape of his neck. "There's something there," he muttered, thinking about the past year's events. The documents before him were blurred in comparison.

"Ciel has been through so much," Undertaker said softly, a smile twisting the words. "It's good you sent him to his Aunt; he should be feeling better soon." The words ought to have been soothing.


"There are reports from late last year through this week; the operation appears to have been in effect for at least six months." Vincent closed his eyes. His hands found the catch to the desk drawer. He opened it without saying anything else. Still without looking, he reached through the pile of paperwork, letting his fingers choose the right paper. He opened his eyes to see a forgotten report--Gunshot Report
His vision blurred as he read the details—shots fired in the Phantomhive household. An official account of how many bullets, and which gun was used... a note demanding reevaluation for his right to hold a gun license. His eyes focused on one line. "Intruder compromising the safety of a minor..." stated as the reason for firing the weapon.

Vincent frowned at the paperwork, and considered his guests. Sebastian was, ultimately, still unknown. Grey seemed to have alluded to him working for the Queen-- but Vincent still felt that Sebastian was too young and too good looking to be a proper spy. Something nagged at him. "We've been hearing about missing children-- especially missing foreign children for nearly a year... I believe I was consulting on a case in October when I filed this report..." Vincent waved it in front of Undertaker. "Do you think those children Ciel mentioned seeing... could they be related?"

Undertaker smiled right back at him, twirling his silvery hair around his fingers. "The zombie children," he chuckled. "It seems highly fanciful to hear Ciel say it, but recently there have been badly maimed bodies showing significant tissue rot before postmortem decay. None of them children-- you've had me looking for child-sized bodies since fall." He paused. "Ask me plainly, Phantomhive...what are you looking for?"

"A connection. If you'll excuse me... I did postpone a meeting to have this little chat..." He shook his head, clearing his thoughts. "I'll ring Ann and see if she is free to see Ciel..."

But when Vincent went downstairs to ask Ciel for details about his encounter on the way to the doctor, he found the sitting room to be empty. Ciel was gone.

Chapter End Notes

(*1) Midorima which sounds like a family name if you pronounce it a certain way. So: 緑Mirori (Green) and 魔Ma (from Majo, Mahou, Spirit/demon, etc). (The Green Witch) Her actual name in the manga is Sullivan, but as I've stated before, I think it’s a bit odd to have an entirely European cast in a Japanese setting, so bear with me.

(*2) Do you remember the case where children went missing? Discussed after Ciel was in the Fashion Show…and kidnapped by Beast, hospitalized, etc? The kids were mentioned in relation to Baron Kevin.

Note: this is still late the same evening Ciel and Sebastian crept into the Aurora Society facilities.

Yay, the plot moves. ♥
Ciel is still tiny, and Sebastian must see to it that his treatment is the best possible. Who or what else could be in store for him...

Chapter Notes

Ciel and Sebastian infiltrated the facilities on one evening in February. Ciel was spirited away to first his dad's and then the Green Witch's late that night. Ciel woke up the next afternoon. Sunset in February in Japan is at 5pm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 44: The Green Witch

In the eyes of the world, Sebastian Michaelis was not a difficult man to please. He seemed amused, even playful most of the time. However, his deceptive smile only hid his dichotomous desire to dine on the best of souls; he would care for them longingly, and devour them.

The petite young woman before him could know none of these things, though, and so she eyed him with unbridled interest, squirming and fidgeting whenever she looked his way.

“What are you doing?” Sebastian asked finally, tiring of her games. “Are you a doctor?”

The little girl made a rude noise. “Of course not! I’m the Green Witch, Sunao-Sullivan Midorima. Now move quickly—we need to purify his body.” She turned a brilliant shade of pink, muttered something about Sebastian not needing to remove his clothes, or anything like that.

“Purify?” Sebastian raised an eyebrow, focusing instead on the unconscious boy before him. He was considering the state of the boy’s soul, and how it might taste. *Briar, roses, and sickly sweet innocence still, likely.*

“Master, you should not be treating these outsiders… this is not like the curses you know…” Hilde cautioned. She did not care for the way Midorima looked at him, with her lashes fluttering.

“Wolfram will return before nightfall… if they are gone before then…” The girl murmured, and began pulling strange amulets from the bedside set of drawers.

“We greatly appreciate your services.” Sebastian gave a gentlemanly bow, his teeth obscured in the dim light. His white skin never seemed so otherworldly.

Meanwhile, Hilde gave a great sigh and stripped Ciel of his clothes, moving him to a large and curiously shaped tub. “Well if we’re starting, we’d better begin now.”

“Pour this over him,” Midorima instructed Hilde. “We will begin the purification ceremony...” She took a deep breath, and began to chant, invoking names of gods and goddesses familiar to her. “Oh

Sebastian watched, interest painted on his sculpted features, breathing in the taste of this unfamiliar style of magic. Ciel would be disappointed that he missed an introduction to yet another kind of the occult. “An actual Witch, and she is on the isle of the rising sun…” Sebastian’s lips twitched. “How very appropriate.” As her namesake, Midorima’s ritual tasted of herbs and flowers, wild things and growing things untaken by the rot of chemical treatment.

After several long minutes, the fog resolved itself, curling out and in throughout the ritual, circling around Ciel until finally it broke away. Sebastian broke his vigil and walked through the barrier to touch Ciel’s wrist. It was a cold lover’s kiss, to feel the heartbeat there. Ciel looked no older, and he seemed no closer to waking. And yet his face seemed to show less pain than before.

At last, the girl finished her ritual. All amulets, plants and things were put aside, and her pert little mouth formed a little ‘o’ at Sebastian’s proximity to his charge. She blustered on, her cheeks reddening again. “Now we need to examine him…” the Green Witch announced. “Put him on the cot…”

Hilde gestured for Sebastian to move away as she deftly positioned Ciel into an upright position so that the Sullivan could carefully position herself on her too-small feet. She moved an arm rest which she could lean onto to better examine her patient. Ciel remained unresponsive, even as she put the cold metal of a stethoscope against his chest. She felt his pulse, examined his lymph glands and pupil response like any doctor would do.

Finally, the little doctor addressed her assistant in German, “The syringe. We need a blood sample.”

Sebastian raised an eyebrow at that, wondering what sorts of alchemical solutions they would put Ciel’s blood through, and how they might gain any knowledge from it.

Ciel flinched despite the medicine that ought to have had him in a very deep sleep indeed.

Sebastian waited calmly for them to report their findings, letting the cold wash of medical words flow over him, absorbing their Latin roots and working out the meaning.

Then the two ladies moved Ciel from the one examination table to another, this one with a boxy, heavy machine operated mechanism. It was rigged much like a Crane might be– with moveable parts and a small control panel. “Please stay behind that wall, sir,” Hilde said sharply. “We shall complete the scan shortly.”

“What sort of scan is it?” Sebastian asked quietly, not making a move toward the wall.

Hilde gave him an incredulous look, but did not answer. The tests continued, with the two women taking measurements and long looks at screens that Sebastian barely registered. The vial of blood went into a machine where it was fed through another machine, where it went through a process obscured from easy view.

A screen began to show various readings. Sebastian saw a number of statistics, everything from hemoglobins to glucose levels, scrolling faster than a human eye could track. The numbers meant very little to him, though. He looked to the two women. They didn’t bother looking at the screen until it beeped, signifying its completion.
Again, they discussed in their native language, and the assistant Hilde shook her head. “These numbers make no sense.”

“He’s been drugged,” the Green Witch proclaimed. “A really odd cocktail—unstable.” She reached for the syringe and wheeled over to Ciel’s sleeping form again. She drew the blood carefully, and hastily maneuvered over to side of the room.

“He’s too young to be a user,” she added absently, and did something to make the shelf lower itself. She withdrew a beaker of something clear, another of a blue liquid, and a row of tiny vials. She carefully inserted a drop of blood into each vial, and her hands worked quickly, waving over it.

Sebastian watched blankly, and Hilde watched him. “If you don’t approve of our methods,” Hilde began heatedly, “you should—”

“Your treatment plan seemed the most promising considering our unique circumstances. You were highly recommended by the Queen’s Guard dog’s... acquaintance,” Sebastian said evenly. “We live in unusual times. If a young Green Witch can restore Ciel to his proper age, all the better.”

At that, Sullivan looked up from her work. “What do you mean his proper age?”

“Ciel is 15 years old. He had his birthday this December... the unusual state you have found him in is the result of an unknown...chemical. Drug, perhaps. I was unable to identify it, but traces may still be in his blood, or on his skin...”

“It is a curse, then!” The girl seemed excited. “The purification ritual will help him, I’m sure...”

Sebastian frowned. “A curse.” He seemed to consider her words, and his expression darkened.

Hilde sniffed importantly, and went to clear away the beakers, emptying the contents into a box marked neatly with ‘cytoxic waste(*)’ “Quiet! We need to work.”

“No!” Ciel gasped in his sleep. He turned over in his bed, wrapped in a soft blanket and leaning against the wall. He opened his eyes to the gentle light, the soft golden glow just before twilight. By the look of it, it’d been several hours after he’d been delivered to the unorthodox clinic.

“Young sir?”

Ciel gave a little mewl of a cry, and immediately curled in on himself. He shivered under his blankets and cast around for a familiar face. He still wasn’t fully awake.

“Good afternoon, Ciel.” Sebastian peered down at him with a wholly unsympathetic expression. “Awake, dear little earl?” He disappeared from Ciel’s narrow point of view, and Ciel heard the sounds of approaching footsteps and what could only be Sullivan・Midorima in her wheelchair.

“Mister Phantomhive,” Hilde announced primly. “The doctor shall speak with you now. Please pay attention; what she has to say is of utmost importance as it affects your health and future.”

Ciel looked at the Green Witch skeptically, uncertain if the young girl in the wheelchair was the supposed ‘doctor.’ He looked to Sebastian, clearly waiting for an explanation.

“Might I recommend that we tell our little earl about his medical treatment, and the expected outcomes?” Sebastian said demurely, always willing to play the part of a loyal servant.
“Sunao-Sullivan Midorima,” the little girl announced herself. “Pleasure to meet you. Now, you need to listen up because this is big stuff, ok?” She clenched the fabric in her skirts. “The level of drugs in your system oughtn’t be enough to curse you like this. We have to assume that there’s some kind of evil intent in the place you picked the curse up. So, for a treatment plan, we’ll need to ward off the Evil Eye that’s set upon you, and we’ll need to purify you of all the evils. As for the chemical bit, well, your body has been changed on a cellular level—the drug has built up in adipose tissue as well as—”

Ciel stopped listening. ”Does she have some kind of experience with faulty drug treatments or something? Or is she an occult specialist?” he asked Sebastian, taking care to keep his voice down.

“This is one of your father’s contacts’ contact. She is the Green Witch, bound to this land and the werewolf here. She is an accomplished healer. If she says you can be healed, you can be. Listen to what she says,” Sebastian said in a very condescending way. Ciel got the idea that he was mocking him.

The girl looked offended at first, and then mildly pleased as she beamed up at Sebastian. “You’re not going to coddle him?”

Sebastian gave another of his mysterious smiles. “It is not the duty of a Butler—”

“You’re not anyone’s butler,” Ciel interrupted. “Please continue with the projected treatment plan, Ms. Sullivan,” he asked, in that instant forgetting all her other names.

The little girl drew herself up in her wheelchair, looking as prim as a Victorian lady sitting for a portrait. “We suggest you get a piece of your enemy from his stronghold, bring it here for a ritual, and burn it,” she said, and then hastily followed with, “For the drug treatment, we’ll mostly be focusing on detox methods and careful monitoring of your health. If we’re unlucky, you might develop Soft Tissue Sarcomas, a tumor, in which case we will be in contact with a national hospital and your primary physician, but hopefully the tissue and blood abnormalities will sort themselves out before then.” She smiled then.

Ciel looked hopelessly at Sebastian. “What?”

Sebastian smiled thinly, and shook his head. “No need to worry about what has yet to occur. The young witch will continue to examine your blood. I will go back to the hospital to look for an antidote...” he said cautiously. He waited, as though expecting Ciel to protest.

Ciel did. “I want to go to the hospital to get an antidote. Take me there.”

“Antidote?” The girl protested. “You wouldn’t know what to look for!”

Ciel fished a piece of glass out of his pocket and showed it to her. There was a tiny sliver of a label stuck to the shell, and a symbol that reminded him of Greek letters: an upside-down omega struck through with a curled zeta.

She stared back at him, mutinous. “Don’t go. Don’t even think of it. You need to stay here to rest, and your butler can...he needs to come back. In any event, you’re not going.” She gestured, and Hilde took a confident step forward. Hilde took the shard of glass from Ciel’s tiny hands.

“That symbol... I’ve seen some of the dead with that symbol... and some who weren’t quite dead.” Hilde shook her head. “If you’ve come into contact with something from the Aurora Society-- I’m afraid there’s nothing we can do. There is a chance that you will become...”

The little girl looked at the symbol and paled. “Those...patients suffered seizures and loss of mobility.
They lose a lot of their higher function thinking abilities.” She clarified. “There is no known cure published.”

“That is not acceptable.” Sebastian frowned. He bent and took one of Ciel’s hands. “We will find you an antidote, Ciel.”

With that, the butler stepped back, ignoring the protests of the two young people. He was gone in a flurry of black cloth, with only the wind to announce him.

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(Sebastian)

The wind howled as I picked up my pace. With Ciel's frail human body on the line, I tasted frustration and the keen edge of hunger more than ever. In the hospital leagues away, Ciel's salvation might yet lie. The wind screamed my frustration, gnashing leaves and stirring small stones. The ground felt cold underneath me, the air colder still.

Over the course of my flight, I wound the information over in my mind. Ciel, his transformation. Undertaker and his tantalizing hints. I could not rush into this; the Society had nearly a full day to lay any traps for me. So I scouted around the facility, stopping crazed patients from leaving by use of excessive force and looking for where the most action was for an age before eventually returning to the same building that Ciel had inspected with me the previous day.

It was a judicious use of my time, meticulous even for one of my abilities. But Ciel would not die in a handful of hours, and if I failed today, there would be scarce little chance to come back. "Show me your secrets," I murmured, my lips soft.

If this were the Undertaker’s territory, they would not be so surprised to find a demon such as myself. Perhaps they would mistake me for an experiment. It didn’t matter. Undertaker never gave me a rule to... not cause the madman’s plan to ruin. I would only answer him should he provide a direct order.

A few wide steps, and I was back in the same building, but this time he wasted no time with computerized trips and pulleys-- it was only metal wiring and electric current, after all. I approached the building’s electrical hub. It was nearing sunset in the early afternoon, and so an idea presented itself almost immediately.

With a shake and a twist, and a few-hundred volts too many going through the circuit, the electricity overloaded, leaving only deadbolts and darkness to bother me. And of course, they were no bother at all for a Librarian of my caliber. I smiled at my handiwork.

I started to head up the stairs, and overheard voices:

“Eh, what the...” A young male voice sighed.

“These structures seem very poorly maintained. And are completely lacking in interior decoration...” This second voice was irritatingly nasal, and overly lilting, as though the speaker were reciting for a play or worse, a romantic comedy drama.

“Senpai, you wanna check it out? What do we do about the light? Don’t you think the security floodlights ought to be turning on soon...?”

That voice nagged at my memory. I’d heard that voice before. I peered at the two men, but I could
only see their shoes from where I was on the stairs. One pair of red high heels, and a pair of black and white oxfords.

Footnotes:

Chapter End Notes

(*1) cytotoxic waste is “any medicinal product or chemically contaminated biological waste that possesses one or more of the hazardous properties toxic, carcinogenic, toxic for reproduction or mutagenic.” (The University of Edinburgh, laboratory waste webpage). The word Biohazard (instead of cytotoxic waste) might be heard more often in the media etc, but I’m not an expert. It’s guesswork.

(*2) adipose tissue is another word for fat. Please remember that this is fiction.

So! Ciel has been diagnosed in an unexpected clinic, and Sebastian has gone gallivanting, only to find….well, you know who. }:-)
The Chase.

Chapter Summary

Sebastian and the Reapers begin to sound one another out. (aka, Grell chases Sebastian through the Facilities, and Bizarre Dolls get in the way. Warning: Bizarre Dolls = mild gore...)

Chapter Notes

Ciel and Sebastian infiltrated the facilities on one evening in February. Ciel was spirited away to first his dad's and then the Green Witch's late that night. He woke up the next afternoon. Sebastian leaves the Green Witch sometime that afternoon, and arrives at the Facilities near evening. (Clock wise, the sun sets around 5pm; it's already dark enough. Hence the effectiveness of cutting the lights. ♥)

Chapter 45: The Chase.

And so it was, I found myself not as alone as I'd anticipated in the research hospital of the Aurora Society. Someone was on the stairs above my breaker box. Someone who was quickly coming to investigate.

For two humans, these two would be behaving rather remarkably; most humans would be unable to function in the unexpected dark. I stepped sharply against the wall and considered my options.

"Well," the elder of the two continued, continuing in a girlish fashion that grated on my ears, "at least we won't have to worry about the alarms going off."

Ah. So they weren't with the Aurora Society. Whose men were they, then?

Ciel Phantomhive was waiting at a clinic in the mountains, his brain dying as we spoke, and his Dark Nobleman of a father was being led in the wrong direction, so they were likely no friends to the Phantomhives.

"Wait," the elder continued, as I caught a glimpse of red hair to match the red shoes.

"There's someone here."

Unperturbed, the first voice scoffed. "Hospital staff. Check them on the list and--"

"Can you read this list, Ronald?" the second voice demanded.

Ah. The name was ringing bells, too-- young Ronald...textbook seller and company employee extraordinaire in a soft black suit and highly polished glasses clouding pale lemon-and-green colored eyes. Something about this pair seemed unusual... not demons, but perhaps not as human as I had originally assumed. It was time I reassessed my opinion of Ronald the textbook seller.
"Well, well. What a stunning male specimen we have here! If I'm not mistaken, you're not even leashed. How about being mine, darling?" Sharp white teeth glinted scant centimeters from me— whoever they were, this one could move fast.

I took a step back. "And to whom do I have the... misfortune... to be speaking with?" I hedged, wondering about the man before me.

"Don't make me laugh." He swished his hair over his shoulder and struck a pose. "A lady never gives her name first. Oh! But then, an un-collared demon...you don't have a name do you?"

"Lady?" I snorted with amusement. "You're no more a lady than I'm--"

"Grell." The Reaper interrupted. "Just call me Grell."

"I fail to see why your services would be required here..." I said dryly, eyeing their clipboards and searching for a sign of a scythe. "Unless there is to be a massacre?"

Ronald shrugged. "Since when do demons work in private schools?"

"Oh, but I thought I heard something about a demon in these parts. But no one mentioned how good looking he was. I had the impression he was a stuffy old man hiding among school children." I had no trouble discerning the faint glint of teeth in the wide smile that flashed after that; this Grell was laughing now.

“What are you doing here?” Ronald asked, his voice cautiously curious.

I shrugged. I took a few steps towards the stairs, conscious of how they watched my every move. I turned my back to them, and practically flew up the stairs. Behind me the reapers swore.

The sounds of heeled shoes clicking on the tile rapped in quick succession; Grell at least was giving chase. Moments later, Ronald joined the pursuit, and I felt a thrill of amusement. Two Reapers would certainly make for an interesting challenge. I counted slowly to three, and dodged into another narrow staircase. I stopped at the second floor, and thrust the door open.

I would lose them in the unfamiliar floor. I felt the air part as a particularly inelegant thing swung past me. Ah. Some sort of saw...

"There you are!" Grell sang shrilly, and his long red hair fluttered around his face in a dramatic sort of way. Or would have, if he had any sort of fashion sense; who wore that much red?

I was not in fact "there" to meet his noisy Death-Scythe. I was busy jumping up into the air, tucking my legs and then touching to the wall. So close to the ceiling, I was better able to hear a soft shuffling from above-- a low murmur of voices. Had I found some of the patients again? Perhaps the patients would distract the Reapers...

"Your business is not with me," I reminded them. "Why don't we agree to part ways, continue our searches separately?"

Ronald looked sorely tempted to agree to that. He gave an awkward smile and looked distinctly at his senior Reaper.

Grell practically purred. "This will all be over in a splash of crimson if you just give me the one dance. Then I'll have whatever passes for your demon's heart...But I truly must have your name before the evening is out. Your last master's one will do, I suppose?" By that time he'd caught up with me, and that saw of his cut deeply into the wall.
Again I spun away, and exploding pipes and snapping wires followed my passing. I was faster than him, to be sure. I didn’t reply, of course; such things were beneath me.

I heard footsteps just beyond the stairway entrance... I edged closer to it, and prepared to open the door. As I did so, I noticed the pale shift thrown over a scrawny body, the shuffling, the moaning. Not true patients, but one of the walking dead came out, blindly gnashing its teeth and lolling its tongue. It seemed confused at what direction to go, but eventually settled in a path that led it to Ronald.

The younger reaper made a face of surprised disgust, and made swift work of dispatching the thing. His scythe took the shape of something rather like a lawn mower... how unconventional. "He's Sebastian Michaelis, senpai," senior. “Or at least that's what he's called at the school," Ronald explained, as nonplused as if he had not just mangled human remains.

Grell grinned. "Oh? And who is his master? We could arrange for them to--"

"Don't know," Ronald replied, cutting in with a vicious thrust as he plowed on ahead-- something that could have been brain matter splattered against the white plaster. "I got a weird feeling about this guy, but he's not gotten the Contract seal. More importantly," his teeth were gritted now, "we gotta get this job done fast."

I danced away from Grell's saw as he said something not fit for repeating. I knew this hospital better than they, it seemed, and I would use that to my advantage. I headed for the closest string of locked doors. Ignoring the conversation going on behind me, I rammed a fist through a door’s glass security window, ignoring the metal wires that cut my flesh and snapped with enough pressure. Small trickles of blood fell with the shards. A large machine hummed in the background, alive with energy that hid some sort of secret. Would it hold glass vials in stasis, or a wave of energy that could reorganize and redirect the cells in Ciel's body, repairing the damage?

Unfortunately, the broken vials seemed to cause blisters and boils on my skin. This could not be a cure...but it would make a good weapon.

Behind me, the reapers ran after me, Grell's saw leaving a lurid gash in the wall, and Ronald's lawn mower giving off sparks. I threw a handful of vials, and made my getaway, going up to the floor where Ciel and I had originally found the drug that changed him.

Through one lab room into the next, I wondered where those men-in-gas-masks could have gotten to, and where the other personnel could be. My little display of darkness would only give me a few minutes, I was sure, before they found some backup generator, rewired what I had wrecked-- how many had been wasted in this Reaper chase?

There-- I spotted a familiar sign on one of the walls, and recognized the layout of a few materials. A vague thought of warning flooded my senses, and I spun again to cast my last handful of vials at a pack of the walking dead. However, it did not seem to bother them, even though they did not shelf any part of their bodies from the missiles.

I remembered how the Reaper had completely decimated the body... perhaps because they appeared to be dead, we must make the vessel unusable. Whatever power or spirit may power them would be unable to do anything, if it were broken beyond repair.

I looked more closely at the pack. A blonde head lolled as it staggered against a small tray-table. The medical instruments clattered against one another, and a sharp screech soon followed as the blonde little dead thing continued to walk-- taking the nails out of the floor with it, and heedless to the red welts coming up on its ghastly hands and thigh that rested against the obstacle.
With a twist and a turn, I found my way to the blonde, pushed my fingers into the strands of gold hair, and jerked the head back—revealing wide, staring eyes. A bloody smile soon blossomed in her face as I slit the mouth from cheek to cheek, and then furthered the damage by taking hold of the tiny jawbone. A snap and a crack, and it was gone—and I shoved her away forcefully into another body.

The blood smelled different, I realized, partially fascinated by the sheer lack of screams my endeavors elicited. Ordinarily, humans are such whiny creatures—stub so much as a toe, and how they shriek.

"Sebas-chan! Do show us how you or your master makes these dead things walk..." The Reapers had caught up with me. Grell ruthlessly cut through more of the bodies.

"You two have no sense of subtly," I critiqued. "Anyone could follow your path to where we are..."

"You aren't much better, felling the patients here and there. Dear me. It looks like they have attacked the staff..." Grell had ripped a door from its hinges to throw at my attackers, revealing a corpse dressed in hospital scrubs.

Ronald decided to take advantage of that moment and ran at me from behind— I could dodge of course, but in so doing I put myself in the way of Grell's noisy-but-still-deadly saw. I let that happen this time, knowing Grell's attention was still on the oncoming crowd, a look of faint surprise on that expressive face.

I stepped neatly on his nose, putting enough force there to break it.

This of course won me a delicious shriek and a rather remarkable spurt of blood.

Ronald groaned, unhappy with my choice of a target. I suspected he'd be on the cutting-edge of Grell's ire for the foreseeable future for letting that happen.

I went into the room with the corpse to look around. Was he in that room for a reason? Would it hold the cure I was looking for?

"What are you doing? Are you hiding something in here?" Grell's eyes flashed behind his glasses, and he raised his scythe. He looked around, checking the bodies. He was looking for someone... someone he thought might be disguised or hidden among the corpses.

Turning away from Grell was a bit of a risk—his saw had a longer reach than Ronald’s machine, and with one leap too slow, he caught the tails of my coat, relieving me of the side-panel. Ah. Now I had the measure of them. They had been sent after the rogue reaper.

"So sorry to disappoint you, good sir," he scowled at my pronoun of choice, “but I’m looking for something rather specific.”

From the shadows, something laughed. "Oh hoh hoh.” A skeletal grin graced a pale face with manic energy. “As they say, when the master is away, the mice will play... Sebastian. Protect my facilities from these intruders.”

I felt my back go rigid, and my eyes flashed dully. Not so bright as they would had I formed a proper contract, but our agreement was enough to compel me to obey.

I would distract and engage the Reapers. But he had not issued a direct order not to steal from him—or commanded me not to seek to aid for the Phantomhive boy. I would obey, superficially at least, and still seek to further my own agenda.
I turned back to the Reapers and gave them a cold smile. “Of course,” I replied coolly. “As you command.”

Ronald and Grell replied with steely grins of their own.

“Bring it on,” Ronald replied.

“We’ll find time for that final dance,” Grell agreed.

And my blood quickened once more.
A deadly dance: Reapers vs. demons

Chapter Summary

Sebastian continues to fight Reapers in the hospital....and who else should appear?

Chapter Notes

Thank you Carrie for the superfast beta. :) You are awesome.

Also, this fic will celebrate its first year birthday in about 2 weeks. (HEART) Thank you all for your support for so long!

Note: Ciel and Sebastian infiltrated the facilities on one evening in February. Ciel was spirited away to first his dad's and then the Green Witch's late that night. He woke up the next afternoon. Sebastian leaves the Green Witch that evening and arrives at the Aurora Society Facilities near evening. Hence the effectiveness of cutting the lights.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

46: A deadly dance

(Sebastian)

"Protect my facilities from these intruders," Undertaker had commanded.

Before me, Grell and Ronald lifted their death-scythes into position, their bodies tensing before they struck. They expected me to attack them with the feral intensity of a beast, perhaps. Did they know as little about demons as I had about Reapers?

How to best protect the facilities and find a cure for Ciel. Attacking them head-on would--

Grell leaped at me, swinging his garish weapon at my shoulder.
I stepped lightly backwards, frowning.

“Fast feet, sweetheart." Grell said, his voice low. "You can't outrun me forever though." The Reaper wiped again at his still dripping nose, holding a flirtatious expression despite all the blood. "A lady always repays her debts, and for this nose? I owe you a big one."

He had me backed against the wall, his arm extended. I had grasped his wrist, and his face contorted with a completely inappropriately flirty look. How rare, to find an opponent who could match my strength and speed.

I gave him a quick punch in the gut, and was about to throw him to the floor, but I saw Ronald starting to run at the nearest room filled with equipment. As per my orders, I moved to protect the machines.

"Oooh, is that where the good stuff is? Let's have a look," Grell crooned.
"What uncultured guests...please refrain from damaging the décor," I replied with a smile. My hands were already flying-- two dinner knives in the wheels of Ronald's machine would stall him for a moment, giving me time to take Grell's arm and pinch a nerve-- his grip on the saw-trigger would ease up, making for a far less dangerous scythe.

Grell only laughed hysterically, that sharpened grin of his making me wonder what sort of psychosis he trailed along. "Ooh, that tickles." He batted his eyelashes. It should have frozen his muscles.

I jumped nimbly into the air, landing on the safety mechanism and Grell's arm-- balanced there for a moment before launching into a dive-- a handful of silverware rained down on Ronald, and just before he could dislodge the wheels I jammed before, a fork peeled through his defenses. There was a loud clatter as the Death-scythe part of the machine tore the silver to shreds.

"Do you know how hard it is to clean metals from the soul-compartment?" Ronald complained with a scowl. "The view-port doesn't stay crystal clear by itself, you know."

Behind us, another figure tore through the door Undertaker had used. His uniform was mussed, and blood stained one sleeve. "Undertaker! The subjects are attacking-- you said we could control them if we had the machine--"

"Did I say that?" Undertaker said lazily. "All you doctors were trying to find medicine to lengthen your lives... I thought it was funny! How serious you all were..." Undertaker shifted his long robes, and grasped something from beneath them. He produced his own Death Scythe thus, revealing himself as a Reaper to the other two.

Both Reapers reared back, shock apparent in their slack jaws. Ronald looked confused and offended, his mouth turning down in a frown. His hands tightened around the handle of his machine.

Grell, on the other hand, stared hungrily. He ran appraising eyes over the Undertaker's long silver hair, his maddening smile and his sparkling eyes. "I've been had!" Grell licked his lips. "By two beautiful strangers...my. Not just a demon operation after all."

I snorted with amusement. "It was hardly my idea. I only found out about it this week..."

Undertaker seemed to glide closer. His elegance was marred by that fiendish laughter, though, and he waved his black-nailed fingers at the Reapers. "Go." He said simply. "You can't stop what I have begun."

Ronald extended his arm, sweeping his scythe out for me, rather than the machine. I jumped backwards, and flipped over so as to push him from behind. As overextended as he was, it was easy to force him to the floor. But the Undertaker wasn't helping me fight, so it was still two against one.

Their scythes could cut anything, it seemed. I wondered how long it would take for any wounds sustained by the death scythe to heal. Even as a hell of a librarian, it could take time...

Grell made a move to strike the Undertaker, grinning broadly as though he enjoyed this act of violence. I didn't begrudge him that. I would have liked to strike the Undertaker also. He made to strike the Undertaker's wooden stick, but fell forward as he easily severed it in two.

He was so surprised at being able to cut what he had assumed was a death scythe, that he failed to guard against the Undertaker's attack. Grell's glasses went flying from his face, and the Undertaker snorted with laughter.

"You rely too much on your eyes," Undertaker drawled.
I followed the assault by striking the glasses with silverware, casting them far out of reach for the red-haired Reaper. His responding yowl was so feral and uncivilized, that I half expected the Undertaker to slit his throat for the nuisance.

Undertaker swung out with the real scythe, a long and curved thing like the pictures of old. Grell barely managed to avoid it—recovering and dodging blindly under Undertaker's legs. The scythe struck the floor and shattered the tile, also severing a few pieces of red hair in the process.

"Tsk, tsk." Undertaker shook his head with another giggle, hiding his mouth with long fingers. "There's one disadvantage you have to remember, red reaper..."

"Grell Sutcliff." The Reaper sniffed. He squinted blindly at Undertaker. "You have a big one." He grinned lewdly. "But you have terrible reflexes." With that, Grell struck out with his monster of a scythe.

"Can't let your attention wander, can you?" Undertaker laughed. "Two deadly birds fighting for our nest...the red bird tweets, the black bird flies..." he sing-songed. Undertaker held his scythe casually, practically striking a pose.

The doctor who had broken in stared at the two Reapers, clearly shocked.

Deciding that he might know something useful, and that attracting attention to the man would distract the Reapers, I stood before him, as though I would shield him from the scythes.

"Move!" I hissed, turning my head just enough that the man could guess I was talking to him. Three sets of yellow-green eyes watched me.

"Well, isn't that a sight. A demon, playing at being a gentleman!" He snorted inelegantly.

The man finally got the sense to listen and turnabout. He stumbled over the now-uneven floor—just as Ronald rammed the mower into an oh-so-familiar control panel. The Reaper had a delicate touch; he managed to keep it from destroying the whole circuitry, so only the shield-and-lock was gone. The man managed to make it for a door, but not before Ronald could send it slamming shut in front of me.

I didn’t bother glancing at Ronald. I leapt up and over (anticipating Grell’s reckless charge), throwing myself through the so-called-shatterproof-glass with a wriggle and a twist. Anything will break if you put enough pressure on it.

My quarry was staring at me again, panting. Poor humans can hardly ever catch their breath. "What’s—"

"Their weapons are very sharp." I told him. "The destructive power is enough to tear through a door in an instant. I need you to do as I say, answer my questions, and ask none of your own."

"Where are the patients? The ones that attack. Will all the patients here attack us?"

"No-- no, not all of them. The subjects for the 'complete salvation' project. They've gotten loose--"

"Where are they now? How did you get away?"

The door began to shatter.

"They're everywhere! They could be on this very staircase--"
"Is it drugs that turned them into those things?"

"No-- it's a machine-- the Director has developed a machine that works like a heart machine," the doctor gave a shaking sob as he realized that the door would give way.

I hauled him up before me, pushing him in the direction Ciel had found his evidence only a day before. Behind me, Undertaker cackled madly.

I dashed up the stairs, and forced my way to the room with the mysterious medicines. "What is kept here? What illness is it?"

"It's not a disease-- it's not even related to the attacking patients! This room is all experimental. Who are you? What are you doing with the director if you don't even know--"

"I'm one hell of a body guard librarian." I gave him a half smile, and began to scan the contents of the room.

But time was limited-- the Reapers would come after me, and I couldn't have them try to destroy everything in this room. If there was a cure, it would be here. Probably.

A hallow sound filled the hallway, followed by a stale sent of sedatives still lingering in the air from when the men attacked Ciel and I earlier.

I removed myself from the room, and prepared to fight once more.

"Your attacking patients...they stop moving if you destroy their heads, sever the spinal cord, or...anything else?" I asked casually.

"That would...incapacitate them," he affirmed reluctantly.

Somewhere farther in the facilities, I heard a familiar cry. A child was screaming.

The reapers would find me soon enough, but something about that scream beckoned to me. I would look around the facilities; determine the location of the equipment the Undertaker wished for me to protect all the while looking for hints of the living subjects in the facilities.

It was becoming increasingly clear that the mindlessly violent patients were connected to the dead—how else would they move around so immune to any stimulation? Aside from their hunger (and that seemingly for human flesh), they seemed to have no desires or drives. There was no soul that I could sense either.

"Those...patients suffered seizures and loss of mobility. They lose a lot of their higher function thinking abilities. There is no known cure published." The Green Witch had said.

But what if there was more than one experiment going on here? I strongly suspected the patients I had seen so far to be dead, and Ciel was not. Either the drug would kill him, or it was something else altogether.

Hallways crisscrossed before me, littered with remnants of the private guards, hospital equipment and miscellaneous paperwork. The wind howled somewhere outside and the ornamental trees scratched at the windows. I drove myself faster, abandoning the conventions of human speed and capabilities. I heard many voices—in distant rooms, people screamed. Not far from me, the animated bodies shuffled. Towards the center, a demon spoke.

Agares. So Undertaker had not come alone after all. "Welcome, Sebastian. What are your orders?"
It was Ciel. Ciel, with tear-streaks down his face, looking barely older than a child. He seemed fragile, stripped of his years and left with soft cheeks and tiny hands. Agares had bound the child, restricted his movements with chains—they’d put on a show with him. For who, I wondered? Myself, I could guess. But something else clawed at my senses.

Again, I caught the sounds of feet pounding. The whole scene came into focus with those noises, as dim light poured in from a high window. Soft and gentle, the moonlight danced through the panels of glass, and the wind blew mocking laughter my way. There was the child, a sacrifice to some game I couldn’t guess. There was the demon who guarded him, who hid the real challenger in that crucial month. And finally the footsteps resolved into ragged breaths.

Behind us, a gun clicked. “Put your hands in the air.” Cold fury filled Vincent Phantomhive’s voice.

There was another man to his left, who I couldn’t quite place. Not until he spoke anyway.

The scent of roses flooded my senses as we faced off. My back to the men, my attention on the boy, ignoring the reaper. There were whispers here, a force that presented itself few times before.

“You are to evacuate the facilities immediately. Staff and our doctors are working to secure all personnel; any patients remaining in the building are being moved as we speak.” Agares said in that flat tone of his. He did not offer a hint of remorse.

“The authorities have been notified,” Grey said at last. I now knew who the other man was—could place him into the scene. How would he stand, with Ciel unrecognizable except to his family?

“Assistance should be arriving shortly. Please take all caution when evacuating to the nearest exit.” Phantomhive senior scoffed. I turned to see him to find that anger had transformed his face to a cold mask. "Return my son to me Agares. Do it now."

Grey's eyes slid over to Ciel, and shock registered in his voice. "How did this--why is he here?"

Agares shrugged noncommittally.

I looked at the Phantomhives, father and son, held apart by the demon. I wondered if Phantomhive even knew that Agares was the vice principal... I ignored Agares's question, and looked to Ciel. He looked the part of a hostage, that much was certain.

“This patient was with a few intruders. The security force-team has the three of them restrained. If they are yours, I recommend you exit immediately to go negotiate their terms of release before they’re handed over to the police as trespassers.”

Three intruders. Bard, Finnian and Mei-Rin undoubtedly. So the little boy had followed me after all.

My quasi-contract bound me to the facilities. I could not help free Ciel... but I could potentially distract Agares, or make an opening wide enough for even Vincent Phantomhive to take advantage of.

Meanwhile, Vincent snorted inelegantly. “He’s not a patient here.”

Grey stayed quiet, choosing not to voice his concerns. Hadn’t he recognized Ciel yet? Stupid man.

Agares held Ciel loosely, trusting the chains to do their work. My irritation flared when he pulled the boy in, close enough to kiss if the other demon dared. Fortunately, he didn’t.
“We don’t have much time, gentlemen. Sebastian.” Agares addressed me lazily.

I gave a mocking bow. In that instant, Grey would be branding me part of this organization. A spy in the school for the other side. Vincent too would consider that, but he would wonder if I was a double-agent. Long years of being the ‘Dark Noble’ had put him in similar situations. He and I exchanged a glance.

“What are you doing with my son?” Vincent demanded. His eyes flicked back to Agares—perhaps to watch his reaction as I responded.

I took a wide and noticeable look around the room.

The large room was far from empty. Grey and Vincent guarded the largest exit, but there were many more doors. A catwalk encircled the room, two doors were opposite one-another in the room. If there were anyone left alive, such a vantage point would be ideal for a sniper. Another door was blockaded somewhat clumsily, by having moved some large equipment before the door. There was a great deal of equipment as well as stretchers, and other vital sign machines which I had become somewhat acquainted with after our brief stay following the brief incident in the department store.

I replied lazily, “Clearly Ciel is a hostage. I assume you have called for backup?” Vincent watched Agares for reaction, and I watched Grey. “Will the police be confronting the supernatural this evening?”

Grey set his jaw resolutely. He shifted his stance and stared ahead blankly. Either he had one hell of a poker face, or as I suspected, no one was coming.

Ciel’s breath caught in his throat. I turned back to him, and noticed his gaze was trained on one of the machines. I looked there also, and saw a symbol of the Aurora Society, two intertwined snakes looking at one another. It was very like the symbol burned into Ciel’s flesh. (1) I turned to regard him. His eyes, wide and staring, never seemed so blue…his pupils had contracted so that they appeared as pinpricks.

Just outside our room, there was a tiny whimpering noise. I doubted anyone could hear it but myself and Agares. We had been lead here, but for what purpose? Would Undertaker be sending his creations in droves? Would he allow the Reapers to fight their way here? It certainly seemed that Vincent Phantomhive assumed I was working with Agares, but it seemed unlikely that he realized that one of his oldest informants was pulling Agares’ strings. I could use that.

Something silvery glinted above me. I turned my face to the ceiling, and saw— suspended in the air— dozens of canisters just like the ones Ciel had tried to bring away. Suddenly the layout of the room made much more sense. This was a reenactment. The sacrifice was on the altar, and the dead and dying would surround us all.

Without another word, I leapt into the air.

Chapter End Notes

(1) do you remember Ch.11? When Ciel is really freaked out about his upperclassmen taking off his shirt and pants? For more reasons than one, Ciel does not want to be seen naked. Again in Ch.16, Sebastian assumes the spot of skin on Ciel that was “rubbed raw” was a result of the student offenders…but why would it last that long? So, as some
of you may have guessed, that was a reference to Ciel’s scar.

A/N: Ok, no one really expected Ciel to sit quietly at the Green Witch’s place. And I have to agree with Manga-Sebastian; that kid is really good at getting caught. XD Look forward to Ciel’s explanation of how he got there next chapter…

In the meantime, what of Sebastian’s moves did you like? Or perhaps you preferred Grell, Ronald, or Undertaker?
XLVII: The Contract

Chapter Summary

Ciel is held captive by the demon Agares, while Vincent, and Grey are powerless to free him. Sebastian must obey Agares because of the Undertaker, but his private motivation is, as always, to prevent his preferred soul from demise.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the comments, follows and clicks! Special thanks to Carrie for never failing to prod me into talking about Kuroshitsuji, and thanks to Fox for telling me a previously unknown fan theory of Kuroshitsuji to me. That got me thinking XD Also, I’ve been collecting foreshadowing manga quotes about “That Day” “that month” and “the contract.” Can’t wait until Volume 19 is released at the end of June!!!!

**Trigger Warnings:** non-graphic violence to minors. Flashbacks to Ciel's traumatic past (non-graphic). PTSD and Panic-y Ciel. Trigger-prone readers, please proceed with caution.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 49: The Contract

(Sebastian)

As I fell through the air, even then I knew that it would be too late. Undertaker had ordered for me to listen to Agares, after all. All he had to do was--

“Sebastian. Do not help Ciel Phantomhive. You must not free him.” Agares’ face was stony and indifferent.

He made the order as a chess-master would move a pawn a single-space as the first of many moves in a long but tedious game. He was not an eager servant.

I landed gently, touching my feet together at the heels to give a smart bow. As I resumed a thoughtfully attentive stance, something caught my eye far above the others’ heads. I caught a glimpse of something just terrible enough to have been the work of a human…it was a cage with no elegance, no choice, just—

Agares cleared his throat, drawing my attention away.

Vincent Phantomhive’s eyes burned on my neck. The air around him reeked of protective fury, but he masked it well. Instead of letting the situation fall wherever Agares demanded, Vincent held his ground, eyes trained on the culprit holding his son. He was going to try and talk Agares down, to focus on Agares’ empathy and desire to evade a heavier punishment from the law-- he could certainly try, but that would do nothing to calm Ciel, or sway Agares. A demon, after all, is not
moved by fear of human punishment, and Ciel would not be calmed by normality—especially if Ciel saw what I had.

I cut Vincent off before he could begin talking-the-criminal-demon down. I chuckled quietly and asked, “Ciel, how is it you managed to find us so quickly? Did you leave the minute I left you in the clinic?”

The words did some sort of magic. Instead of breathing too fast, too shallowly, Ciel was startled into looking away from a piece of equipment directly in front of him. Now, he was focusing on my voice. Surely he had realized that everything about this situation was a recreation of that day—designed to put him ill-at-ease. But I was not a part of those past-events, so when I spoke, it all seemed farther away, less stark than it had moments before. He and I both were able to look at our surroundings as just a high-ceiling room, and not an arena for spiritual or magical experimentation.

I turned around slowly, giving him something to look at, something that wasn’t a part of the plan. “Ciel. Where are you now? Do you know?”

Ciel finally turned his eyes on me, but he was still not completely present. He sucked in a breath. “That mark... the brand... I know that mark. How is the Aurora Society— that time...”

How I longed to turn his chin up, to force him to meet my gaze, to squeeze just hard enough to catch his attention. A little pain would surely help him focus.

“How good. You realize we’re at the heart of the Aurora Society’s experimental chambers...do you know why you’re here?”

Agares interrupted our little chat with a sharp look in my direction. “Michaelis. Desist immediately.”

How I wished to call both him and Undertaker out. But I was still bound by what the rogue Reaper had ordered me from the first day:

“Things will be complicated if the Phantomhives discover my...shall we say nature? And any information I choose to withhold from Vincent will remain undisclosed. That is an order, Sebastian. Ciel... is a more difficult matter. Do not betray my plans,” Undertaker gave a leering smile, and his yellow-green eyes glittered. “One more thing... do what Agares tells you, will you?” *1

I could not inform Vincent, not if I knew that it was Undertaker’s business or part of his bizarre plan. As infuriating as it was, I would have to wait for the humans to realize on their own what kind of supernatural being (Rogue Reaper) they were dealing with.

“Why should I?” I asked languidly. “No one said I couldn’t talk to the boy.” I smiled, showing just a hint of teeth.

Ciel answered me either way. “We’re here for answers. Sullivan said...” he wavered, looked at his smaller-than-usual-hands and swayed a little.

“Surely that’s not all you have to say,” I goaded. “You’ve barely told us anything...”

But of course, the school-teacher spy Grey and the unscrupulous detective senior Phantomhive were not willing to wait and let me question the boy. Vincent still had his gun trained, his eyes flicking between Agares and me.

“Stand down,” Vincent was saying.

I turned my attention back to them. “So tell me, Grey, did you contact the police yourself, or were
you depending on the three servants?” I purred.

Grey didn’t answer the question, but still, I wondered.

“Servants? Bard, Finny, Mei-Rin...” Ciel cried out sharply as Agares tugged on his ear. “They were with me.” So I was right, pain did help him concentrate.

I felt a smile tug at my lips. “Were they?” I cocked my head. “And which of them fetched you from the good doctor’s?”

“Mei-Rin. Tracked my cellphone; she was ready to--” He bit off the rest as Agares pinched him. An angry red blossom was forming on his cheek.

“So little Ms. Mei-Rin tracked us...and was waiting for your signal to spirit you away. Daddy must have been awfully annoyed that she chose to take you here,” I mused.

Ciel snorted. “I made them think they got a message from him. Bit stupid, really, but I wanted... I thought I should be here.”

Vincent looked pained.

Agares frowned at me. “Sebastian, you speak far too freely. My, but if this is an example of how you honor your contracts, it’s a wonder any of the humans make the bargain at all.” He turned his eyes to Vincent, and for a moment, I caught a glimpse of the demon behind his nearly perfect human face. “Ciel will not be harmed.”

Nothing to say about the others, though? That was telling. There was madness in Agares’ voice, and a raw, primal need. A hunger, perhaps.

I had long tired of gorging on soul after soul; indiscriminately picking off any human who crossed my path. These days, I played the long game. I would taste only the best. But I, of course, made a contract to guarantee that I would get my prize. What, however, of Agares?

Somewhere in the large room, a door creaked. “Woops!” a caustic voice called out, feigning innocence. “Sorry, did I interrupt? I’m sure that was supposed to be a very scary, if a bit pedantic, speech, but...” the red-haired Reaper yawned. “Get on with it already. We have a lot of souls to collect, and I’m on a tight schedule!”

The Reaper burst in, already moving to start stabbing anything in sight. Grell gave a wild leap, as high and fast as only a Reaper (or a demon) could jump. He could be graceful if not elegant, especially with his beastly scythe.

I needed a shield. Something besides my flesh to hinder the blade. It seemed the Reaper was going after me. I sidestepped neatly, tossed a fork as a distraction, and walked right up to Grell and gave him a shove.

He shouted in protest, spinning out of control and careening into a tall cement support. It shook, sending two of the cages that I’d seen earlier swinging. One crashed to the ground just as I predicted, supplying me with temporary protection from the all-cutting Death Scythe.

Yes. Suspended high above us, the cages had finally come crashing down. Again I noted the lack of elegance; just bare captivity behind bars, anguished, broken spirits held as though suspended between heaven and hell.
Ciel jerked as the reaper crashed into the cement support. There was a low and terrible groan, as if something heavy strained against the weakened structure that held it together. Even so, Ciel didn’t look up until he heard the clang of metal on metal, hearing two heavy objects colliding. He couldn’t even manage a scream as he realized one of the things had pulled away from the ceiling—something was falling. Something the size of a large car—

It crashed to the ground. Ciel barely had time to reconcile his thoughts-- terminal velocity and it’s going to fall resonating in the seconds before it hit the unforgiving ground. His vision clouded to black, and then, slowly came back into focus.

There, on the ground was a cage. He was on an altar, and there were cages filled with—

Ciel choked out as he finally realized what he was seeing. A pale hand here, a hospital gown there. These were the broken forms of the captives. There had been children inside…and more than one of them was badly broken. Ciel made a sound like a wounded animal and gave a keening moan.

Stop, stop, stop. Why doesn’t anyone help us? Ciel could almost feel the grime inside the cage. Remembered the humiliation of always being on display. But there was no helping these children. Their bodies were as mangled as their broken minds.

After the fall, not many of the children were aware, and from his vantage point, Ciel could see the blank expressions of several of them. Saw how they sat unresponsive and unmoving. They did not flinch. Ciel stared, his eyes widening. He began to shake, to feel a cold sensation run down his spine. Were they already dead? Or had they just died?

Ciel felt bile rise in his throat, and fought to keep it down.

That day. The cages, the masked men and women. The ceremonial knife and all those traumatized victims, the sacrificial lambs.

Just like he had been.

He remembered reaching out a dirty hand, screaming so loud and hard that it hurt—

He remembered another child’s hand reaching back for him—

The door to the cage closed. The boy screamed as he was placed on the altar. The altar was right there, right where he and Vice Principal Agares stood.

Ciel’s breathing hitched, his eyes fluttered. His hands clutched at his nightshirt—no, his school-things.

"You’re not inside the cage, Ciel." Once again, Sebastian’s voice cut through the memories. It seemed he was always there, always watching. Waiting. Waiting for him to fall, or to reach out? Ciel felt his whole body tremble. “What is there to be afraid of? Now. Call my name."

While Sebastian moved away from Grell, the rest of the room seemed to fall to pieces. Ronald was distracted, watching Ciel and Sebastian with clinical interest, and Sebastian’s lack of attention gave Agares the opening. Agares moved away from Ciel, giving up his hostage. Instead of challenging Sebastian there, the salivating demon went for the threat. For Vincent, who held a gun.

Vincent had time to shift his gaze. He was calm despite everything, moving with ease and skill brought on by years of practice. But he was too slow. The weapon in his hands wouldn’t help him in
the slightest.

Sebastian stayed still, ready to let Grell carry on and destroy whatever he saw fit. His eyes were not on the Queen’s Dog, who was seconds away from discovering what Agares was. Instead, he looked to Ciel, watching his every reaction. He would ignore Undertaker’s orders for an instant, for some opening that he thought Ciel could provide.

At last, Ciel saw what was happening. The children were already dead. There was no saving them. Sebastian was right; he wasn’t in the cage. But there, right before him, was his father.

He wasn’t in the dingy night-shirt. He wasn’t in the cage. Lost in memories of that day, and now faced with the eminent death of his father, Ciel felt his last reserves crumble. His father, at the hands of another demon, without the protection a valued meal (his soul after the end of a contract) would be killed, or worse, Vincent’s soul devoured. Vincent was as good as dead.

Sebastian was by Ciel’s side.

“What will it be, Ciel? Can you even join the game?” He whispered. The trees outside the facilities whistled in the wind, branches scraping as the night sang its song. Sebastian’s eyes were pitiless and intent. In that instant, he seemed to have none of the usual charm or human-like characteristics about him. He was as wild and untamable as a horrific accident, those eyes as insentient as those of a feral beast.

“Yes,” Ciel choked, his sweet face aglow. He licked his lips and stared up at Sebastian, stared into those red eyes. “Demon! I will make a contract with you.” Ciel felt as though he were screaming the words, like they were acid in his throat, but was anyone even listening? There wasn’t any time--

Sebastian’s smile was sharp, his eyes indulgent. He looked anything but surprised.

“Yes, my lord,” he answered, his form like so much smoke with those red, red eyes staring out from the center.

Ciel took a breath, and prepared to make his wish.

Chapter End Notes

Tbc….

*1 “Confronting Undertaker” chapter 33

A/N: This chapter was getting LONG, so I decided you’d rather read something now rather than nothing, so I split the chapters up. Chapter 48 is in the works! Encouragement appreciated. :)
He turns his back to the light

Chapter Summary

Last Time: Agares’s hunger got the better of him, and he moved to attack Vincent Phantomhive. Ciel had finally seen enough, and agreed to form the contract.

This time: How will the Queen’s Guard Dog react to his son making a contract with a demon before his eyes? Will the two reapers gather all the souls? Will Sebastian and Ciel capture the Undertaker?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He turns his back on the Light.

(Sebastian)

How he turned his back on the light without hesitating; what nobility, even as he plummeted into the abyss. Such beauty, such foolishness.

“I want power!” he yelled.

The energy of it brought other words to mind; ancient promises, older contracts of blood and bone. I remembered a previous contract…Demon! Come to me! My power was always strengthened by a human’s raw wish: first spoken, then heard throughout hell. Finally, his wish was fulfilled as the soul grew darker, matured. It all ended as it began; suckled until the bones were dried and the savory, while the soul was sweet and bitter as it melted into every crevice of my mouth. The master breathed his last, and I sighed in ecstasy.

Such is a demon’s sole purpose, his only pursuit.

I kissed Ciel’s tiny hand. “Yes, my lord. Certainly, the crown of victory will be yours. Until the very end.”

Ciel doesn’t waste time contemplating the finality of his decision. He’s already screaming orders. “Save him! Don’t let them kill my father,” he interrupted the moment, and his command struck a chord in me that was as hot and harsh as molten steel.

Even before, I had felt the Undertaker’s contract waning under each phase of the moon, losing strength because of that foolish time limit. The rough, undignified bonds of the contract that had bound me to the Undertaker seemed a flimsy thing, at that moment, now that a true contract was right before me. Because of the weakness in Undertaker’s contract, and the pressing order from my young master to save his father, I could delay obedience to the Undertaker—just long enough to exploit it.

There would be time to carve the contract seal into our bodies, after.

Had the Undertaker bowed to my aesthetics, merely asked I do as he say instead of bind me to my word, I might have felt inclined to help him. To toy with Ciel before I returned to him under the right circumstances. This boy before me... he had been broken before. It was only a matter of time before
he lost the restraints keeping him from seizing power ruthlessly. That thirst for power—

Instead, Undertaker had played the game from the shadows, sending the memory demon, Agares, in his place. Agares was never a good messenger. He made the challenge, not the Undertaker. But it was Undertaker I had knelt before at the end of the month. The contract was weak. Agares was the key.

_Agares the Damned. Agares the Aged. Agares, Duke of Eastern Hell._ I named him silently, pulling on the blood-rite that I’d charged him with months ago. It was enough to make him freeze. (*1: A Colossal Joke)

My feet barely touched the ground. Did Agares see the faint smile that I painted on my face? Would he read the cunning there; know what weakness I’d seen to use against him?

I plunged my fist into Agares’s head, smashing it like so much fruit.

As Agares fell, limp and unresponsive, I considered him. He could not have been bound to serve the Rogue Reaper, the Undertaker. Reapers did not interest us— they had no souls to salivate over. Perhaps this oblivion, this return to hell was even what Agares had wanted. If I had made Agares forget his contract name by returning him to hell, it would almost be the same as ending a more natural contract. If it didn’t end whatever he had with the Undertaker, it was his own fault. I at least was no longer bound.

In a flash, I returned to Ciel.

The boy was looking at me, distracted. He seemed only rudimentarily aware of what was going on around him, and so he barely noticed anything other than my presence. His heart was pounding loudly, making his pulse visible in his neck. “My father,” he said, a bit too quickly.

I turned to glance in that direction. Phantomhive Sr. had managed to avoid shooting himself in the foot while I disposed of Agares, so all seemed well enough to me. “We have more pressing issues, Ciel Phantomhive,” I murmured. “Call my name.” I tilted his chin upwards, looking into those wide, blue eyes.

“Sebastian,” he whispered.

“Yes,” I said.

Amidst pain, anger, and despair, he breathes the words of a curse, a wish, no, a thirst for revenge. I felt him call my name, finally making the summons I have long sought these past moons.

How I wished to linger over that moment.

“You have made your choice. That fact cannot be changed for all the ages... the price that was paid cannot be returned,” I told him. “We must mark each other’s bodies with the contract-- any place will do, the more visible, the stronger the contract--”

“I don’t care. Anywhere. I want power; more than anyone else has. Enough so that no one can defeat me.”

“Greedy, aren’t we?” I purred. “Even though you are so very small.”

“I won’t be small forever,” Ciel snapped.

I grasped his childlike face, wondering if I would see him cringe in fear. His eyes still had a trace of
that wild madness about them, but he did not flinch, did not close his eyes. “I shall place it on these beautiful eyes, which reflect this despairing world.” My hand all but covered his child’s face. Only then, when I carved the contract mark onto his eye, did he begin to scream in anguish.

Behind me, Vincent was yelling. Any moment now he would shoot.

At last I pulled away to marvel at the color of Ciel’s brand. An indigo mixed with violet and lilac ash...striking, to be sure. My own brand burned into the flesh of my hand, marking me for what I am, at last...a bound demon....

...waiting for that perfect soul.

I smiled leisurely. “What are your commands?” This would set the terms of our contract; if the boy knew it, he would be careful, so very careful in how he worded his wishes.

But Ciel just looked around the room with those wide, animal eyes, and he spoke fast.

Vincent’s bullet came in a flash, traveling through my chest (and well above Ciel’s head. We’re lucky he’s kneeling), but it doesn’t stop Ciel from speaking.

He wished for three things.

That I obey his every order without reserve. That I should not betray him until he had gotten his revenge on those that made him suffer on That Day, and that I never lie to him.

What a delectable child. His soul will be striking in its delicacy.

The deal was done. I let the smile fall from my face, and scooped little Ciel into my arms.

“Freeze!” Vincent shouted. He didn’t seem to notice the bullet that’d torn through me, or perhaps he would have realized that he was utterly powerless. Instead, he kept talking. “Step away from him!”

Ciel wavered in my embrace, weak and trembling as any newborn. “You’ll do it?” He asked uncertainly. It didn’t suit him, this humility.

"Until the very end, little master, I will serve you," I told him. “My aesthetics demand that I protect you, little lord, to get my reward.”

“No.” Vincent swore colorfully.

“Oh, what’s this?” I asked. “An invitation?” I ran with Ciel toward Vincent rather than away--startling him into nearly dropping the gun. It was simple, really, to corral them into a more protected area of the vast room. Under a mess of iron bars that lead up to the catwalk--a ladder, I realized.

Vincent hissed when the air was pummeled out of him. He stumbled, but did not fall. “Ciel!”

“Keep your son down,” I advised, looking directly into Vincent’s eyes. Let him see the amusement there. “And stay close if you want to get out of this alive.”

Ciel muttered something that sounded an awful lot like, “Where do you get off playing the good guy?” But surely he was too traumatized for something like that. I turned my attention back to the Reapers.

I called out, “Undoubtedly, the artifact you seek was created by the Undertaker. I’m surprised you never recognized one of your own. Do stop getting in my way and go after him, won’t you?” How pleasant to go against orders, how enjoyable to go up against the Undertaker.
"Why are you called Sebastian, darling?" Grell crooned, ignoring my suggestion.

"There is but one reason. I have been Sebastian since the young master called me so. The words themselves became a baptism and a contract. From that day, I was Sebastian. I swore as much to the moon."

Ronald, who had been busy with Grey, looked up with exasperation. Apparently they were constrained with the presence of two "normal humans" not slated to die, and so Ronald had been animatedly trying to persuade Grey to leave. Grey, of course, was a stubborn individual, and mere words would not help change his mind.

Unaware of Ronald's apparent difficulty, Grell was watching me with vapid interest, unaware or uncaring of Undertaker's part in the grander game. My words were primarily for him; he might be of better use against Undertaker.

Surely the destruction of his vassal, Agares, had caught his attention. He would be close. Now where had The Thing gone?

When Grell saw me looking in his direction, he flipped his red hair over his shoulder and offered a truly horrible grin. (Though I'd seen them before, I thought, Sharp teeth? In this day and age?) "I was hoping you might loosen him up a bit for me, darling," he drawled. "It'd be more fun to fight you, after all. I want to do some hard exercise with you."

"Also..." Ronald quipped, "This Undertaker's not here, is he? Disappeared earlier after you left us."

There was a flicker from above. From behind the glass, high above and level with the suspended cages. Someone was in there. And having seen the artifice torn and dashed on the ground, it was moving. I put it out of my mind, more concerned with who I couldn't see, but only sense.

Some intervention is necessary, I thought. I climbed up the metal ladder at lightning speed, hand over hand in a race against the wind. As I expected, the new vantage point proved my hunch.

Unbeknownst to everyone on the ground, Undertaker had crept in above; I could sense him, see him out of the corner of my eye.

I looked impassively forward, not betraying my intention until I flung myself into the air, leaping towards Undertaker.

He stood there, smiling that strange half-smile of his, his long silvery hair blocking much of his face. He wasn't watching me, but Ciel and Vincent-- his glittering gaze was caught on the lingering Contractee.

I took my chance and flung two rather pointed forks at Undertaker's face, all the while maneuvering for a knife to his gut.

Just as I'd hoped, he flung his head back, silver hair a streamer in the dim light. His fine cheekbones made the dainty smile; a work of subtle ecstasy, and its nuances made me hesitate (for an instant). But I struck, my hands grappling for purchase and finding it-- the silver knife nearly cutting an edge in the rich fabric.

Undertaker caught my wrist and laughed, low and languid. "Ahhhh," he sighed. "The little boy has lost his freedom, but gained a knightly piece. You've gone and made things interesting, Sebastian."

Undertaker's smile widened then, cutting a red streak across his pale face.

From below, Grell gave an approving whistle. "Despite those scars, this Rogue Reaper is quite a
"looker..." he cat-called, edging forward.

Even as their words registered, we began to fall. The Undertaker pulled me down, and we spun in an arc, whirling for the ground in an unbalanced streak of black, black, and silvery-white. My impact had unbalanced us, sent us off the narrow catwalk. I wasn't worried— until he pulled that Death Scythe from nowhere, blocking Grell's monstrosity with a backhanded glance. It cut through the tails of my jacket in a clean swoop, and I only barely managed to dance away.

A few yards away where I'd left the father and son, Vincent stared. He was in shock.

"You're a rogue-Reaper. What have you been doing to all those corpses?" Grell asked sharply, though I (with irritation) noticed he wasn’t eager to battle even now.

Undertaker grinned, and his eyes flitted to Ciel. "You want to know, don't you? You're dying to know what those canisters on the ceiling are for."

Vincent was still staring at Undertaker. Something flickered, and he seemed to understand then what Undertaker had to do with the situation—or he was beginning to. He blinked several times, shook his head tightly. Clearly this old friend’s betrayal was too much.

Ciel's expression was unreadable. He'd already enough reason to doubt Undertaker; all he wanted now was answers.

“Well, you’ll have to make me laugh first, Sebastian. I can’t give in just yet.” And he stepped back rapidly, fingers raking the metal scaffolding of a wall-divider. The sound grated.

“No! Get me up there—those canisters. I’ve got to see it for myself!” Ciel demanded. He didn’t notice his father’s white-knuckled grip on his trembling shoulders, didn’t see anything but his goal before him.

All the players had registered my new freedom, and that Undertaker and I were no longer on the same team. Things would start to move again, at long last.

Ciel’s little outburst brought a reaction from Ronald. “I’ve never seen a contract enacted before…I didn’t realize that it was so…intimate. The kid’s soul has been stained by that demon’s hands.”

“His lips, you mean.” Grell shivered with anticipation. "But forget that! Look at him, this freshly bound demon... collared as he is he surely won't interfere with our work? Right, Sebas-chan? How about we go for tea after all this is finished? A little one on one--" "No kidding. If he steals any of the souls we're meant to collect-- the paperwork would take ages," Ronald agreed, giving a half smile as he pushed up his glasses. Doubtless he had practiced this "cool" move before a mirror many times before.

Undertaker grinned broadly and lazily adjusted his grip.

The two Reapers cut quite the pose, one with his hip jutted to one side, blowing obscene kisses in my direction, while the other revved his Scythe's engine, preparing for action. Fortunately, the red Reaper had his attention focused on Undertaker now, and not me.

I would leave them to it.

“Treasure and protect each and every soul, Phantomhive.” Undertaker leaned over, as though he bore some heavy weight. He stretched out his hands before him, and his sleeves dragged to the
ground. He looked like someone in a fancy burial costume.

Something of the old cleverness returned to Vincent’s eyes. He looked from one Reaper to the other before something settled in him. ”If he steals any of the souls we’re meant to collect,” Vincent was muttering. ”A price. A contract...Ciel, what have you done? A contract...a Faustian contract? With the devil.” The man looked completely white and bloodless.

Vincent Phantomhive...what an interesting prospect. It was surprising, really, when his son had spent the better part of my first month refusing to believe the evidence before him, that the father would understand within the space of a few moments. Granted, he did have the notable advantage of another demon being disposed of before his eyes, and three Reapers tossing themselves at each other with very, very sharp instruments.

I decided that relieving Ciel of his father’s protection now rather than later would be best, and threw myself into the air.

Ciel looked up at me with his mismatched eyes, unblinking.

Vincent Phantomhive lifted his gun, but I was faster. In seconds, I had little Ciel in my grasp, pulling him close enough to smile over his head.

”You're powerless to stop me,” I told Vincent.

Then Vincent fired. I already was spinning out of the way, but the bullet's trajectory was so far off that Ciel couldn't have felt a whisper. I followed his aim to--

Undertaker.

Ciel howled in frustration. ”NO,” he hissed. ”You can't kill him; he knows--"

But Vincent Phantomhive had the most unusual expression I’d seen yet. Determined, yes, but also...lost. Grieving already. ”If you fulfill this bargain,” Vincent shouted as I sprang up again, making for a relatively-safe area, ”your soul is lost, Ciel."

Ah, and so it begins. I smiled and licked my lips.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: What has Vincent decided? What is his plan? Look forward to it.
**His master, at last**

Chapter Summary

Ciel has traded his soul for unwavering loyalty, but what can Vincent Phantomhive do? Ciel's first orders are...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

49: *His master, at last."

(Ciel)

“Your soul is lost, Ciel,” Vincent called, his voice wrought with anger and despair. His eyes were very wide.

A shot fired through the air-- Vincent’s. There was no other noise, though, and nothing changed in the room.

Sebastian began to laugh.

Of course, Undertaker was not hit, but he seemed inexplicably amused by the situation; he trembled with laughter.

“Don’t you understand?” Ciel clutched his hands into fists. “I need to do this! Not just for you-- though I wanted to save you-- but for me. I can get revenge--”

Vincent shook his head. “I saved you from that,” he said.

“I don’t care! I want this. I’m doing this. It's already too late anyway--” Ciel broke off, his voice ragged.

Undertaker laughed. Softly at first, then with a growing intensity that rang from the floor to the ceiling.

Vincent glared at Undertaker, smoldering in his anger.

“Touching. Hehehe! The child has saved his father, but at what cost?” Undertaker shook his head wordlessly before extending his long nailed fingers to shake at the man. “And Vincent, but how many times have you been in a situation similar to this? How many more times will you forget, before your brilliant mind is useless to me?”

Ciel’s voice was quiet. “Undertaker can take memories,” he said quietly. “He can make you forget.”

“Not Undertaker, young master. Agares, if I'm not mistaken...” Sebastian murmured.

The other Reapers had taken advantage of this quiet moment, and Undertaker’s distraction. Ronald plowed in with a reckless shove, and Grell swept down with that loud scythe hissing. They managed
only a few blows before Undertaker swatted them away, his face, suddenly lacking his characteristic leer.

The Undertaker's seriousness seemed to underline the madness better than all the amount of juvenile humor he usually projected. As he met the blows of the Death Scythes with his own, truly wicked looking thing, something glimmered through the air.

“Vincent, Ciel. Did you get a good look at some of the staff? Some of them might be familiar…A second tier,” Undertaker’s smile widened as he caressed each word, “Circus member, perhaps? I was quite disappointed…you so thoroughly disbanded my first tier. Not even a mouse of a sponsor survived. He was rather disappointed, you know.”

The younger reaper leaned his weight onto one foot, preparing to strike with his Death Scythe while the Undertaker was distracted, but Grell put a hand on his elbow, cocking his hip to one side. “Let the handsome ex-Reaper speak. Can’t you see he’s in the middle of a soliloquy? We can write whatever info he shares into our report; William will love it.”

Sebastian barely seemed to register the Reaper’s comment, as curious as the Phantomhives about Undertaker’s scheme.

“Baron Kelvin, he wanted to be a hanger-on of yours, Guard Dog. When he realized he couldn’t, he turned to a certain…organization that’s so fond of sacrificial lambs. Yes. He knew about That Day, and how many tears he shed when he learned he couldn’t die with the participants. But then he found his children, and his doctor…and he set about making a gift for your son, Vincent. Only he didn’t quite have time to finish, did he? But his generous donations made the Phoenix, the Aurora Society, very excited.”

The Queen’s guard dog, the reigning lord of the underworld, stared at Undertaker, betrayal and pain written all over his face. He blinked, shook his head, and Vincent had come close to speaking out when That Day—when his wife was murdered and child taken—the shock of it gave way to the same anticipation a bloodhound might show. He’d caught a new scent, and now he was listening for answers.

“Worried, aren’t you, Ciel? You should be; it’s quite funny, really…but I will, after all this, have to wait for your soul to be collected (one way or another) before I can try and complete the Cinematic Record project. Only then can I reanimate your body, help you accomplish what your memories tell you are your dream. Agares was so helpful with that…sorting through all those memories,” he snickered.

Sebastian tilted his head, his eyes blank.

“Oh my, but aren’t you a twisted rebel? Playing with those human souls like that! Our record-books are in chaos because of you.” Grell actually sounded impressed.

“What’d you do to me?” Ciel demanded, voice breaking.

“I didn’t do that…your tiny child’s body. That was Sebastian’s fault for bringing you along. It’s a chemical agent—reversible, but not without effect. Your heart, your lungs will suffer. I doubt they’ll grow with you anymore. But you never know…I heard there’s an experimental antidote floating around here somewhere. But I’d be more concerned about the other weapons if I were you.”

Undertaker smirked.

Sebastian’s eyes were drawn to something above them all, even as the Undertaker launched into the air. The result was a cacophony of noise as the other Reapers flung themselves forward.
Even so, Ciel extended his hand, as though a doll on strings.

The other Reapers were too slow. In a flash, Undertaker was before the boy, capturing his flailing arms and legs in a mockery of an embrace. He smiled into the boy’s hair, and spun on one foot, showing off his prize. His wide grin spoke of barely contained excitement.

Ciel reached out, whether to catch his balance or to try and strike the Undertaker, it was unclear. But as he fell away, he grabbed something. The Undertaker smiled, and gave a deep laugh.

Vincent lunged for his child, trying desperately to reach his side. He was too slow, and Sebastian reached the boy first. He stood there silently, smiling down at Vincent with a mocking raise of his eyebrows.

“Thank you for the laugh…” Undertaker snickered. “I haven’t had so much fun in ages.”

Vincent shook his head, anger marking his grip on the firearm. “Why.” He demanded. “You could have changed so much.”

Undertaker only gave a mysterious smile and shrugged. “Why live? Why die? Why do anything at all, if not for amusement?” He twirled his long hair, watching Ciel with something that might have passed for affection.

But Ciel had stopped, a silver locket clutched in his limp hands. The boy was utterly still. He had seen something.

He looked at the cage that had fallen. Near it, something moved toward the broken bodies on the ground, catching Ciel’s attention. He stared until it registered: to the left, a man was walking down the aisle, his shoes echoing oddly amidst the debris.

The man looked deranged—as though the blackout, the feral patients, and now this eerie pile of bodies had shaken something in him. Now standing next to the children in the fallen cage, the lanyard caught the light and Ciel knew it was a doctor. A man with dark, curly hair, holding a knife and his vision shifted as he remembered.

The cultists in their black cloaks and gaudy masks. Their perverse excitement, their pleasure in holding Ciel and the other children at their mercy.

The doctor’s mouth twitched and he spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

The two Reapers stood still. Perhaps something in their nature told them not to act. Death approached, and the time for them to collect Souls reared.

“Get up, girl.” Miraculously, he had found one who was alive. “These must be the new clients.” He pulled the girl to her feet, but she didn’t respond, not even to the knife he waved before her. “Get up! Move. To the altar.” The doctor limped, his scrubs stained with what must be his own blood.

“They’ll be wanting a sacrifice—someone to pay for their bargains. Our old clients,” he gave a snort, “They wanted to save everyone from dying. Everyone? These children aren’t of use to anyone. No one even noticed them missing for ages…what difference does it make to anyone whether they live or die?”

The Reapers watched the man drag the girl over to the altar. The altar before him was nothing like the one Ciel remembered— it looked more a table than an altar, or like a piece of medical equipment.

Ciel was hyperventilating. Two altars seemed to overlap—one sterile white, the other spotlighted by candles and chandeliers in a basement. Ciel watched the doctor lay the girl down—
Ciel remembered watching the screaming, terrified boy. The boy with dark hair and blue eyes (*1). He wasn’t quiet. The boy on the altar, the boy who was dragged from the cell. Ciel remembered how that boy had thrashed and screamed even as the knife was plunged into his chest.

Ciel screamed, “Stop!” Why doesn’t anyone help us? He had thought. His own hand seemed smaller, younger. Dirty with grime. His voice was hoarse with days of silence. Ciel shuddered and heaved. His knees buckled.

But no— his body may be smaller than it was, perhaps even smaller than it had been on That Day be thanks to falling on the Aurora Society’s drug. He felt like that child of twelve, despairing and giving up hope and all belief of the prospect of salvation. There is no God. He tried desperately to keep a hold of what was past and present.

Ciel wrestled out of Sebastian’s grasp, only for Sebastian to take his chin in his hands. The black nails were as claws, and his gaze was utterly ruthless; inhuman. “You know what to do. Speak my name. Give me an order.” That voice was silky, dark and almost a low purr. Ciel shuddered to think that Sebastian might enjoy this situation.

Everything roiled about inside him, past and present, anger, shame and adrenaline. Without Sebastian there to lean on, Ciel would have swayed on his feet, would have been perilously close to collapsing. Ciel gasped out the name. “Sebastian!” He knew what to do. What his next order would be. “Kill them! Get rid of the doctors, and the patients!”

“The patients—” for a fraction of a second, Ciel thought Sebastian looked surprised, or perhaps resigned. Sebastian withdrew. “Your father will be needing them to prosecute—”

“Kill them!” Ciel screamed. “Kill them all.” He sank to his knees, unable to keep standing.

Sebastian picked up Ciel more gently than the boy thought possible. He shifted the boy so that his head rested on his shoulder and took several dignified steps, and raised his hand. The room erupted into flames, taking the altar and the doctor, and running along the electric lights and into the cage where the children were.

Sebastian only looked on, his face a perfect mask of indifference. “Yes, my lord. If those are your orders,” he bowed low, “then your will is done.”

(Sebastian)

There was a high-pitched whine, the sound of the fire alarm going off automatically. Ciel stared up at the ceiling from his new vantage point, apparently wondering at the strange canisters there.

Everything moved at once. Grell’s standstill had ended, and Undertaker and they had again crossed blades. The monotony began to bore me, but with Ciel’s soul promised to me, I spared them little attention as the flames spread. If I could find the antidote…

“A weapon is only as good as the hand that holds it,” Undertaker’s voice cut through my concentration. He had the air of a senior employee chiding a young recruit. The flames licked at Ronald and Undertaker both, and Ronald’s eyes grew round behind his glasses.

Ronald and Grell fell back at last, perhaps intent on finding the other souls that would need collecting after all the smoke. They would be very busy soon—and if Undertaker wasn’t hard on their heels, he might be taken down by my maelstrom. They would make a tactical retreat, then.
Undertaker was also preparing to jump ship. He stood high above us all, ready to leap for freedom and far out of reach of myself or the two Reapers.

“After him!” Ronald declared, sounding like any junior staff member made to put up with tenured employees. Did he think himself a hero?

Grell spared me a final look. He lingered, perhaps enjoying the heat. “I look at you, and I want to see a knight rescuing a tragically deflowered innocent—”

I scoffed.

He continued, undaunted, adding a dramatic hand gesture. “I see not one of Shakespeare’s greatest heroes though, but a dangerous spirit, a man with no love in his cold eyes. Red as love, but bearing none of it! Oh!” He swooned, and then glared at Ciel. “And you think that pitiful creature is a prize delicacy? Well, Sebas-chan. It’s been nice, and parting is such sweet sorrow and all that, but I think we’ll have to try a long-distance relationship. Ciao!”

Grey and Vincent were shouting, screaming orders into the inferno. The doctor was already dead, along with the child he had sacrificed before the Queen’s investigators. Who exactly did they imagine they were talking to? The flames grew with supernatural speed, licking at everything around them.

“Take cover!” Vincent was screaming, casting his gaze about for an escape. But Grey was too slow. The man was struck by bits of metal as the canisters on the ceiling exploded. The Queen’s Guard dog was watching me now. Such despair reflected in his eyes...

I smiled knowingly, and covered Ciel with my jacket, watching Vincent curiously.

Vincent raised his gun, and took careful aim.

I guessed what he was about to do, though I could not fathom his reason. The heart is far too complex, stretching beyond my grasp. “You cannot kill your own son... not even to save his soul. You don't have what it takes,” I said, willing my words to be carried over the flame. The flames were mine, after all. They could be an instrument should I choose.

The chemicals already falling, crackled as they met fire. Areas of debris were showered in a fine, misty spray that smelled of human tampering and clever, clever death. And humans say that demons are cruel.

Vincent looked at his son, not at me. He spoke, and I could read the words on his lips and hear the gentle vibrations, but I doubted very much if Ciel could. ‘Why? Ciel. You promised me you'd live.’

“And he shall live, Phantomhive. Until his wish is fulfilled.”

“And if you can't fulfill it, the contract is void” Phantomhive steadied his hand, aiming the gun at his own flesh and blood.

Ciel's fist hit my shoulder, and his whole body convulsed as he coughed. The chemicals and smoke was not affecting him well. “Save him! Sebastian, I order you to--”

“My first task is always to see to your safety, little master. And saving him would not be good for your health.”

Ciel wailed his objections even as I whisked him away, leaving Vincent and Gray behind to fend for themselves. They would escape by their own power, or not at all.
Ciel cursed me even as his lungs failed him. I would have to venture back to search for a cure, or his delectable soul would not be mine to taste…

I grinned into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Ciel has made the contract, Undertaker has explained a few loose ends, and Ciel is again on the path of revenge. Things are looking bleak indeed…how else to start a Contract?

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