Temporary Accommodations

by Originia

Summary

Due to a matter of circumstance and some near-death escapades, Mob's body gets kidnapped. ...Without Mob himself in it.

(In which the great Reigen Arataka’s body becomes a sort of temporary accommodation for Mob's soul, and Reigen quickly finds out he’s not really built for this sort of thing.)

Notes

Right, well. This is my first MP100 story. And it just might be the first time I've ever written a story that I've been Really Wanting To Read. Body-share fics are my jam. And so, here I am.

I will try to update on Mondays. Because, you know: Mobdays.
(Hope you're ready for some good ol' platonic relationships here. Mmm yes.)
Reigen reads the news.

He does it to stay at the top of his game. It's good for finding jobs and convincing clients. He reads the articles and advertisements, the obituaries and gossip columns. Knowing about the latest scandal means he can avoid becoming the latest scandal.

But, the news isn't always about public embarrassments and celebrity affairs. Sometimes it's a bit more serious, sometimes a little dark.

Reigen reads the news, daily. He knows about the mysterious disappearance plaguing the city. About the murders.

Mob, on the other hand, does not.

And for once, Reigen isn't about to tell him.

"I'm heading out."

Mob's voice is quiet, but it breaks the silence of the office.

Reigen looks up from his laptop. Looks up at Mob. His school stuff is already all packed away, backpack zipped up. It had been a slow afternoon. A few customers, nothing supernatural at all. Mob worked quietly on his assignments. Routine stuff.

"Already?" Reigen says more so than asks. He glances at his watch.

Oh.

He closes his laptop. "Right, well. I'll walk you home."

Mob blinks. "Why?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

Mob seems to think that one over. A moment later he shrugs, looking a little lost. "Okay."

"Good. Give me just a moment."

Reigen is relieved Mob didn't press the issue. Because well. Reigen rarely walks Mob home. Not anymore. Especially when it is still light outside. The boy is fifteen now.Hardly in need of adult supervision.

But, Reigen reads the news.

He slides his arms into his jacket. Pockets his cellphone, his keys. And then, when he figures Mob wouldn't notice, slips a small canister alongside it. Something he'd purchased only yesterday. Just in case.

"All right Mob, let's go." He smiles, gives an indistinct wave of his hand towards the door. Mob seems none the wiser.
Reigen think it's better this way. The ignorance.

Because Mob is young. And innocent. And too kind. And he really shouldn't have to know about the murders and disappearances.

Especially when all the victims have been psychics.
Sometimes being paranoid pays off.

(But usually it just makes things messier.)

Mobday is here.

(Updates will usually occur between 4PM and 5PM EST because that is when I get off work. This is also assuming I have content ready to post by that point too. Fingers crossed, my friends.)

They walk the usual route. Dimple finds them a few blocks from the office.

"What're you doing here?" the spirit sneers, ignoring Mob's soft greeting.

Reigen scowls. "Walking Mob home." He keeps his hands in his pockets. "What are you doing here?"

"I always keep Shigeo company." It's a boast, like he's proud the fact. The spirit matches their pace and floats close to Mob, just over his shoulder. "Isn't that right, Shigeo?"

Mob shrugs, then gives a sort of halfhearted nod. "He usually finds me when I'm walking home."

"Creepy," Reigen says, but there's no feeling behind the word.

They stop, waiting for a car to pass.

Reigen is worried. A little. Not that he would ever say as much. The latest string of disappearances is troublesome, sure, but nothing to fret over.

That is, until today.

Because when he had read the news that morning he had recognized the latest victim. Some nobody he remembered from that Flaw organization last year. Slaw? Claw? Whatever. It had been a face he recognized. And well, the internet made it easy to look up things. Look a little further into the other victims.

It didn't take long for Reigen to piece together the pattern.

"Master?"
"Hmm, what?"

"Told you he wasn't listening." Dimple flaunts.

Reigen grimaces and tries knocking the spirit away. Dimple simply lets his hand pass harmlessly through, grinning triumphantly. Reigen promptly ignores him.

"Sorry Mob," he says. Sort of half-turns towards him. Apologies come easier now, he finds. Might have to do with having dropped the psychic-act. "Can you repeat that?"

They cross the road. Mob shrugs.

"Um. I asked– I was wondering if you had to go somewhere?"

Reigen blinks. Scratches his chin. "What do you mean?"

"Well I thought..." Mob hoists his backpack a little higher up on his shoulders. They turn down a smaller road – a shortcut to the Kageyama house. "Usually when you walk me home you actually have some place you want to go."

Dimple floats in lazy circles above their heads, snickering.

"Oh, you mean like–" Reigen waves a hand in a couple vague circles. "For food? Or a client?"

Mob nods, making a soft noise of agreement. Reigen thinks about it, and realizes that Mob's entirely correct. It feels strange, having his own habits laid out for him.

Expect, of course, that this is the one time Mob's wrong. He looks away.

"No no, not this time," he says, waves his hand dismissively. There's a car coming. It's a narrow road, buildings crowding in on both sides. They're going to have to move over. "Just felt like getting some fresh air."

He puts a hand on Mob's shoulder, meaning to guide him towards the wall, and realizes how tense his disciple's become. Reigen stops. Mob stops too. Dimple had stopped a little bit further back.

Mob and Dimple, they're both looking at the car, and Reigen doesn't need to be a genius to know that he's missing out on something.

The car slows. Stops. Two doors open.

"You know what," Reigen says, and goes to turn around. "Ramen actually does sounds like a–"

He stops mid-word. The car from before, the one they had let pass, is at the entrance of the alley. And Reigen realizes that it is an alley they're in. Because it's small. And cars really shouldn't be coming down this way, honestly. And nothing good ever happens in alleys.

Reigen swallows heavily, crowding close to Mob.

"Hey Mob," he says, and is surprised how unconcerned his voice sounds. "These friends of yours?"

Like he doesn't know otherwise. Mob is silent. Gives a short, stiff shake of his head. The tension is nearly palpable. Reigen wonders offhandedly what Mob must feel from these two cars.

Reigen himself can barely believe it. He'd thought... well he'd thought he was being paranoid. Sure, psychics were disappearing around the city, but it hadn't really been anyone important. Just. Small-
timers. Some possible fakes, to be completely honest. Reigen wonders how these people – the cars, whoever's inside them – had found them. Found Mob. It had been months since anything drastic had happened. Mob's powers have been all but controlled. He's a kid, Reigen had thought. There was no way anyone would ever go after him.

Reigen reaches a hand into his pocket. He had truly believed he was being paranoid.

It sure didn't feel like that now.

Dimple floats in low and close.

"You feel it too, right?" Dimple asks Mob. "The evil spirit."

"Yes," Mob replies softly. "It feels like more than one."

"It's not," says Dimple.

Reigen looks, but of course he can't see anything. Just the car. Two open doors. Some shadowed feet. It can't be that bad, he thinks. Because Mob fights against evil spirits. He exorcises them all the time. It's humans where he draws the line. And on any other day Reigen would be more than happy with that fact.

But. Well. There sure were a lot of people getting out of the two cars. Lots of humans, as far as Reigen can tell. Mob's not moving, and Dimple's hovering real close to him, like he's hiding. It's quiet. The sounds of closing car doors echo from both ends of the alley.

Reigen breathes in, then out. Squeezes Mob's shoulder once, hard. Lets go. And smiles. As big and bright and as disarming as possible.

"Hey there!" he calls out, loud and friendly. Mob makes a small, startled noise, which Reigen does his best to ignore.

There are two groups of dark-suited individuals, each at either end of the alley. Reign chooses the largest – a group of three – and starts striding towards them.

"You guys lost?" he asks, to which he gets no answer. "Not sure I can help, if that's the case."

He pauses briefly, gauging the reaction. There is none. Reigen can feel the sweat clinging to his undershirt. He continues walking forwards.

"To be honest my friend and I might be a little turned around ourselves." He laughs, scratches the back of his head with one hand. The other's clenched in his pocket. He keeps moving forwards.

"We're new the place, you see."

A few more steps, all casual-like. He's gotten pretty close. It's better than he could have hoped for.

"I hope we're not in your way." Another laugh. It feels breathless.

If he's able to create a significant enough distraction, then maybe...

"Reigen Arataka."

He stops mid-step. One of the guys had spoken, but he's not sure which one. He had been too busy looking at their hands, their jackets. Trying to spot a weapon. Looking for anything to indicate the highest level of threat. Because he's probably only going to get two shots at this. Maybe three, if he
throws caution to the wind.

"Yeah, that's me," he replies, brows raised, hoping he looks surprised. It's not a hard sell. Surprise and fear are close cousins. "Funny you guys should know that..."

One of the men steps forwards. "The owner of the Spirits and Such establishment."

Oh. His heart pounds. So much for pretending he doesn't live here.

"Ahaha, yes! The one and only," he says, trying to switch gears. And then, because he can't help himself. "You guys looking to schedule an appointment?"

The man's face remains impressively impassive. "This meeting will be all we need".

Reigen gives him his most innocent look.

"I'm not sure how—"

"You and your kind," the man interrupts, almost spitting out the words. "Have endangered those around you for too long. It would be reckless for us to allow it to go on any further." The man's hand is raised, parallel with his own body. It looks like some kind of signal.

For a fraction of a second, Reigen has the ridiculous notion that these people must really hate conmen. But then it clicks.

The misunderstanding almost brings a sense of relief.

"O-Oh, you mean us psychics?" he says. Practically poses, one hand splayed across his own chest. His heart is pounding so hard he can feel it beneath his sweaty palm. "I have no idea what you could possibly mean."

"It doesn't matter," the man says. One of his companions steps forward, seems to be holding a box of sorts. Reigen's eyes flick rapidly from one possible threat to another. "Your fate has already been decided." The words sound practiced, rehearsed.

"That doesn't sound too friendly," he replies, trying to school his expression into something polite, non-aggressive. "What's to stop me from just leaving right now, huh." Hoping not to betray his fear, he takes one more step, hand inching out of his pocket.

He has to do it now.

He has to—

"I think you will find your powers don't work against us, Reigen Ar—"

Reigen doesn't let the man finish, whipping out the pepper spray from his pocket in a violent motion. He sprays it. Once, twice. Manages to get that third one in even though he's pretty sure he misses. Some weird mist – a dark cloud? – is released right in his own face. He blinks, mouth, eyes, nostrils burning for a brief moment, and then it's gone. That weird box lays discarded on the ground, top open and empty. People are yelling – the men, maybe Mob, something about an evil spirit – but he's no longer listening.

He turns around. Looks for Mob. His ears pop. He feels dizzy. A little off balance. Must be adrenaline. Someone's grabbing at the back of his jacket but he shakes himself out of it. It feels like there's a growing pressure inside his head, something pushing against his brain. He blinks, trying to...
what was– oh right, Mob. His eyes find him, still standing right... there. But further away? Mob
looks scared. Wide-eyed. Reigen blinks, trying to move towards him but his limbs feel deadened. He
manages a step. Another.

Why can't he... Something's wrong...

His head feels like it's splitting open.

"Mob," he gasps, once. Then suddenly finds he can't speak anymore.

He can't move anymore.

He thinks this is probably where he should pass out.

But he doesn't.

Things take on a hazy quality, but he remains lucid enough to realize that his eyes are moving
around, focusing on things, without him meaning to. He looks at the pair of men behind Mob, by the
entrance of the alley. The world seems to tilt as if he's nodding. And then he is turning back around,
away from Mob, limbs moving without any conscious thought.

"I've got him," he says. His voice, his mouth, but not him.

He faces the three men. One of them says something in return, but Reigen doesn't manage to
catch the words. He can see two figures on the ground, covering their faces. The other's standing,
wiping at his eyes. Why are they... ahh, the pepper spray. Reigen wonders vaguely what became of
the canister. He would look for it, but finds that he can't even control his eyes.

"The usual, then?" comes out of him mouth. He feels one of his arms moving, a hand rubbing at his
face. "This one's resilient, I'll give you that. Probably best to get going."

"–giving you trouble?" Words and faces start coming back into focus, slowly, lazily. It hurts. The
man who's talking almost looks frightened. "But you told us no psychic could ever–"

"No no." He sees his own hand wave through the air in front of him. He's not controlling it at all.
"This guy's no problem. Just stubborn."

"You're sure he can't use his powers?"

Reigen feels a grin spreading across his face. "He's still awake, which is annoying, but his powers
are completely dormant."

He's being possessed, Regien realizes. Too late to be of any use.

"Well then let's get this over with." One of the men steps away. Towards the car. "I hate being
around these psychics. The sooner the better."

His body moves forward of its own accord, someone else controlling the strings. It hurts, a lot.
Especially his head. It's like he's being compressed into a space that's too tiny for him to fit. His
thoughts are sluggish. And there's an odd sense of vertigo that comes with it all.

And then, suddenly it gets ten times worse.

His body stops, knees buckling, and thing controlling him lets out a gasp. The pressure is
thunderous. A hand – his hand, but not him – grasps at his head. His vision swims, blackness
crowding in from the edges. Reigen feels like he's drowning.
He thinks he might die.

"What's going on?"

The words are vague and indistinct. Coming from somewhere slightly above him.

"I think--" He chokes. It's not him, still. The hand at his head pulls at his hair. The pain does nothing to help reduce the relentless pressure. "I think he's trying to exorcise me?" There's a sense of incredulity the the words that even he can feel.

It's Mob. Reigen knows, without a doubt, that it's Mob. Mob's trying to help him. His thoughts have stalled, and it's as if the weight of world concentrated on his head, but there's a fleeting notion of panic.

Mob's trying to exorcise the spirit. Mob is using his powers.

Reigen wishes with all his remaining lucidity that Mob is being as discrete as possible about it. These guys can't know it's him. They can't find out.

Reigen knows he's going to die. But they can't have Mob.

"He can do that? From in there?"

It's one of the men. He says more words but Reigen doesn't hear them. He's on his knees, one hand gripping his head and the other clutching at his shirt. His vision has tunneled and he's been left staring at the ground.

"You better do it now." His voice again. He sounds like's he in incredible pain.

"But there's a witness." A different voice, one of the other men.

Mob. No.

"Doesn't matter," he says. Not him. His body looks up. "You need to kill this guy now." He chokes, almost vomits. "This... this kind of power... It's unnatural. Dangerous."

"O-okay." The voice, whoever it is, sounds alarmed. Reigen's eyes blink and it feels like he's suddenly skipped ahead a handful of seconds.

He feels the cold press of something against his forehead.

"Hold still."

When he finally focuses through his own eyes, he sees the trailing muzzle of a handgun.

Reigen is going to die.

He thinks he hears a cry from somewhere behind, and the pressure – not all of it, just the unbearable part – abates suddenly. His ears ring, his vision swims. He feels rather than hears the click of the gun's safety.

(There's a shimmering form in the corner of his eye. Something familiar. A pale apparition, two eyes, a hand reaching towards him...)

In the next moment, he skulls shatters. It must have. The pain is blinding. His lungs seize. His only lucid thought is that there must be a bullet lodged in his head because nothing else could describe this
kind of pain.

Reigen screams.

A kaleidoscope of color erupts in front of his eyes. Reigen's still screaming – realizes it's *him* screaming and not that *thing* that had moved his body and talked in his voice – and watches as the men go flying. More color, shimmering. The ground beneath him cracks and fractures. The gun goes off. Harmlessly. Towards the sky.

The pain reaches its peak and briefly whitens his vision. And then, as abruptly as it had happened it dulls. Recedes. There's still a sense of pressure in his head, but it feels different, more restrained.

He's in the alley. On his knees. There is no bullet hole in his skull.

Reigen realizes he's still alive.

His eyes move, look around, and he's not entirely sure whether it's him doing it or not. He sees movement, a dark twisting form. Something assuredly not human.

The pressure in his head seems to grow, and his hands lift up, palms out and fingers splayed. And then there's that shimmering color again, all around him. It's a barrier. Like the ones Mob makes.

Reigen looks at his hands, and this time he knows. It's not him doing it. He feels sick at the notion.

That foreign bit of pressure occupying his head space seems to shift, push forward. The feeling does nothing to help his nausea.

"I'm s-sorry," his voice says, sounding utterly distraught. His arms shake, but the barriers holds fast. "The s-spirit wouldn't leave you. And– and I didn't know what else to do."

It's Mob.

Mob is...

"H-how?" Reigen asks, surprised that he *can* ask it. It feels wrong, disconnected, and there's a bit of numbness around his arms, mouth, that constant pressure in his head. But it's not nearly as bad as before.

"Um." Not him. "O-out of body experience." He swallows thickly, his throat feels dry. "Like with Minori. And M-Mogami."

Oh.

The numbness spreads to his legs, his feet, and suddenly he's standing. His arms are still outstretched, psychic barrier extending just past his fingertips. Mob's doing all this. Mob, who is... possessing him, somehow. Who saved him.

How dare these people make Mob go through this.

A rush of energy, a swooping sensation in his stomach. Reigen can feel his hair sway around him as if he's underwater.

His head hurts something awful. But that's not important right now.

"What about your own body?" Reigen asks, turning to look. It's hard to see past the barrier. Colors bleed into one another, and the pounding in his head makes it hard to focus.
Mob turns his head back. There's that... thing – very large, all shadows and darkness – just beyond the barrier.

"It's okay," his own voice – Mob – replies. His arms move. Thumbs coming together, wrists parallel, straight out in front. Reigen feels rather than sees the barrier concentrate its defences at that spot. Right in front of the shadows. "Dimple says he'll protect it."

Reigen watches with a detached sort of horror as the mass of darkness hammers at the barrier. Each attack feels like a particularly strong beat of his heart.

"Is that the evil spirit?" he asks.

"Yes."

He breathes, in and out. "That was in me?"

His head bobs a little, and Reigen realizes Mob is nodding. "It was very strong," Mob says with Reigen's voice. "I couldn't exorcise it. Only push it out."

Reigen feels very nauseous. Really kind of wants to vomit. Maybe just hold his head for a while. But his hands aren't really his right now – his arms feel indistinct and fuzzy – and he doesn't want to distract Mob from saving their lives.

The barrier glows bright with each attack. There's a lot of noise coming from outside their barrier. Some blurry movement. Shouting. Yelling, probably. The spirit might be saying something too but Reigen doubts either he or Mob would ever want to know what it is.

Reigen realizes those men-in-suits are still out there.

So is Mob's body. Dimple too. They are probably in quite a bit of danger.

Reigen looks at the spirit, not five feet beyond their barrier.

"You can beat it, right?" he asks.

The world seems to tilt slightly. And then.

The barrier blinks out of existence.

Reigen's heart seizes in panic.

His body skips effortlessly to the side – far lighter than he's ever been able to – avoiding a nasty shard of black shadow. His right arm swings around, out, fingers splayed. A psychic attack, apparently. It sends pins and needles down his arm and cold into his palm. Reigen watches as the extended chunk of spirit is cut clean off from the whole. The piece thins out, spreads, evaporates.

Something shoots their way, and his left arm is makes a wide arc, and another shining barrier appears in its wake. Just in time. The strike hits and slides off the barrier.

"W-what– Why..." Reigen tries, adrenaline coursing through his veins, but Mob's already shaking his head, words stolen from his lips.

"I can't defend and attack at the same time."

Reigen... knows that. Somehow. Remembers hearing about it at least. But never before has the prospect seemed so terrifying. The last thing Reigen wants to do is drop the only protection between
him and... that.

But.

Mob is here. And Mob's body is out there.

"Okay," he starts, a bit shakily. He feels kind of numb all over. Tries taking a deep breath just to see if he still can. He can taste the smoke and dust and something a little more electric that he's always associated with Mob's powers.

It helps calm his down.

"Okay," Reigen says again. "Two minutes Mob. This spirit better be exorcised in two minutes, got it?"

There's that pressure in his head – the unnatural weight that he now knows is Mob. It feels like it's crowding in on his mind space. His chest expands and contracts in another, slow deep breath, this time not his own.

"Okay, Master," he hears Mob say.

And so Reigen just... steps back. Mentally.

Lets the numbness spread.

The barrier drops.

The alley is small, but Mob seems to be able to make full use of its space. Bits of ground go flying. Reigen's arms spread out wide – an attack, accompanied by a swooping sensation in the pit of his stomach. Another barrier follows, to block the counter the spirit throws their way. Attack, block, attack. Small, inconsequential a pieces of the evil spirit crumble and fade away, but they amount quickly.

His palms burn, his finger ache like frostbite. The air tastes of electricity.

Even Reigen, as detached as he is, can tell Mob's only using a fraction of his power.

Stone tumbles down around them. Mob spreads the barrier wider, covering their front, their head. Reigen realizes Mob doesn't quiet seem to have a full grasp of just how much longer Reigen's limbs are. They take a few hits here and there. Another attack follows the first, and then another.

It feels like takes a long time, but Reigen knows the whole thing probably only amounts to a handful of seconds.

The ground splits wildly in places, footing becoming treacherous, so Mob just sort of... floats at some points. The evil spirit has shrunk considerably in size, seems a bit more dense in matter than before. Each strike that connects cleaves more and more out of it.

Finally, in what Reigen is sure must be some form of psychic teleportation, he's standing directly in front of the dark mass. An arm outstretched in front of him. Fingers extended.

The spirit looks at him – at Mob – two dark eyes set in the remains of its shadows. And it speaks.

"Death is all that awaits you, Reigen Arataka. My masters will make sure of it."

Mob blinks Reigen's eyes, presses forwards. The burst of psychic power is a shock of pain spreading
from Reigen's chest out to the tips of his fingers. The core of the spirit implodes, a soundless
detonation.

Reigen's lips form the words, but it's Mob that speaks them.

"You hurt my Master," Mob says. "Disappear."

All at once, noise seems to return. Like emerging from underwater.

The air is cool, sharp. The evening stars shine high above. The remaining wisps of the spirit
disintegrate into the air. It's like his ears have popped, the tension in the air dissipating entirely.

It's quiet.

Reigen's legs get abruptly heavy again, and he realizes that he's the one now that's keeping them
standing. The rush of feeling spreads, his arms, his chest. The pressure remains in his head though.

It's quiet, Reigen realizes.

He looks around. The ground is cracked and fractured beyond recognition. A few nearby walls have
caved in or collapsed, bare rebar and pipes exposed. There's a car at the end of the alley, overturned,
dented in. There is water pooling somewhere, the soft bubbling sounds easy to hear in the silence.
His suit jacket is long gone, buried, likely. Reigen probably looks like a mess.

"Master?"

Mob's soft question, delivered through Reigen's voice, falls flat in the quiet of the alley. In the
distance he hears cars passing, sirens.

Reigen probably looks like an awful mess. But there's no one around to see it.

"Where did they go?"

Reigen swallows, throat dry. His head feels unbearably heavy.

"I don't know," he says aloud. To no one.

The other car and the men who had tried to kill him were gone.

Along with Mob's body.

Chapter End Notes

(This is my first time writing anything of this nature so if it's a bit off in places –
confusing, awkward, whatever – I apologize. Feel free to point such things out to me
because knowing is growing.)
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Emotions can be dangerous.

Chapter Notes

It's Reigen's birthday. This is probably not the kind of chapter that would gifted on such an occasion, but what can you do.

(Also, holy shit? You guys are actually the best?? Thank you so much for the kudos and comments last chapter, like seriously. I thought this was going to be some kind of niche interest story that like four people were gonna roll with but everyone else would just ignore. So thank you. Y'all are the best readers.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The surge in pressure hits him like a punch to his gut, and the silence of the alley seems to erupt in a roar of white noise. Reigen blinks, eyes wide, and tries to catch his breath.

"Mob," Reigen gasps. "What--"

Dread, foreign and intrusive, slides through him. It's accompanied by a wash of fear. Reigen feels it in his chest, his throat. Building, expanding, making it harder and harder to breathe. His eyes are unblinking, staring at nothing in particular. His heart pounds hard and fast. Each pulse seems to bring with it a new flare of bright, vibrant psychic power. The broken pavement fractures even further under his feet.

"They're gone," his voice says. Mob's words. "And I-- It's my fault."

A deafening crack accompanies the flash of pressure, and Reigen watches, paralyzed, as the pavement in front of them splits into a large gap. Stone crumbles from the nearby alley wall.

"Mob," Reigen says, blinks wildly. "It-it's okay, it's not--"

His mouth goes entirely numb, and Reigen can't speak, can't breath.

"It is, it is." Mob, again. "I shouldn't have-- but then you." His fists are clenched tight, fingers and arms deadened. Mob's controlling them. "And I couldn't-- I couldn't let you, they were going to... and I'm-- I'm..."

The words stutter, stop. Reigen regains control of his mouth and lungs. He gasps for air, taking a much-needed breath. And then another, shakily, trying to stay calm.

"M-Mob," he says, his eyes fluttering shut. "It's going to be okay, please."

His head pounds violently with each heartbeat. It's loud. It almost drowns out his own voice.
This is Mob's panic.

"No, no." Mob again, snatching back control, shaking his head back and forth. It makes the pressure worse. "They're gone, and now I– They're still out there, and they tried– they tried to kill you. Because they thought–"

His eyes open, not of his own accord. Mob uses them to look around, frantic, as if he could spot some other aspect to their situation that hadn't been noted yet. Some salvation. Reigen tries his damnedest to keep them breathing. The pressure in his head is excruciating.

"Mob," he chokes out again. The air around him is all spikes of neon, warped light, electric fissures. He can feel the ground giving way beneath him. His hair whips around his head. Bits of shattered stone and rock drift upwards. Reigen can barely think, but he knows what this is.

He's seen what Mob's emotions can do.

"P-please. You're hurting me."

At his words, the panic flares bright and overflowing. It fills every empty space, every crack. There's a violent burst of pain, and then profound numbness.

Reigen realizes he must have blacked out. A small blip. Maybe longer. The next thing he knows he's hunched over on his knees. Both hands are gripping the fabric of his shirt, material bunched in his fists.

His eyes are open wide, staring blankly down at his ground, and Mob is talking.

"No no nonono I'm sorry I'm s-sorry. I didn't mean to. I'm s-sorry, M-Master. Please."

Reigen can feel warmth at his eyes and heat in his throat.

"I– I didn't mean to. Please, w-wake up... I can't–" He blinks, and Reigen can feel the warmth trickle down his face. Numbly, Reigen reaches his hand up, pads of his fingers landing just below his eye. It's wet.

A muffled sob. "Master Reigen?"

The kaleidoscopic wash of color is gone. Nearby rocks vibrate, but no longer float. The pressure is still staggering, and Reigen himself feels a little distant, foggy. But he can breathe. He does just that, and notices how much is body is shaking.

"R-Reigen?" Mob asks again.

Reigen swallows, regains control of his mouth.


Reigen lets Mob breathe, for them. Reigen manages to close their eyes. The darkness helps.

They stay like that, for a little while. A couple minutes, maybe. Reigen is not sure how much. He thinks he may have had a watch on at some point today but he can no longer feel it on his wrist. He refuses to open their eyes to check. It's not important.

Between one breath and another, Reigen shifts them into a sitting position. In the middle of the alley.
There are sirens in the distance. Again, not important.

He's not sure if the pressure in his head has gotten a little better or if he is simply getting used to it. Maybe he's just too exhausted to feel things as strongly anymore. Everything still kind of hurts though, and deciding that the closer to the ground they've gotten the better he's felt, Reigen lets their body tip sideways. The cracked pavement is nice and cool against the side of his face. A different sort of numbness is threatening to overtake him, but the press of ground helps him feel present.

The weight in his mind stirs. A bit hesitant, Reigen thinks. Pins and needles spread to his jaw, his lips.

"Master?"

He hums in response. Finally lets their eyes drift open. They can't see much of the wreckage from this angle. That's probably a good thing, Reigen thinks.

But, the prickling sensation persists, and there's a sense of concern hovering in the outskirts of his mind. Reigen tries to muster up an appropriate reply.

"I, um." He blinks and presses his lips together, trying to chase away the numbness. "I'm okay. I just-- I don't think my body was built for this," he says honestly. Wonders where his silver tongue had disappeared to. Probably the same place his energy had gone.

Mob seems very hesitant now, but a lot more controlled. The raw emotion has dissipated. Pins and needles prod once, twice, and then overtake Reigen's mouth, his arm.

"I'm sorry," Mob says, and grips their shirt tight in his hand. "This is my fault."

Reigen takes his voice back. "No, no." He flops over gracelessly onto their back. Wrestles back control of the arm, waves it about a little above their head, making pointed gestures. It kind of hurts. "This is not your fault. You did... you did what you had to. Saved my life back there, too. So, you know, thanks. For that." His mouth starts to feel a little numb, but Reigen continues to push on. "No listen. Don't-- don't go blaming yourself, okay? I'll figure this out."

Mob waits only a fraction of a second before speaking. "I can leave, if that would make it any better--"

"No no no, don't!" Reigen nearly bites his own tongue, wresting for control in the middle of a word like that. "I mean, I would probably *feel* better. But then I wouldn't be able to talk to you. And who knows what happens to, uh, disembodied spirits, if they're without a body. There might be a time limit to these sorts of things. It's too dangerous, Mob." Reigen wishes he could actually see his disciple, see his reactions, make sure he's okay.

"But this is dangerous."

"Well yes, the situation isn't that great, I'll admit it. But as long as we're careful, we should be okay," Reigen says. He thinks back to the evil spirit, the men, the gun. He *had* been careful, leading up to it all, and yet...

"I mean--" Mob again. Places a hand flat on their chest. "Dangerous for you."

Ah.

Reigen doesn't feel like he could honestly argue that. He *had* already nearly died, after all. And his head still feels about five times heavier than usual. Reigen also now knows for a fact that it only gets
worse the more worked-up Mob gets. All in all it's probably not all that healthy for him.

But. This is Mob. And he needs to keep Mob safe.

So Reigen shrugs their shoulders. His back hurts at the motion, but it's just part of the overall mess he's become. "Ehh, what's an extra soul here and there." He sort of waves a hand a little vaguely above himself. "It's just a little crowded, that's all."

"But Master," Mob starts to protest, but Reigen just kind of takes control of his body and sits up. The motion clearly surprises Mob enough to break his concentration. Reigen uses the opportunity to keep speaking.

"We'll just go find your body," he says, looks around the alley. "Find Dimple. Get you back where you belong. And then everything can go back to normal."

Mob waits until Reigen's done looking around before speaking.

"Are you– are you sure?"

Mob doesn't usually question Reigen's words. But given the situation, well. Reigen can't really blame him. He wonders, a little, how much their emotions bleed into one another. Whether Mob can feel the fear and uncertainty eating away at Reigen's thoughts. Reigen had gotten rather good at pretending – part of his job description, after all. But it would be an entirely different matter if he actually had to convince himself.

Reigen stands up, a little shakily. His muscles feel weak and overused. His legs tremble. His head throbs. Even so, he manages to put a smile on his face.

"Of course I'm sure," he lies.

The alley itself is quiet, but the sirens from before sound rather close now. Looking around at the admittedly severe destruction, Reigen realizes that they're probably headed here.

It's time to leave.

The ground has buckled and collapsed in some places, so it's slow going. He doesn't find his jacket, or his keys, but he does spot his phone after clearing a small mound. The screen is cracked something awful. Reigen stops to pick it up, then just slips it into his pants' pocket. He doesn't bother checking whether the thing still works. The answer would probably make him sad.

Reigen finds that he's doing most of the movement now, climbing out of the alley. Mob helps once, using his psychic powers to move a big chunk of wall that Reigen is too tired to scramble over. It's all pins and needles and cold again, for that brief moment. His head and hand aches.

"Is it always like that?" Reigen asks out loud, then relaxes his jaw and waits. This sharing-speaking thing really is weird.

"What do you mean?"

Reigen waves his hand a circular motion, partly to return sensation to it and partly to accompany his words. "Psychic power. Is is always cold, and... sharp?" And painful, he doesn't add. He's pretty sure it isn't supposed to hurt like that.

Mob – that mental weight that is him – shifts forward again and stays. "No...?" A pause. "I think it feels different to different people. Hanazawa always said it felt hot and dry, like a sunburn. And
Ritsu once told me that it was like a... a contraction. A muscle spasm."

Reigen blinks. They're out on the street now, and the wind is a little chilly without his jacket. "Oh. What about you then?"

Reigen can feel Mob hesitate. "It doesn't feel like anything."

The saying as natural as breathing comes to mind, and Reigen wonders what that might mean for Mob. "Oh, well that's alright. Must be nice."

There's a group of older teens across the street. Looking at them – him – strangely. Maybe even the alley behind him. The evening wind gusts again, and between the strange looks and the chill, Reigen remembers exactly what he must look like.

Ripped clothes. Cuts and bruises. Talking out loud to himself.

It probably doesn't lend itself to the best of impressions.

Reigen ducks his head and – more by instinct than anything – starts heading back towards the office. He doesn't really have a plan.

"Where are we going?" Mob asks. It's a good question.

"Not sure. Away from here at least." The sirens have stopped, though he can see flashing lights back where they came from. Reigen wonders what the police must think of the mess in the alley. He wonders what they might find.

The last thing they need is to get arrested.

The numbness returns to his mouth and jaw. "How are we going to find those men?"

Reigen shoves his hands in his pants' pockets, waiting until they've passed a couple women walking opposite of them before replying. "Well we need to get a lead, somehow." His right hand happens upon his phone. Ah.

He grabs it, brings it up next to his ear, earning a small spike of confusion from the weight inside his head. It makes him dizzy, for a brief moment, but it passes.

"Don't mind this," he says, tapping his index finger against the back of the phone. "Just pretending. Makes us looks a little less crazy. You don't happen to remember what that other car looked like, do you?"

There's a small moment of consideration. "Um, I think it was black? A dark blue."

"Ahh, that's too generic." Reigen turns the corner. "Damn. If only we had a name or something. Or a license plate." He draws his free hand through his hair, head still throbbing, and is disgusted to feel dirt and dried sweat. What he really needs right now is a shower and some sleep. Not to be running through the city in the middle of the night looking for murderers and kidnappers.

"I could try searching for other psychics," Mob says. Their voice sounds doubtful. "Widen my range as much as possible." There's a pause, but the persisting numbness tells Reigen that Mob isn't done yet. "It might hurt you again, though."

Ah. The pain and pressure is pretty awful, but it's an idea. Reigen taps the back of his phone a few times, thinking.
"I don't think those men were psychics," he says after a moment. "What would you search for? Your body?"

"Dimple."

"Oh, right." Reigen presses his lips together to help drive away the tingling sensation. "That little fart possessed you when you came to help me?"

His head bobs a couple times – Mob's nodding. The dizziness returns.

"Think he'd still be there?" he continues, blinking away the fuzziness at the edges of his vision. "I wouldn't be surprised if he abandoned ship."

"No," Mob says. "I trust him."

Reigen hums. It could work. A Dimple radar, of sorts. That thought brings another to mind.

"Oh!" he says. "I might be able to track your phone!"

His mouth tingles. "How?"

"Ahh, GPS." Reigen pulls a bit of a face and rubs the back of his neck. "I had something, uh, installed in your phone. A couple years ago. Haven't used it it ages."

The presence in his mind seems to get a bit heavier, but Reigen's voice sounds no different when Mob uses it to simply say, "Oh. I didn't know."

Reigen glances around. Doesn't see anyone. He pulls the phone away from his ear. A couple shards of screen are missing from the bottom, where the cracks congregate.

"Hmm, that is," Reigen says. "If this thing still works."

In that moment, much to Reigen's surprise, the cracked screen lights up. It is the only warning they get before the phone begins buzzing. Loudly.

His phone is not broken. Apparently.

And it's also ringing.

"Um." Reigen isn't entirely sure if it's Mob or him that says it. But he knows for certain that he's the one to swear softly under his breath when he sees the caller ID on the phone's screen.

The incoming call is from Mob's phone.

Chapter End Notes

(Knowing is still growing, so once again any feedback on writing is cool stuff. Also if you have any genuine questions about the plot or situation, feel free to ask. I'll answer what I can.)
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Phone calls, lost time, and brief conversations.

Chapter Notes

Who's ready for Mobday? (hint: not Reigen)

(I am utterly amazed at all the comments?? First off, the overall enthusiasm is stunning, and I really hope that I can live up to the expectations. Secondly, you're all asking exactly the right questions and it's making me nervous. I mean, it's a good kind of nervous, like "holy shit these readers are thinking and have theories", but just like. Wow... I hope I don't disappoint.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They stop, nearly at the corner of the street.

"This could either be good," Reigen says, staring down the ringing phone. "Or very, very bad."

The pressure in his head grows.

"Could be Dimple," Mob says, his words quiet in Reigen's voice and not at all convincing. "He could have gotten away."

Reigen blinks. His head is feeling heavier by the second. There's no way to tell for sure what state Mob is in, but the press of pain is enough to cause concern. Reigen wonders what it must feel like for Mob. He wonders if this is normal.

The fractured, blinking display of his cellphone prompts him back to reality.

"Could be Dimple," he echoes. The phone continues buzzing, and Reigen realizes that if he doesn't answer now he'll quite likely miss the call.

He taps answer. Holds the phone up to his ear.

"Hello?" he says.

At first all they can hear is a soft static – enough ambient noise to convince Reigen that the call hasn't been dropped. And then–

"Reigen Arataka, you are still alive."

The voice is distinctly not Mob's, and that in itself kills any hope Reigen had of it being Dimple. The man – because it is a man, on the other line – doesn't even wait for a response before continuing.
"That is unfortunate. You are the first psychic to overthrow Bdosheb's possession, but do not think that it means it's good news for you."

"Where is Mob?" Reigen demands.

The man acts as if he hasn't heard him. "It only means that you have denied yourself a peaceful and painless death. If you hadn't resisted we wouldn't be in this mess. You are only causing yourself more suffering." A pause. "More suffering for those around you."

"Where." Reigen emphasizes his words, feeling sick to his stomach. "Is. Mob." The pressure in his head is bordering on excruciating. There's a sort of rushing in his ears.

"I hope you are familiar with the lower industrial district." Reigen is being entirely ignored. He kind of wants to throw his phone, out into the street, as far away as possible. "The third warehouse past the southern entrance. You will come there, alone, in exactly twelve hours."

Reigen's grip tightens, his fingers feel cold.

"Why?" he spits out. But he knows, knows exactly why. Can tell ransom demands when he hears them.

"Why else, Reigen Arataka?" A pause, more ambient noise. It sounds like far-off nighttime traffic. "Twelve hours, no more, no less. We hold no grudge against your child. However in order to stop a psychic as dangerous as you we will not hesitate to hurt him. All we want is a fair exchange. Your life, for his."

Words usually come so easily to Reigen, but for once he finds himself at a loss. Numb in a way that has nothing to do with Mob's presence in his mind. This – everything, this entire afternoon – has been far too much. He doesn't know what to do.

When he feels actual, tangible numbness at his lips Reigen doesn't even hesitate to let Mob speak.

"Why are you doing this?" Mob asks with Reigen's voice.

There is a beat of silence.

"Because you are dangerous." The man's voices is weighted down with indisputable conviction. "Unchecked. Uncontrolled. Your kind bears a power that can not be explained. A power that is unmatched, except by the few of us who know how." The words flow with the ease of practice and repetition. "The police does not know of your existence. The government does not care. You walk among us like live grenades, just waiting for someone to pull the pin. People should not have to live in that kind of fear, Reigen Arataka. That is why we do this."

Reigen stands there, near the corner of the street. His chest feels hollowed out, his head aches, and he thinks for sure that this time he will vomit. The pins and needles remain at his mouth. But they also spread. Reigen doesn't fight it. He lets Mob take control of his voice, his eyes, his hands.

"You're wrong," Mob says, clutching at the phone. The words sound distant to Reigen's own ears. Flimsy and weak. "You don't know what--"

The line goes dead. There's no click or dial tone. Only a sudden absence of noise. Mob's words catch in their throat, then finish pitifully.

"–you're talking about." And then even softer. "We don't... don't scare people. We just..."
Reigen feels detached, and a little dizzy. It's becoming difficult to tell what numbness is Mob and what numbness is his own. He's not entirely sure what is happening. It feels a little bit like floating, but mostly like being very, very lost.

Mob's pressure is there, barely fluctuating, still in control of most of their body. Still holding the phone next to their ear.

The phone gives two quick vibrations, which Reigen feels but does not quite comprehend.

It's Mob that blinks their eyes. Once, twice, pulls the phone away and looks at it.

It's a text, Reigen notes vaguely, slowly. From Mob's phone. A photo. The open trunk of a car.

In it lies Mob's body, on its side, staring at the camera with angry eyes. A tapped mouth. Wrists, knees, and feet tied. There's a scattering of indistinct symbols – drawn in black marker – on the body's exposed skin. The face, the hands. Sigils, Reigen thinks blankly. He wonders what they might do.

"Hey look," Reigen tries to say, only to find that he doesn't have control of his mouth. He tries again. "Hmmlook. Dimple is, ah, having as bad a time as us."

The phone buzzes again, another text. This time it's a short message. Reigen's eyes skip through the words. Mob must be moving them. Reigen sees the letters, the numbers, but doesn't really make much sense of them.

Mob easily lifts control of their voice.

"Master," he says, still staring down at the phone. "I think something's wrong with you." A pause, the words slow and distant. "You... you might be going into shock."

Oh, Reigen thinks. That would... that would probably explain things. The cold. And the shaking. And... and maybe the thud-thud-pounding in his head.

He tries saying as much, but really only manages, "cold."

He loses a little time, then. The street corner that had been still dozens of feet ahead if them is now at his back. His legs are moving – a little unsteadily, steps careful and measured. His arms are crossed tight across his ribs, fingers digging painfully into his sides.

Mob keeps them walking, passing street lamps and buildings, looking down at their feet.

Reigen's been drunk before, but this sort of unsteadiness feels entirely different. Less dipping and weaving and more sudden, abrupt shifts in reality.

"Where," Reigen tries, remembering just in time to focus on wanting to talk. "Where are we going?"

He can really feel the trembling now. His body's shaking all over, shivers wracking his frame.

"Your office?" Mob replies. "You were h-headed this way. Before."

Their arms tighten around them, almost as if to try and keep the cold at bay. Thoughts skip though Reigen's mind, hazy and indistinct, and the only one that manages to take root is inconsequential and unimportant.

"Phone?" Reigen asks. He can't feel it in his hands.
"Pants' pocket."

Another skip in time. They've stopped moving. Reigen blinks, looks up, and they're in front of his office building. The trek down the street is no more than a blur.

They walk up the stairs. Stop outside the office door. Reigen feels as if his thoughts are moving a little faster, the weightless fog clearing in patches. He remembers a fraction of a second before Mob tries the door that it is in fact locked.

The handle clinks gently, but does not turn.

Mob makes a soft, frustrated noise in the back of their throat while Reigen takes control of his arm and hand. He gives the door handle a couple tugs, wiggles it around as much as possible. It holds fast. On any other occasion, Reigen would have been happy by this fact. His office is secure.

Right now it feels like the final nail in the coffin.

"Your keys?" Mob asks, and then. "Also Master are you feeling any better?"

Reigen heaves a sigh, sort of fist-bumps the door.

"I feel like shit," he says. "And my keys are back in that alley. Probably."

He feels pins and needles hesitantly retreating from his legs, his other arm. Weight returns to his muscles and lessens from his head. It leaves him feeling dizzier than before. Reigen lets himself tip forwards just slightly, forehead gently thudding against the wooden door. He closes his eyes.

"Maybe," Mob starts, voice reverberating in the small between their face and the surface of the door. "Maybe I should leave."

"Leave?" Reigen asks before the context of that statement has a chance to catch up. When it does, his breath seems to catch in his throat. He's suddenly imagining that faint wisp of spirit – the one that Mob becomes during an out-of-body experience. He imagines it getting fainter and fainter until–

"No," Reigen manages. "Bad idea."

"But Master–"

Reigen snatches control of his voice. "Nope, not gonna happen Mob."

The pins and needles return in full force. "I'm worried about you."

It sounds fast and desperate and Reigen doesn't like it at all. He places his palm flat against the door and pushes himself away. "It's okay, I'm fine," he says through still-numb lips. He opens his eyes and stares at the door, tries imagining Mob in front of him. "Look, unless this is hurting you," he continues, fingers tapping his chest. "I want you to stay where I know you'll be okay. I'll be fine, really! It's only for, what is it, twelve hours right?" He tries pitching his voice a bit lighter, aiming for nonchalance. Instead it just sounds breathless.

Twelve hours, he thinks. Except... Reigen's hand fumbles at his pant's pocket for his phone.

"Speaking of which," he says. "How long..."

His phone lights up, showing the time through its cracked screen. It's 9:52 p.m.

"The man called around nine thirty," Mob says. "And the texts came right after." The numbness
stays at their mouth, as if Mob has more to say. But no further words come.

Reigen purses his lips to chase away the tingling sensation.

"Okay, right. I remember that much," he says. He waves his hand dismissively, as is habit. "Kind of. Time got a little weird. I remember the picture."

There's a twinge of pain in his wrist, and another duller ache at his shoulder. Reigen grimaces and stops.

"The man sent another text," Mob says. Their voice sounds unhappy. "It had the, um, trade information."

Reigen checks his inbox, a bitter taste in his mouth. The photo is there, followed by a small message, words serving as a reminder of the place, the terms, the time. Reigen breathes in deeply, tries to blink away that aching feeling from his eyes, and shuts off the phone's display. He slips it back in his pocket.

He then stares at the locked door. Thinks longingly of the small, cramped bathroom and old couch.

"Do you think you could..." Reigen hesitates, makes a vague round-about gesture with his sort-of-okay hand. "You know. Break the lock? With your powers." The thought of repairs makes him cringe, but he's kind of desperate.

Mob hesitates, and then shifts forwards. He takes not just their mouth this time but their eyes and brows. It's enough to form a frown.

"Um... I've never tried, before." The pins and needles prod at his arm. Reigen lets Mob take it. "Are you sure? I might break it."

"My apartment is another half hour away," Reigen says. "And I'm not walking us over to your place." A pause. "Ritsu would probably kill me. So yes, I'm sure."

His fingers splay out and his palm presses against the wood, right near the door's handle.

"I'm not sure how the lock works," his voice says.

"Just force it," Reigen tacks on right at the end of Mob's words. He's sure that between the two of them, speaking with the same voice, they must sound ridiculous.

There's that burst of sharp, cold pain again. Shoulder, elbow, wrist, and then his palm. The door slams open with a loud crack of splintering wood.

Reigen's head droops, and he blinks rapidly to try and dispel the spots appearing in his vision. The pads of his fingers sting. The door creaks as it slowly swings back their way. Reigen takes a moment and breathes. He feels really, unbelievably tired.

"Master?" Mob asks.

Reigen manages a lackluster wave of his hand. The twinge of pain is more pronounced this time.

"I'm fine," he says. He stumble in to the room, turning to close the door as much as possible.

The office looks exactly as they had left it. The lights are on, the window's open, his laptop is closed. The small coffee table is still next to the couch, adjusted as such so Mob could work on his homework.
The atmosphere, usually comforting and bland, feels different now. Reigen takes another deep breath, flicks the light switch, and heads over to the window.

"What are you doing?"

Reigen slides the window shut, flips the latch, pulls the blinds. His arms ache.

"Closing up shop," he says, trying to ignore the exhaustion pulling at his limbs. "Making it look like no one's here."

He shuffles back towards the little sitting area and grabs the dirty coffee mug off the table. The couch is tempting but Reigen turns away and heads to the tiny washroom.

"Why?"

"Because," Reigen replies tiredly. "Bad guys lie." He turns on the sink, rinses the mug out. "I know they said twelve hours, but I wouldn't put it pass them to try something in the meantime."

He does a sloppy job of cleaning the mug. There's still a ring of old coffee near the bottom, but Reigen fills it up with water anyways. Gulps it down harshly. It soothes his throat but sloshes uncomfortably in his stomach. He fills up the mug up again anyway before catching a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror.

Reigen stops, straightening up and blinks a few times. He looks...

He looks pretty bad.

He reaches over and flicks the light switch in the washroom, and the harsh florescence does nothing to help his appearance. His hair is clumped together in places, from dirt, and sweat, and in one place, from blood. His face is grimy, a couple dried tear tracks leading down his cheeks. His eyes are bloodshot, squinting in the light, and there's a smattering a dried blood under his nose and down around the corner of his mouth.

Reigen doesn't realize that Mob has taken control of their hand until he sees it moving in the mirror. He tries ignoring the sense of vertigo as he watches it hesitantly pad at the crusted blood, the few scrapes, the spot on his head where it's matted and red. It hurts. The gentle press of fingers makes the spots sting, makes his headache worsen. Reigen closes his eyes.

"You're hurt." Mob's words catch in Reigen's throat, far softer than Reigen ever speaks.

Reigen swallows and attempts to take back control of his arm. "I'm fine," he says.

"You keep saying that," Mob replies, voice rising. The pins and needles refuse to leave, spreading up his neck to his face. His eyes open under Mob's control. "But you're not."

Their mouth seems to be neutral territory – or, at the very least, Reigen can still speak. Which he does, a hint of agitation to his voice. "Mob, it's nothing, really. I figured you could feel it. It's just–"

His head tilts up, again under Mod's control. His eyes peer down the length of his face, looking at his neck in the reflection of the mirror. There's one small scrape, nothing too bad. The hand – Mob's – pokes it, then moves to the collar of his shirt. Pulls at his tie.

"I can't feel it," Mob says, making Reigen look down. "Everything's numb. It's just... pressure." The forgotten coffee mug rattles against the counter, water sloshing. The pressure in his head grows.

"That's why I kept asking if you were okay."
Mob continues pulling at the tie, loosening it, but not getting anywhere with only one hand. Reigen can feel the pins and needles prodding at his other arm, but he tightens his mental hold on it. Moves that that arm, in fact, up to his other one. Clasps his own wrist.

"What are you doing, Mob?" he asks, trying to keep his voice steady. The pressure hurts.

Mob blinks their eyes and looks back into the mirror. The mug continues shaking, the hanging hand-towel jolts and sways. The lights flicker, once.

"Where else are you hurt?" Mob asks in return.

Mob’s powers don't quite manifest visually, but Reigen can feel the chill spreading across his skin. He tries not to feel too alarmed. His reflection looks like that of a stranger, messy and frantic. Reigen kind of wants to close his eyes, again, to block out the image. But Mob’s the one controlling them at the moment.

Instead Reigen manages a deep breath and tries to stay calm.

"It's not too bad," he says. "Honestly." He releases his wrist, and reaches out to steady the shaking mug. The lights flicker again, but then settle. "My head's the worst, definitely. And I'm really, really tired. Everything else is just... superficial."

The buzzing numbness doesn't relent. "Where else are you hurt?"

"I don't--" Reigen sighs, and finds that his apprehension begins to fade. "I'm not sure. A couple places. Not everything was blocked by the barriers. Back then."

The hand under Mob's control once again starts tugging at his shirt collar and tie. "How bad?"

"Gosh Mob, can you just--" Reigen grabs at that wrist again, now feeling absolutely absurd fighting himself like this. He shakes the arm that Mob has claimed. "Look, give me this back. I'll take off my shirt. You're just making me uncomfortable struggling like this."

His eyes blink, slowly, and he realizes that their control has finally been relinquished. It's followed by a prickling feeling, spreading from the tips of his fingers back up through his shoulder and neck. It leaves in its wake a rush of sensation. His hand clenches, finger nails digging into soft skin, and it takes a moment before Reigen can convince the muscles to relax.

"Thanks," Reigen says, a little distracted. His head is pounding far worse now, and he lets both arms – now fully under his control – drop down to hold the edge of the sink. It helps keep him steady. "I'm sorry," Mob says at length. "This is... this is your body and I shouldn't--"

"It's fine," Reigen stresses, managing to cut in at Mob's hesitation. "Look. It's... this is weird enough as is. No need to make it awkward." The pressure lessens some, now that Mob has retreated. "You-- you should have said something, you know. About not feeling anything. I thought we were both in pain here." The cool sink feels good against his hands. Reigen wonders if something has happened to them, too.

"You should have said something about being in pain."

Reigen ducks his head and closes his eyes. He doesn't know if he should concede that one. "Does it feel weird," he says instead, starting to loosen his tie. "When you've been using your psychic powers?"
He can feel his brow furrow slightly. Knows that it's Mob doing it. "Not really." A pause. "Why?"

His tie gets discarded on the bathroom floor. Reigen reluctantly opens his eyes and starts on the buttons of his shirt. One has already come undone at some point, and another button seems to be gone entirely.

"No reason," he replies, and feels guilty at the lack of honesty. He decides to give a partial truth as compensation. "Some of the, uh, bigger stuff kinda stings. When you have me doing it." His fingers feel slow and clumsy, trying to poke the small buttons through the holes. "I said it felt cold, right? Well it's kinda like that, but also like, um, frostbite. And my head hurts, sometimes."

"Why haven't--" Mob starts, pauses briefly. "Why haven't you said anything? I didn't... want to hurt you."

Reigen gives up on the remainder of the buttons and just pulls the shirt over his head. It too ends up on the floor.

"Because you used your powers to save me," Reigen replies, breathing in and out slowly. "Or when I asked you to. I don't want you to feel guilty about that."

He looks up at the mirror.

A fresh bruise is revealed at his shoulder, extending part-way down his upper arm. It's red and swollen, with the first few hints of purple. Reigen rolls his shoulders experimentally and winces at the dull throb of pain. He doesn't remember getting it, thinks it might be from the tumbling stone and bricks.

"Better than being dead," he says softly, mostly to himself. He feels a twinge from the pressure in his head.

There are a handful cuts and bruises on his forearms, also likely from the barrage of rocks. His chest and stomach only have a couple scrapes, but when Reigen turns to check his back in the mirror there's another large spot of red and swelling. This time with some smeared, dried blood.

Reigen can feel the shift pins and needles, can feel them settle into his throat and mouth. But Mob doesn't end up saying anything.

He turns on the tap and washes up as best as possible. His wrist still sends spikes of sharp pain if he bends it a certain way – it's probably sprained. It makes washing his hair a little difficult, but he manages. He uses the hand towel to scrub away the dirt and grime and blood. It leaves the bruises feeling tender and the cuts raw and red, but Reigen feels considerably better being clean.

There's an old t-shirt in the closet by the door, as well as his windbreaker. Reigen puts on the shirt and then trudges back to the couch.

"We're spending the night here?" Mob asks once they've sat down. The mug of water has migrated back to the coffee table, where it now rests next to Reigen's phone, a charger Reigen had lifted from his desk, and bruised apple Reigen had found next to the charger.

"We have twelve--" Reigen leans forwards and checks his phone. "Just under eleven hours to kill. So yes." He yawns, leans back on the couch, and kicks off his shoes. "We need to come up with a plan. And I really, really need some sleep."

"Won't it be dangerous?" Mob asks. "You said those men might try something."
Reigen licks his lips. "Well yes, maybe. But I'm a light sleeper." He gives a tired wave of his hand. "It'll be fine. I even set alarms on my phone to go off every hour. We won't fall into anything more than a light doze."

There's a bit of silence, then. Reigen plugs in the charger, his phone. Considers the apple but decides that he'll leave that decision for tomorrow morning. His eyes feel dry and gritty, and he's just lying down when his mouth goes numb again.

"You will say something, if you get hurt again. Right?"

The couch is old and not terribly comfy, but Reigen is beyond caring. He hums vaguely in response.

"Master, please."

Reigen shift a little onto his side, taking the pressure off the bruised back. His eyes stay closed. "Yes, of course," he mumbles.

He can feel the pins and needles spread, hesitantly, but enough to make his eyes open. Reigen knows he could fight it, but he doesn't.

"What is it, Mob?" he asks into the darkness of his office.

Mob releases their eyes and retreats once more. "I'm... worried," he says. "If this--" Pins and needles at their arm, moving it to tap gently at their chest. "--is hurting you then I don't... we shouldn't wait."

Reigen blinks a few times, slowly. "You're not hurting me," he says. At this point he feels that it's probably true enough. The psychic powers are one thing, but the pressure— the weight is no longer unbearable. It's just... part of what they are now. Things only gets bad when Mob's emotions flare.

"But my powers--"

"I don't care about your powers," Reigen cuts over his own voice, biting his tongue in the process. "I care about— about you being safe. You need a body, Mob. You need your body."

Mob purses their lips. "We know where they are, now," he says softly. "Where there will be. We could call the police. Or I could go alone."

Reigen breathes deeply. "No."

"But Master--"

"They said they would hurt you, Mob!" His voice sounds loud in the small office. Reigen closes his eyes and wraps his arms tight around his chest. "If they think... If they think I'm doing anything except what they told me to do. I can't, okay. I can't, and— and you can't, either. It's too dangerous."

There's a few seconds of silence.

"You might die," Mob says.

Reigen hunches in, trying to fit his legs on the too-small couch. "Yeah. And I'm worried you might die too."

The silence stretches, and Reigen finds himself relaxing despite the sick feeling in his chest. He turns over again, ignoring the ache in his back, shoulder, and head. He stares up at the ceiling.
"Listen Mob," he says after a long pause. "I will... I'll let you know. If anything gets too bad." He breathes in and out, slowly, waiting to see if the pins and needles return. "Just don't— don't try and go do it yourself, okay?"

The pressure shifts slightly in his head, feels a little heavier.

"If you say so, Master."

Reigen sighs and closes his eyes once more.

He thinks about saying goodnight, but by the time he's decided to do so he's already fallen into a fitful sleep.

Chapter End Notes

(Right, so. Request time: I struggled in this chapter to write those sorts of scene transitions where like, time passes, but you don't actually have a hard break (like at the ends of chapters). So for example, characters finishing a conversation, then moving somewhere else, without there being too much description of the actual *finishing a conversation and moving* process. (I'm bad at describing this but do you get what I mean?) Anyways, basically what I'm requesting – if it's not too much trouble – is some feedback on that sort of stuff. Like, if you happened to notice something too jarring or awkward or whatnot. I would really appreciate it!)
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Alarms and phone calls.

(Or alternatively, a bad situation gets worse.)

Chapter Notes

This chapter is "good enough", even though that doesn't feel very "good" to me. So, you know, sorry.

On another note, thank you so so much for the specific feedback last chapter. I haven't gotten a chance to reply to you all but I really appreciate the different comments and suggestions. Y'all are the coolest.

(The rating for this story went up because someone apparently wanted to swear. A lot.)

The first time his phone alarm sounds, Reigen jolts awake, eyes blinking wide.

He then proceeds to lie on the couch, waiting for his heart to stop pounding. He feels no less tired, and is almost convinced that no time has passed.

But a check of his phone confirms the hour gone – cracked screen now reading 11:45 p.m. – and so Reigen sits up slowly and rubs his eyes.

His head throbs steadily with each heartbeat, but the pressure in his skull remains a fixed constant. Reigen thinks about calling out to Mob, but doesn't. He's not even sure if Mob is awake. In the end Reigen winds up looking across the darkened office, staring at the sad, not-quite-closed door. He does so for a solid minute.

Nothing happens.

Already questioning his decision to set these alarms, Reigen yawns and turns back to the couch. He falls asleep within seconds.

The second time he wakes up, he has the sneaking suspicion his eyes may have already been open. He stares at the ceiling just long enough for the phone alarm to kick into double-time, and then rolls over to silence it. He can just barely see the door from this angle, so he glares at it, silently bemoaning the ruined frame and his lost keys. The seconds tick by in silence, and the distant late-night traffic threatens to lull him back to sleep.

It ends up doing just that.

Reigen misses the third alarm – or at the very least doesn't remember waking up to turn it off.
The fourth time it goes, not only is Reigen in a different position, but he's holding the mug of water in his hand. Reigen blinks lethargically, sits up, and pulls the mug into his lap. The rim is still wet. Reigen sits there, finally dismisses the alarm, and then breathes deeply.

"Mob," he says at length. "Have you gotten any sleep at all?"

His voice sounds too-loud in the quiet of the early morning hours. Mob somehow manages to pitch that same voice at an entirely appropriate volume.

"Yes. A little."

Reigen sighs. "Go to sleep, Mob."

They end up sitting there. In the quiet and gloom of the office. Reigen wonders if he would be able to know – if he'd feel something, should Mob actually fall asleep. He could probably just ask, he thinks. At this point Mob probably knows.

Really, Reigen figures Mob probably knows most things concerning his psychic powers. It shows, in the way Mob uses them, in the way he talks to others about them. Mob's grown as a student. Has likely grown out of being a student. Reigen's thought as much for a while now, no matter how much Mob still continues calls him Master.

So yes, Reigen could ask. But he doesn't want to break the silence. It's as close to comfortable he's been these past few hours.

The office continues to remain undisturbed, and Reigen lets himself relax. He takes a small sip from the mug. The water is almost gone.

Reigen closes his eyes.

He thinks he feels his arm move at some point, the cool press of ceramic leaving his hands. But then again, he could have just imagined it. He falls asleep still sitting, hands folded in his lap.

The fifth time his alarm goes off, something immediately feels wrong.

The sensation triggers a cold rush, waking him up entirely. Reigen swallows, blinks a few times, and peers through the darkness.

The door's still mostly closed. The office looks normal. And Reigen feels no more injured than before. Nothing prompts an urgent reaction, and so Reigen continues to sit, trying to control his breathing.

Something's off – he knows – and yet...

He silences the phone's alarm before it can reach its third go-round, and sits there blinking rapidly.

His head still aches, and the steady throbbing hasn't gone away. But–

The pressure feels different.

Reigen's breath catches in his throat. "Mob," he whispers with what little air he has left. His head is the lightest it's been all night, and Reigen is terrified. He sits there, eyes wide, and for that brief moment he is absolutely, entirely convinced that Mob has left.

Reigen folds his arms over his head. "Mob, I swear to god..."
It takes a good deal of panic and many muffled swears before Reigen stumbles upon a different realization. Considers perhaps that he's overreacting. Maybe.

Probably.

The pressure in his head is still there, he reasons. It takes a bit of mental prodding to find it, and the ambiguity comes from the fact that it's so much softer now. So much more indistinct. But it's still there. Reigen sits back, finally, looks up at the ceiling. He tries in vain to ease the tension in his back and neck. His heart still pounds far too quickly, but it's no longer the rabbit-fast rhythm of fear.

The pressure is still there, he thinks. It's still there. Mob is still there. It's just... different. Loose and fluid and almost comforting.

Reigen is, all things considered, a little surprised that Mob is still asleep.

"You must have been tired," Reigen whispers to himself.

Mob is asleep. This is what it feels like. That conclusion chases away the final dregs of fear. His head-space still feels crowded, but it's quieter and softer now. The thing that is Mob is a bit more unidentifiable. A bit less restrained. Reigen lets his eyes close.

He wonders... what would happen. What that inky, fluid pressure would do. If he were to give the unidentifiable a few mental pokes.

Reigen opens his eyes.

No no nope. Bad idea. Tempting, yes. But bad. Mob needs his rest. And no matter how strange his unconsciousness might be, Reigen refuses to be the one to disturb it.

He gathers his thoughts, turns away from the pressure, and resolutely points his focus outwards.

The sixth time his alarm goes off, Reigen isn't really asleep. He's lying on his side, curled up so as to fit fully between the two armrests. The pressure in his head is still all liquid-like and hazy, and Reigen blinks his eyes open with more than a little reluctance.

He reaches out to silence the phone, and misses.

It takes a few blinks and a harsh rub of his eyes to finally chase away the lingering double-vision. By the time he manages to turn off the alarm he can feel the stirrings of consciousness from the weight inside his head.

"Damn," he whispers, pressure slowly but surely increasing.

A distant sense of confusion sparks up within him – foreign and not-Reigen – along with something close to distress. Reigen blinks, and keeps his limbs limp and joints malleable. The pins and needles appear, a little haphazardly, first down his neck, then his eyes, the corners of their mouth. Reigen's fingers twitch, stretch and extend, then contract into relaxed fists. The confusion spikes and swirls and then–

Then.

It's as if a wall descends. A blanket, not to comfort but to smother. The confusion shrivels up, expect for the smallest inkling that Reigen wouldn't have known to look for if he hadn't known the source. The distress gets blocked off entirely. The pressure hardens, the pins and needles retreat, and Reigen feels his chest expand with a sharp breath that does not come from himself.
Reigen sits there, exhales slowly, and gives it a few moments before trying to speak.


Then remaining bit of confusion dissipates. Numbness spreads up his throat and jaw to their lips and Mob hums.

"Morning, Master."

Reigen breathes easy and tilts his head back, staring at the ceiling. "Ah, it's not quite morning yet." The pressure is heavy once again in his mind. "You feeling alright?"

"Yes?" Mob has them swallow, and Reigen can feel their brow furrow. "How about you?" Mob asks, turning Reigen's question around.

Reigen tries to discern any sort of lie in Mob's answer, but everything feels as, well... as normal as it had last evening. Which is to say it felt weird and heavy, but it didn't necessarily feel bad.

Reigen just didn't like that awful sense of repression that had come about with Mob's awakening.

"I'm fine," Reigen finally says. And this time he knows he feels the immediate spike of muted displeasure. "Alright, alright, my head still hurts, this couch is killing my back, and I'm still pretty tired. Is that what you want to hear?"

"Um, no?" Mob replies, hesitates. "But... thank you, for telling me?"

"Yeah, don't mention it. And, uh, I got a question for you," he starts, pauses. His neck and lips go a bit numb. Mob uses them to hum, short and curious.

Reigen sits there and realizes he has absolutely no idea how to word his concerns. He can't exactly go out and say, what's wrong with your emotions. And he's not even sure if there is anything wrong. Mob had always been a bit reserved. Maybe this was just... part of it.

He blinks, purses his lips, and crinkles his nose. Then promptly decides to ask another trivial question.

"Um, I was wondering what exactly it feels like, in ah, here." He taps his head once, gently, so as to not aggravate his headache. "What do I feel like?"

"Big," Mob says after prolonged consideration. "You're tall. It's nice."

"Ah... Not really what I was getting at."

"Oh." The numbness persists. "What were you asking about then?"

Reigen waves his hand, and surprised to find that he's smiling. "Nothing, doesn't really matter."

He gets up then, to go refill the mug, feeling a bit better. He hadn't really noticed the office getting brighter, but it's now easy to see the first weak rays of sunlight filtering through the blinds. He knows it's still early, but the sunrise serves as a bit of a dampener.

They need to figure out a plan.

"You should try to get some more rest," Reigen says once he's settled back down. "There's still a couple more hours."
The small spike of emotion is more prominent this time. His heart picks up pace, and his breaths get a bit short. It feels like panic, watered-down and suppressed.

Mob presses forwards. "A couple hours?"

Reigen pushes back. "No no, there's more time than that." He tries moving his hand but finds his arm has gone numb. "I just meant until we had to really wake up."

Mob ignores his words, reaching forwards to grab Reigen's phone. His heart's still thud-thud-thudding no matter how much Reigen wills it not to. He lets his eyes focus down at their hands, lets Mob see the time on the screen. It's just after 5 a.m.

"Oh," Mob has them say.

The panic dissipates, but doesn't fade entirely. Reigen starts to wonder what part of it is simply his own growing dread.

"What are we going to do?" Mob asks, still looking at the phone.

Reigen closes their eyes. He doesn't reply. It's true that they need to come up with a plan. But the thought makes his head hurt, so Reigen chooses to avoid it. Mob apparently doesn't.

"Um, Master," Mob prompts. Reigen feels a gently tap-tap on their chest.

Reigen breathes in and out slowly, then blinks open their eyes.

"We won't do anything to hurt anyone," he starts. It's easier to begin with the kinds of phrases he's said time and time again. "You're not allowed to use your psychic powers against other people."

"I know," Mob says, mistaking Reigen's hesitation for a deliberate pause. "I won't."

Reigen swallows and nods their head. "Right, good. Because it would be bad to hurt people. And it would be dangerous. It's not our job to stop them."

Reigen can feel Mob's concern, drifting faintly in the outskirts of his mind.

"But they're hurting people," Mob starts. "Shouldn't we--"

"No," Reigen interrupts, hating the feeling of talking over Mob's words, lingering numbness making his tongue heavy. "Mm, sorry. What I mean is, we can let someone else can deal with stopping those men. Our job is a rescue mission. Get your body, get Dimple, get out. That's it."

"How?" Mob stresses.

How indeed.

"Easy," Reigen lies. Because he can't admit he has no idea. Mob needs better than that. "I'm going to just walk right up, like they asked. Make them lower their guard."

"And then?" Mob prompts, and Reigen senses the smallest trickle of fear.

And then," he echoes. Smiles. Reigen always smiles when he's lying through his teeth. "I'll distract them. You know how good I am at that. It just takes some fancy talking. I'm going to give you--" He sort of points vaguely out into the space in front of them. "--enough time to go find your body. You'll have to be quick, though, because I won't be able to distract them forever. I'm sure Dimple will help you. We... we'll all meet up outside, after. Whoever makes it out first can call the police."
"But–" The trickle of fear increases, as does the pressure in Reigen's head. "You... you'll be in danger. Just like last night."

"We'll both be in danger," Reigen counters smoothly. "But don't worry. We have justifiable self defence, remember. So if someone attacks you, you must promise me you'll use your psychic barriers. And me..." Here Reigen swallows dryly. "I'm good at surprising people. And I know when it's best to run away. They'll expect me to stay and... and comply. But– when I'm sure that you're safe. When they least expect it, I'll run."

He blinks, then forces another smile and sort of holds up a pointed finger as if he's found the singular solution.

"I don't–" Mob says, stops. "If I leave you how are you going to protect yourself?"

"I'll be fine," he says without a second thought. And then softer, "I'll be ready this time. It's not your job to protect me, Mob. You need to worry about yourself first."

The assurance comes naturally, but feels just as flimsy as every line that had come before it.

"I– Okay," Mob says. He sounds tired, and not at all satisfied. "Alright."

Reigen ends up pulling his legs onto the couch, wrapping his arms around his knees. The pose feels a little childish, but he doesn't care. It helps keep the fear at bay.

"We can plan more, later," he says. "We have time."

They don't say anything, after that. The office gets lighter around them, and Reigen curses the dwindling hours. Sleep does not come to either of them.

The seventh time Reigen's phone goes off, it isn't his alarm.

"Your phone's ringing," Mob says unnecessarily.

Bright little vibrations, entirely at odds with the sinking feeling of dread. It's with trembling fingers that Reigen picks up the phone.

He looks at the screen, and his breath rushes out in a sigh of relief. The caller is some number Reigen doesn't recognize. A telemarketer, probably. Or a wrong number.

"It's too early for this," Reigen mumbles, staring down at the display with bitter resentment. His heart's still racing and he has absolutely no intentions of answering the call.

He is therefore is entirely unprepared to stop Mob from surging forwards and mashing the answer button. Pins and needles blossom and Mob is there – in front and in control, pressing the phone to their face, using their voice to shout–

"Ritsu?"

Reigen swears his heart stops.

"Ritsu, is everyth–"

"You fucking asshole!" yells the voice on the other line, cutting off Mob's words. "Where the hell is my brother?"

The voice is young, and loud, and very, very angry.
It's definitely Ritsu.

"Wh-what?" Mob stutters. Reigen tries to push back, to take control, but Mob is very present and shockingly unrelenting.

"My brother," Ritsu's voice is fire and venom. "I swear to god if anything's happened..."

"Ah, n-no," Mob says, and Reigen's voice sounds so very wrong with Mob's word. So very not-Reigen. "I'm– ah, M-Mob's... okay."

This is bad. The pressure has quickly tipped the scale to overwhelming. Reigen struggles to focus his attention on regaining one thing, tries for his mouth, but pushing away the pins and needles is a monumental effort.

"Bullshit," Ritsu spits. "He never came home."

Mob swallows, blinks rapidly. "Ah, that... that's because–"

Ritsu's breath is loud and harsh in the phone's speaker. "He hasn't answered his phone either! And Nii-san always answers his phone!"

This is really bad. The pins and needles at his mouth finally give way, just for a moment. Their eyes are wide and Mob has them clutching at the phone.

"He's okay, he's fine," Reigen manages to say. His words are fast and just the slightest bit slurred from the pressing numbness. "His phone's just broken."

"You're so full of shit! " Ritsu shouts, getting louder and louder. "His phone's fine! It's not even turned off, because it still rings when I try calling it!"

"Mob's brother, please," Reigen begs. "Just give it a few more hours and I promise–"

"Is he with you?"

Reigen's words fail him. "A-ah... um."

"Is. He. With. You?" Ritsu enunciates, fire having turned to ice. He makes either option – yes or no – seem entirely unacceptable.

"Mob's brother," Reigen tries again. "If you could just please calm down–"

"The police were at my house!" Ritsu says suddenly. "Looking for him." A pause, and there's rustle of something fabric followed by a soft thud. "They brought us Nii-san's backpack. Found it in this... freak disaster, they said. An earthquake. They wanted to know if Nii-san made it home."

Reigen freezes at the mention of the police. He thinks he knows where this is going, and it's so very bad. He doesn't say anything, however, and his hesitation gives Mob the chance to take back their voice.

"It... It was just an accident, Ritsu. Everything's okay."

Ritsu ignores their words. "When they found out he hasn't," he spits, voice low. "A policeman told my mum and dad that they're would consider Nii-san a missing child unless we knew where he was. Because of the circumstances. Because it looked bad, and it would be easy for someone to take advantage of a kid in distress."
Mob makes them blink, and Reigen thinks he can feel wetness gathering at their eyes. "I– He's okay. Ritsu it's oka–"

"You were the last one he was with!" Ritsu yells, and then laughs, short and bitter.. "And I know the earthquake was Nii-san. It's what he does. But he never gets hurt, he never goes missing." Ritsu's breath rushes over the speaker, causing flares of static. "You keep saying Nii-san's okay. Sois he with you?"

"He's..." Mob's still the one speaking, and Reigen realizes moments before Mob says it what he's going to tell Ritsu. "He's here. He's okay."

Oh this is really, really, really bad.

"Why then," Ritsu says, slow and dangerous, "haven't you put him on the phone?"

Reigen suddenly finds that he's the one holding the phone. Holding most of their body upright, in fact. For all that Mob had held control of their limbs, he's abruptly retreated. In a panic, likely. And Reigen, also panicking, does the only thing he can think of in this moment.

He ends the call.

Chapter End Notes

(The characters – specifically Reigen – are way out of character in this chapter. So, um, my apologies. I ran out of time to try and fix it. Due to that, the dialogue may seem a bit forced in areas. Please feel free to point out such occurrences since I do intend to come back later – once the story's complete – and fix up spots that are... sub-par. Anyways, stay tuned and thanks for reading!)
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The situation rapidly deteriorates.

(Things can always get worse.)

Chapter Notes

This chapter kicked my ass. The beginning was rewritten about three times, and the online app "write or die" was used profusely throughout the week.

That should... give you an idea about the quality of this chapter.

That said, happy Halloween guys! Enjoy this entirely non-Halloween themed chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Reigen reads the news.

And sure, it's usually because he's browsing online, or skimming the newspaper. But he also has this nice little app on his phone for things like breaking news. He doesn't really use it all that much, but the small notifications tend to be convenient.

Except for right now.

Right now it's horrifying.

"Fuck," Reigen breathes.

| ONGOING: AMBER Alert issued for missing 15 year-old boy, last seen in west Seasoning city...

His phone is held limply in his hands. The notification must have came through at some point during Ritsu's phone call, because it was there on-screen waiting to greet them after that spectacular disaster. Like scrubbing salt into a fresh wound.

"We need to call him back." It's Mob, soft and dazed.

Reigen blinks, looks up from the phone. "What?"

Pins and needles spread down, hesitantly, to their finger tips. "We... we need to tell him."

"Tell who?" Reigen asks, voice sounding a bit strangled. "Your brother? The police? Tell them what?"

Their hands are moving, Reigen notices then, looking down. The notification is dismissed with a haphazard swipe, and the call screen fades back into focus. His hands ache under Mob's control, and
his numb fingers painstakingly press at the keypad on the cracked screen.

"What are you doing?" Reigen shouts, eyes wide, voice rising.

"We hung up on Ritsu!" Mob yells back, breathless, and– There's emotion there, in those words. More so than before. "He... he was scared! And we just– We have to tell him. I can explain."

The first few digits are on-screen, and Mob taps two more with shaking fingers.

"Explain what!?" Reigen's heart pounds, and he manages to free a hand from Mob. Sort of wildly gestures towards his head. "This?"

Ritsu's number is left half-finished.

"I don't know," Mob says, words quick and desperate.

The pressure is bad, again – bad like everything else – but it's doesn't hurt, per se. Not yet. Just heavy and sharp and close. Mob's emotions have gained an edge. Reigen can feel the a faint chill in the air around them.

"We can't explain this," Reigen says, straightening up and taking a few deep breaths. "He'd never believe us. He'd never believe me. Hey listen– Mob, stop. Stop."

He finally just grabs the phone out of his – Mob's – hand. It ruins Mob's feeble attempt at blind one-handed typing.

"We are not calling your brother," Reigen says, suddenly very cold and very tired.

Which is, of course, when the phone starts buzzing in Reigen's hand.

Another incoming call. Reigen looks before he stop himself, and– of course, it's Ritsu. Reigen still doesn't recognize the number but it must be. They had just hung up on him. It would only make sense.

Reigen's still staring at the blinking display when their lips go numb.

"Please," Mob says softly.

Reigen blinks, feels a bit faint, and presses decline before Mob can do anything stupid.

The spike of dismay makes his throat feel tight and his teeth clench. Mob doesn't say anything after it, however. And so Reigen stands up, somewhat hating himself. The lingering numbness fades in sharp patches as he steps around the coffee table.

"Right," he says, voice uncharacteristically blank. "We need to leave." He stares at the door for a long moment, then turns towards the rest of the office. "This is probably one of the worst places to be."

He heads past his desk, his chair, into the weak rays of sunlight peeking through the blinds.

The phone rings again. Reigen dismisses the call.

Mob doesn't say anything.

"Look, Mob," he says, trying to ignore the creeping sensation of guilt. "Your brother's probably called the police on us. Or well, me. They're going to think I abducted you, okay? We can't–" He
swallows the lump in his throat, lets himself slump against the wall next to the window. "We only have a few hours. By the time we convince anyone otherwise it'll be too late."

Mob still doesn't say anything.

Reigen breathes out, glances briefly up at the ceiling, and then pulls back the blinds. Just a small amount. Their eyes skip over the street and parked cars and building fronts. There's no patrol car parked outside his office, which is a small blessing.

Finally, he feels the hesitant prodding of pins in needles. He surrenders control of his mouth with a breath of relief.

"Ritsu wouldn't... He doesn't think that." The numbness persists but Mob clearly doesn't know how to continue.

Reigen waits, then let's the blinds fall back into place. He's going to have to put this bluntly as possible.

"Your brother," he says at length. "Thinks I'm a fraud and a creep. He always has. And now he probably believes that I'm actually doing something creepy, and... It's bad, Mob. The police might be looking for me. It's very bad."

His phone lights up right then with a new emergency notification, just as if to emphasize Reigen's words.

| AMBER ALERT UPDATE: Kageyama Shigeo, 15, possibly injured, may be in the company of an adult male... |

"Great," Reigen hears himself say rather distantly.

His head throbs lightly, and it only gets worse the longer they stare at the screen.

"Ritsu doesn't..." Pins and needles at his jaw and throat. "He doesn't think that about you," Mob says, simply repeating his earlier words. There is no confidence in their voice.

Reigen hums, closes his eyes, and gives his phone a small shake. "Yes well, like I was just saying, he does. I mean, this right here should probably convince you."

There's a bit of a pause, then. And neither of them see his phone light up. But the sudden buzz-buzz-buzzing of yet another phone call is enough. It's enough. Reigen turns on his heel and chucks the thing across the room.

The rush of bitter satisfaction lasts only as long as the phone's flight. Reigen – or maybe Mob – opens their eyes just time time to see the phone thud once, twice, against the floor. It skids, knocks against the far wall, and then continues buzzing feebly. Somehow. A miracle of technology.

"It's holding up better than I am," Reigen mumbles, mostly to himself. The phone beeps quietly and politely requests the caller to leave a message.

It is Ritsu, of course. On the other line. That much they can hear. However the words are all static and muffled hissing and Reigen really, really doesn't care enough to move any closer to hear them.

It takes a few, static-filled seconds for his mouth to go numb.

"Can we--" Mob hesitates, then continues. "I won't answer him. But can you let me at least hear what
Ritsu's saying?"

Reigen feels the fog of unhappiness. It's sharper now. All of Mob's feelings are sharper now. The blanket of suppression has grown very thin.

"Of course. Sorry." He sighs, starts moving towards the phone with heavy steps. "I didn't mean--" Reigen purses his lips and swallows dryly. "You know you could have just walked us over yourself, right?"

The small, angry voice on the phone grows louder as Reigen crouches down. He picks up the phone and turns it over to see the screen. A single, larger crack splits the screen now, passing through all the smaller fractures from before.

"I didn't want you to think I was going to answer it," Mob says softly, then falls silent.

They both listen to Ritsu, mid-tirade, going off about Reigen.

"--and what kind of creepy asshole hangs out with fucking kids all day! I knew, I knew you were bad news, and I should've said something then but--"

Reigen kind of wants to say something about Ritsu's foul language. Maybe even defend himself against Ritsu's scathing words. Just for Mob's sake, really. But then there's a sudden shift in Ritsu's speech.

"Nii-san if you can hear me, I promise I'm coming for you!"

Which is honestly an awful idea. The distant slam of a wrought iron gate makes its way through the phone, and Reigen suddenly finds himself standing straight, eyes wide.

"Ritsu, no," Mob says faintly through their lips.

Reigen's not entirely sure if it's him or Mob that breathes in quick, shallow breaths, but the panic from before is back. This is going very, very bad.

Just as quickly, Ritsu's voice cuts back in to low threats.

"You better hope the police finds you first," Ritsu hisses. "Because I swear to god if I don't find Nii-san in perfect condition, I am going to fucking kill you."

The message stops then, phone beeping happily, and Reigen just sort of finds himself nodding slowly.

"Your brother," Reigen says after a long moment. "Is very good at making incredibly stupid decisions."

The swirl of fear is from Mob, and it seeps into Reigen's own dread. He absently wonders if Ritsu would try and use his psychic powers to find Mob. Wonders how obvious he'd be about it. Whether it would paint him – a fourteen year-old kid – a target for the psychic killers.

Reigen knows they need to leave, but he closes their eyes and breathes. Everything is going just about as wrong as it can go.

So he's not even surprised when his phone starts ringing again.

"I swear to god," Reigen whispers under his breath. "Your brother's persistence is terri--"
He glances at the phone and stops mid-word. The number on screen isn't Mob's brother.

"Fuck." The word is uttered with the sincerity of the damned.

This call is from Mob's cellphone.

Reigen... honestly considers ignoring it. Just like with Mob's brother. Because well, things can't possibly get much worse. What would the harm be in not answering?

It's Mob that shifts forwards, restless agitation and growing terror. "Master?"

"Yes okay, I know," Reigen says. Taps answer. Stares straight up at the ceiling.

The other line is silent. There's no ambient static this time. No distant rush of traffic. Then the man speaks.

"Hello Reigen Arataka. I hope you are well."

It's the same voice as the last call – the same man. Reigen doesn't say anything in return. Barely even listens.

"There's been a change of plans," the man continues after a pause. "Although, to be fair, it's really only a change for you."

Reigen waits, joining Mob in buzzing numbness. When the silence starts to drag, he swallows and says, "Why?"

"A precaution," the man replies almost immediately. "You've proven to be tricky, and it was never our intention to let you prepare for this... exchange." The way the man says the word has Reigen closing his eyes. "Same place, same entrance, but you'll come to the first warehouse past the gate. A slight change in location, you'll notice."

"Ah, right," Reigen hears himself say, as calm as if they were discussing business ventures. "Goodbye."

"Tut-tut, not so fast," the man says quickly. It would have sounded condescending if his tone wasn't so matter-of-fact. "Six-thirty."

Reigen blinks his eyes open, heart suddenly in his throat. "What?"

"Six-thirty a.m., Reigen Arataka. On the dot, if I were you. Best get moving."

And then the call ends.

Reigen stands there, frozen, for a fraction of a second. The pressure in his head is thunderous, pins and needles spreading ineffectively down in arms in random patches. And then, with near blind panic, they pull the phone away to stare at the screen, watching the digital clock tick from five forty a.m. to five forty-one.

"You've got to be kidding me," Reigen breathes.

Mob is heavy and Reigen is cold. A couple of things in the office – the coffee mug, the phone charger, Reigen's laptop and chair – have broken free from gravity and float aimlessly. Reigen doesn't even feel it happening.

There's only a the slightly hint of numbness at his lips when Mob lifts their voice.
"Where is– how long?" their voice says. "How long does it take to get there?"

Reigen jerks out of his stupor and starts stumbling towards the door.

"Too long," he says. "Too... too goddamn long."

He rips his old windbreaker jacket from closet, breaking the plastic coat hanger. Small white pieces float towards the ceiling. His phone – his goddamn fucking phone – gets shoved in his pockets. It takes mere seconds to leave the office, but it doesn't even feel like it matters.

"We can't make it." He can already feel the pounding in their head, the shortness of their breath. "I don't understand how they can possibly think we'd ever make it there in time. It's all the way across the city."

The office door is left wide open and Reigen nearly falls down the narrow staircase. He stumbles out onto the street, into the road.

"They think–" Mob has them swallow, breathing in and out slowly. "They think you're a psychic. That you'll use your powers to get there."

Reigen stops, turns in a sort of half circle and runs a hand through his hair. As if to add to the sense of desperation, faint sirens drift over the sounds of early-morning traffic. The city is waking up, and they have run out of time.

"Great," Reigen breathes. "Just excellent." He clenches his fists, takes a few hesitant steps in one direction, then abruptly turns around and starts heading the other way. He honestly has no idea what to do, but just standing there was starting to feel a lot like drowning. His phone decides to go off again, possibly a phone call, possible his long-forgotten hourly alarm. Reigen ignores it.

"You could get us there," he says suddenly. "If you were using you powers?"

Reigen doesn't even feel the pins and needles anymore.

"Yes," Mob replies without hesitation. He uses their head to look around. "I could. You would have to point me the right way, but I could. Probably."

"Probably," Reigen echoes, partly in question. Walking starts feeling far too slow, so he breaks out into a light jog.

"It's..." Mob hesitates. "It would be difficult, maybe dangerous. It's not something that most psychics can do, usually, especially for a long time and I–" Mob pauses, seems to consider his words. "I haven't really been able to use my full powers through you."

"Wait, what?" Reigen asks, rounding the corner. He narrowly avoids an elderly man and his dog. "Why not?"

"I don't know," Mob says, and has them look up. The street is speckled with early-risers and bleary-eyed business folk, most of whom give them strange looks as they run past. "I mean, you said the bigger stuff hurt, right? And the bigger stuff, when I had to do it back in the alley, I guess it felt like I was putting a lot in but only getting a little... out? Through? I don't know."

There were a lot of words there, for Mob. Reigen tries to parse through them. His head is pounding pretty steadily now, but oddly enough the pain seems to be entirely separate from Mob's pressure. Actually, using Mob's psychic powers right now feels like an entirely acceptable thing to do.
"Oh," he says at length. He slows as he approaches a bigger intersection. "So I have like, a limit?"

There's decent traffic at this hour, and Reigen pauses to gauge a time to cross.

"Yes?" Mob replies, and well. It kind of makes sense.

"Hmm, right. Good to know." He blinks heavily, a little dizzy. "What were you thinking of trying?"

He takes a few steps, and his vision swims. Reigen stops, rubs his eyes. He'd been fine back at the office, but then two minutes of running and...

"I was thinking that I cou–"

Reigen isn't listening. He blinks again and brings a hand up to his head. It's that one spot – slightly raised and tender to the touch, and it throbs sharply under the press of his fingertips.

"Um," Mob says, having stopped mid-word. He makes their eyes follow Reigen's hand. "Are you okay?"

His head really hurts. And... Reigen squeezes his eyes shut, trying to chase away the double vision. Head injuries, Reigen thinks. His eyes flutter open. Those could be bad, couldn't they.

"No," he says faintly. "I don't think I am."

What's worse is the police car pulling up to their intersection, lights flashing.

Chapter End Notes

(This wasn't supposed to be the end of the chapter but things were getting long and there was really no other place to cut it. So, you know, enjoy the awkward cliffhanger. Thanks for being awesome readers. Hope I'm keeping up with expectations.)

(Oh, and, real question here: AMBER Alerts. That's a thing used in Canada and the US. Did some research into its origin and realized it's a pretty North American thing, I think? But I couldn't find a European or Asian equivalent. If anyone happens to know I'd be super appreciative! Thank you!)
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Evasion and, to a lesser degree, pursuit.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is all over the place, and I am tired.

On another note, you guys are amazing and far too kind and I just want to say thank you for all the comments and speculations. You're all really rad and I hope you like this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The traffic light turns green.

The police car doesn't move.

"Shit," Reigen says quickly, taking half a step back. His head aches, vision going a bit dark around the edges. "Mob?"

Mob blinks their eyes, frown pulling at their brow. "W-what?"

"You said--" Reigen swallows. "You were saying you can... get us out of here right?" He's not even sure if Mob had shared what exactly it was that he could do. Reigen doesn't care. "Do it now, please."

The patrol car's lights keep flashing, bright and painful.

"N-now?" Mob stutters. "But--"

The passenger door opens, followed quickly by the driver's side.

"Now," Reigen says, turning on his heel. "Now. Do it now--"

"Reigen Arataka?" a voice calls out behind them. His fingers and legs go cold. "This is the police--"

"Mob," Reigen practically pleads. He tries moving forwards – away – stumbling under the spreading numbness. Things go a bit out of focus, the voices start shouting.

And Mob finally uses their lips to say, "Okay, o-okay relax. Please."

Reigen closes his eyes and the coldness spreads. Their legs start to fold, arms spread wide, and Mob--Mob jumps. Jumps, and gravity seems to ripple, snap, then reverse. It's cold cold cold and there's rushing air and immense pressure and suddenly--
Reigen's eyes snap open.

—suddenly they are many, many feet up in the air.

"Oh god," Reigen breathes.

The wind rushes around them, loud and piercing. Mob has their arms out, braced against thin air, fingers extended and knees bent. And Reigen— Reigen makes the mistake of looking down.

He sees the road and the distant, tiny cars and two speck-like police officers and—

Reigen slams their eyes shut.

"N-no," Mob gasps, something Reigen feels rather than hears. Not with the roaring wind and the thud-thud pounding of his heart. "I need to see."

The air tastes of ice and energy. Sharp and cold and empty and Reigen can just barely feel the pins and needles prickling his face and eyes.

"Please," Mob says.

Reigen takes a deep, shuddering breath, and forces their eyes open, wide and staring.

His lips go cold. "Okay," Mob says, words stolen by the wind. "Okay. Now where?"

Down, Reigen thinks. Please. He blinks away fresh tears, brought on by the wind and the fear. The weightlessness is terrifying, and he barely breathe for the tightness in their chest. Teeth are clenched, jaw and head aching from the tension. Instincts scream that he's falling falling falling—

Mob's pressure buzzes in their skull and their head moves under his control. "Where do I n-need to go?"

The city spreads out before them. Reigen holds their breath, closes his eyes tightly for a brief moment, then lets Mob look. There's long, straight streets and distant high-rises and tiny green parks and—

"Over there," he gasps, pointing rather unnecessarily towards the industrial areas.

They're not falling. It's actually kind of like the brief hovering from before – in the alley – but far higher and far more unsteady. Everything feels ice-cold and tight, and it only gets worse when they suddenly start moving. Not down, but towards the old factories and distant warehouses. Their jacket billows in the wind, flaring out, sleeves puffy and ridiculous. Reigen squints and blinks, tears prickling their eyes.

"We're flying," he says faintly, words inaudible.

A scattering of tall buildings pass by below them, close enough to entice the terror swirling in his gut.

"Yes," Mob says. "Kind of."

Reigen swallows and keeps his gaze resolutely forwards.

"How is this--" He breathes, in and out. "—kind of?" His voice probably sounds far too high, and Reigen's head pounds steadily, sharp pain radiating out from that spot just past his hairline. But it's separate from Mob, separate from cold. He tries focusing on that instead of everything else.
"Because it's not..." Mob hums, and Reigen can feel the vibrations deep in their chest. "It's telekinesis. Only I'm using it on us, instead of something el--"

There's a bit of a drop, right then. A little hiccup in their flight, and the cold abates for that brief moment. Reigen's heart jumps right into his throat before they steady, legs curled up under them and arms outstretched with palms facing downwards.

"Sorry," Mob gasps, almost immediately.

Reigen blinks rapidly. "What was that?"

Mob doesn't say anything at first. Reigen's chest feels tight, heart pounding with quick, fluttering beats.

"I don't know," Mob finally says. "Your limit, maybe." Even so, Mob straightens their legs and they continue to move. Just slower. Reigen is no less terrified. The pain in his head no longer a sufficient distraction.

"Oh. G-great," Reigen says when he thinks he has his voice under control. "M-my limit? Glad I asked. Maybe you shouldn't be doing this, then? If we're just gonna short-out like that? I'm sure I can just run. Back on the ground. Where we won't fall to our deaths? I m-mean really, we must be nearly there and--"

The spread of pins and needles has been barely noticeable. So when it suddenly appears in force at their lips Reigen is surprised.

"Master." The pressure flares, heavy in his mind. "How bad is it?"


"No I mean--" Mob pauses, just for a moment, and they stutter-drop again, another few feet. "The powers. This is a lot, for you. And I think--" Another drop. Reigen closes their eyes. "You keep shutting me down."

"I am?" Reigen says distantly.

It's Mob that peels their eyes open, blinking through the tears. Reigen is feeling – if anything – shockingly lightheaded, which is a distinctive turnaround from the typical heaviness.

"I think it's my fault," Mob says. "I keep pushing too much and--" Another smaller flicker in their flight. "I don't know how to not. T-to limit the powers to... you. I've never-- had this problem."

Well this is great. Just-- casually discussing psychic power failure, dozens of feet in the air. Reigen's feeling shaky and breathless and cold and--

"It's f-fine." Habit takes over, it seems, regardless of fear or phobia. "You're doing fine. It's n-not your fault."

The city stretches out below them, slightly lower now, the morning sun casting long shadows at their back.

"Are you sure?" Mob asks, wind gusting around them, pulling at their hair and clothes. Their flight stutters but they don't drop.

Reigen takes a few moments to just breathe. Then nods his head.
And when the cold diminishes once more, leaving them to drop over five feet in the air, he feels the need to add on, "Just for the love of god don't let us die."

They move on, towards the city outskirts. It can't take longer than a handful of minutes, but to Reigen it feels like an eternity. The fear refuses to dissipate, and Mob has to fight against the tension in their muscles each time he goes to move a limb. It's exhausting. His headache is a constant, nagging thing, but the pain is... it's ice and cold and verging on frostbite but it's... not that bad, really. Not compared to before.

Maybe Reigen's getting used to it.

They slow considerably, after another brief drop. The industrial district is nearly below them, wide and desolate and empty. They've travelled far. It's both a relief and cause for concern. Sick dread presses through the fear, and Mob has them breathe in and out slowly.

"I'm going to land on that building," Mob says, looks. Reigen looks too, through their eyes, and sees one of the last remaining high-rises before the true city outskirts.

He doesn't trust his voice, so he just kind of nods.

They start descending, mostly controlled. The wind picks up, gusting past their outstretched arms, and Mob extends their legs in preparation. Reigen tries not to imagine shattered shins and blown kneecaps as the roof approaches.

They drop the last five feet.

Cold dissipates altogether in a hot rush of terror, and Reigen swears. He manages to sort of fold upon contact, nothing elegant, but it prevents the worst of the damage. His knees and hands throb and his head hurts something awful, but it's fine. He's on solid ground and it's fine.

"Ouch," he says finally, closing his eyes and letting the tension bleed out of his limbs. The roof is rough against his face.

"Sorry." Mob makes them breathe deeply. It rattles through their lungs. "I meant to bring us down more carefully. I couldn't even make a barrier to lessen the fall."

Hmmm, too bad.

"It's okay," Reigen says after a long moment, slowly sitting up. "You did good. We made it." He laughs a little and draws a hand through thoroughly wind-swept hair. Both his palm and head sting. "We made it. We're here."

Mob licks their lips – chapped and dry and rough. "Are you afraid of heights, Master?"

Reigen chuckles again, and even he knows it's edging on hysterical. "Um, that's ah, really the least of our worries right now, don't you think?" He pushes himself up, standing shakily, refusing to look at the edge behind him.

"I'm still sorry," Mob says again, then purses their lips.

Reigen just kind shakily pats his own chest. It's the best comfort he can offer.

The pressure ebbs a bit, and Reigen steps carefully to the other side of the roof. There's only the faintest buzzing sensation now, a new sort of consistency alongside the throbbing in his head. He stops a safe distance away from the edge. Peers out and down at the distant chain-link fence and
long, arched buildings.

"Is that the southern entrance," Mob asks when Reigen's eyes land on a well-lit, monitored gate.

"Hmm, don't think so. I think--" Reigen sorts of half turns, looks around. The city-proper is to their right. The sunrise is behind them. He looks back and points. "Around that way, down that road, there's another gate. It's smaller. Must be the south one."

Reigen barely notices the switch in their voice. "How long do we have?"

"I don't--" Reigen blinks, and his heart starts picking up pace. In a bit of a panic, he quickly drops his hands to his pockets. Pats them roughly.

The phone's still there.

He slides the thing out, checks the time. It reads 6:03 a.m.

There's also two missed calls, both from Ritsu, and another update from Reigen's emergency news app.

**AMBER ALERT UPDATE (2): Possible suspect in the abduction of Kageyama Shigeo – city local Reigen Arataka – has been...

Reigen closes his eyes, takes a moment to feel truly, utterly sorry for himself, then dismisses the notification.

"Twenty-five minutes," he says finally, blinking a few times and squinting down at the warehouses. "We've got twenty-five minutes. They said I had to be right on time, right? Can't go early?"

Mob shakes their head. "No more, no less," he says, sort of distantly.

Reigen sighs. "Can you..." He starts making vague, circular motions with his hand. "Can you tell – with that, ah, radar thing – if your body's down there somewhere?"

"Yes," Mob answers, pauses. "Well, I can check if Dimple is, at least. I might be able to tell if they have another evil spirit working for them, too."

"Oh good," Reigen says, not nearly as sarcastic as he'd hoped. He rubs his chin and lips nervously.

Mob nods, then says, "Tell me if it starts to hurt."

Reigen keeps their gaze up, but notices a sticky, warm feeling between his hand and upper lip. It smells unmistakably of metal and iron. He drops both arms to his side without looking.

"Don't worry," he says quickly. "Of course I will."

It happens a lot quicker than Reigen expects. No build up. No accompanying gestures. Just a sudden swoop in his stomach and the distinct feeling of resurfacing from underwater.

The pressure in his head increases – nothing new at this point – but so does seemingly everything else.

The gentle wind suddenly sounds far too loud. The sky, the distant buildings. Far too bright and sharp. Reigen closes their eyes but it doesn't help. Instead, it's as if vibrant little fires have appeared beneath his eyelids. Pinpoints of light and color. Reigen looks left, then right. Yellows and blues and greens and reds, every which way. Like holiday lights.
There's the a small but bright impression of emerald and teal, down below.

"Is that..." Reigen's brow furrows. "Is that Dimple?"

He feels his head bob up and down. "Yes," Mob says. "And there's no other psychics down there, but I can feel a couple other spirits besides him."

Spirits. Possibly evil spirits capable of possession. Reigen shudders. "Are they strong?"

"I don't think so," Mob replies. "I would have felt them before now. They may just be haunting the place."

Reigen hums shortly, starting to feel the faintest bit dizzy. But he kind of likes the vivid little fires. In front of him, behind him. All around, really. Each one a spirit or psychic. Dimple's green is constant and unwavering. There's a scattering of distant blues and grays, the most prevalent of all colors. Some reds and brighter pinks and purples. A few yellows.

A yellow and a blue, both of which are getting stronger by the second.

He feels one hand raise up – not him – right in front of their closed eyes. And it's funny, because the gesture is entirely unnecessary. Their own colorful fire was obvious without it. The most curious kaleidoscope of magenta and bright turquoise, mixed together with thin sweeps of silver and white. Colors bleeding and slotting together like a strange, dynamic puzzle. It's similar to what Reigen's seen whenever Mob uses his powers, but the lighter colors are new.

"This..." Mob says softly, and Reigen can feel him turn over their hand, as if inspecting it despite the lack of sight. "Is not usually what I look like."

And Mob seems quite engrossed in this fact. Keeps their eyes closed, too, second hand joining the first as Mob does the equivalent of staring. And it gets to the point that Reigen finally feels the need to cut in.

"Hey Mob," he says, wondering whether he should open their eyes.

"Hmm?"

"Maybe it's nothing," Reigen starts, a nervous edge creeping into his voice. "But I'm pretty sure that there's these two lights headed right this–"

Mob opens their eyes.

Things happen quite fast, then.

The extrasensory perception shuts off violently. Like a slamming door. Reigen reels, and in the time it takes him to recover his arms have spread wide. Ice and electricity returns, a bitter warning to the shimmering barrier that flickers to life around them.

Not a moment too soon.

The impact is not so much loud as it is bright. The barrier is blinding upon contact. There's the high, singing notes of static and glass. One collision, followed by two smaller taps, and Reigen thinks he see a hand trying to reach through. There's shouting – a furious, "What the hell?" which Reigen finds himself agreeing with wholeheartedly.

And then nothing. The attack, as quick as it happened, stops.
The barrier's white glimmer fades, and then the barrier itself blinks out of sight. And Reigen, blinking away dark spots from his vision, finally gets to see what had hit them.

Mob's brother, a few paces away now. Livid and – going by wide eyes and slack jaw – utterly stunned. The faintest hint of a blue-gray aura swirling around him.

"What the hell." Ritsu says again, taking another half-step back. "Since when can you..."

It's Mob, still at the forefront, that speaks. "Ritsu? H-how?"

Ritsu blinks, opens his mouth, but it's not him that replies.

"Oh it wasn't that hard," says a clear, high voice. "Kageyama's presence is easy to find if you know what you're doing."

Mob shifts their gaze, arms still raised. Just beyond Ritsu – all bright haloed yellow and hovering a few feet in the air – is that blond esper kid.

"Hanazawa," says Mob with Reigen's voice, and Reigen can feel the distant sense of alarm. "What are you–"

"Doing here?" Hanazawa cuts in, dropping to the roof with ease. "I think you're the one who should be answering that, Reigen."

Chapter End Notes

(Cliffhangers can't stop, won't stop. Also here's hoping people weren't too caught up in the idea of Reigen actually getting arrested at the end of the last chapter. Better to just fly away. Yep. Stay tuned for the next chapter, where I tackle my most difficult challenge yet: conversation between more than two people!

Thanks for reading!)
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Anger, reveals, and disbelief.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the week delay. I got the flu last Thursday. It was awful. Do not recommend. 0 stars.

Also, this chapter has been rewritten three times. Partially due to the fact that I tried writing/editing while sick and made a complete mess of things. This current version's beginning is not my fave. (Neither is the ending, mind you.) But... what can you do. Hopefully it doesn't come across too choppy or awkward.

A wonderful person made an art inspired by this fic and I'm in awe. It's super neat guys. Go check it out: www.clori-eden.deviantart.com/art/Temporary-Accomadations-646819185.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hanazawa's question sounds in the open air around them, and Hanazawa himself pins them with an expectant stare. Waiting.

Mob swallows, stutters, stops. Hesitates to answer. With a sense of desperation, Reigen pushes forwards, trying not to panic.

"You want to know what I'm doing here?" he repeats, hand landing against his chest. "I'll admit, that's a good question. But I assure you there is an equally good answer."

It's Ritsu that takes a step forwards. Almost threateningly so. "Great," he says with false zeal, eyes still wide and furious. "Where is my brother?"

Reigen's lips barely tingle, gaze unwillingly switching focus. "Ritsu," Mob calls out. "Please, it's oka--"

"NO!" Ritsu shouts, voice breaking. "No, I'm done playing your games. Where the fuck is my brother?"

Ah, this is bad. Ritsu is hard to reason with even at the best of time. And this is definitely not the best of times. Reigen blinks, mind racing. "Listen, you have to understand that..." He swallows against the faint buzzing in his throat, the increased pressure in his head. "It's an answer that requires time to explain."

Mob must see it coming before Reigen does. Because the next thing Reigen knows his arm has extended out, fingers flexing, and a barrier ripples into existence. Ritsu, arms encased in bright,
vibrant power, hits with a clear ringing vibration.

"Answer the goddamn question," Ritsu shouts.

Reigen takes a step back, ears ringing. "Whoa whoa hang on--"

Another strike, resounding through both the semi-translucent barrier and Reigen's head. "I can't believe this!" Ritsu continues shouting. "All this time! You had psychic powers! You're such a fucking liar! A liar and--"

"Brother-kun!" The voice is a bit distant, but then Hanazawa is suddenly there. "You need to give him a chance--"

"No!" Ritsu shouts again, skipping away from Hanazawa. "I'm done! My brother isn't here. I'm fucking done."

Reigen frowns. "H-hey now--"

The next strike comes from distance, Ritsu's arms crossing in front of his own chest in a violent, sweeping motion. The rush of knife-like air breaks upon Mob's barrier, sliding past them in a gust of wind. The pressure increases, and Reigen's vision starts to darken around the edges.

"Ritsu, please," Mob has them say once the gusts have died down. "Listen. It's dangerous to use your powers against ano--"

"Shut up!"

"N-no, he's right," Hanazawa says, wide-eyed gaze shifting from Reigen to Ritsu. Flickers of yellow light up his hands. "Brother-kun, listen. We're all worried about Kageyama, but this isn't going to help!"

Ritsu jerks around. "You shut up! You're only here because I needed to find Nii-san. You said you found his aura! But you were wrong!"

Mob shifts forwards. "Everyone, pl--"

Hanazawa cuts in, bright voice eclipsing Mob's quiet pleas. "I told you that something seemed weird!" he yells, composure slipping. "Kageyama's aura was here but... I don't know..." His brow pinches. "Something must be wrong with him."

Mob lets their barrier flicker away, and Reigen blinks rapidly. "N-no, no," Mob says. "I'm... it's okay. Please don't yell. It's okay." He looks first at Ritsu, then at Hanazawa. "You did good."

Hanazawa frowns, stares at Reigen. "What?"

"What the fuck are you talking about." Ritsu, of course. He also stares at them. "None of this is okay!"

The pressure is still quite heavy, but the dizziness gradually recedes. Reigen breathes through his nose, tries to speak, but finds Mob still has their voice.

"I want to explain. Ritsu, please." They take a step forwards. "Please listen." And then, even softer, lips barely moving, "Please, Master."

They're all done for. Really. It's all bad. This whole thing. Reigen's only real accomplishment so far is to not die. That's it. He's put Mob in danger. He's putting Mob's brother and Mob's friend in
danger, just by standing here. Just by standing a few hundred feet away from the warehouse, from the killers inside. And he's just, letting it happen. What kind of person does that make him?

"Brother-kun," Hanazawa adds in the silence. "I think you should listen to him."

Reigen realizes he'd let their eyes close. He opens them. Sees Ritsu striding towards them, closing the short distance. Reigen blinks and takes half a step back, but Ritsu fills the gap. The shorter boy stops barely a foot away, chin raised defiantly.

"Fine," Ritsu says, and from this distance it's easy to see the dark circles under his eyes and the stress at his jaw. "Explain."

What kind of person does this make him? Reigen hopes it's not a bad one.

"Mob?" he asks, and he feels a sort of rushing sensation in his head. Something akin to relief. The pressure abates, and Mob quietly hums. Reigen feels the vibrations through his throat and chest. He licks his lips, tasting the blood and sweat. This is going to be interesting.

They avoid Ritsu's expectant glare, glancing past Hanazawa's puzzled expression up to the sky. It's easier, this way, to speak.

"We really don't have any time," Reigen says towards the clouds. "How quickly can you explain?

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Ritsu says, and Reigen feels a pushing motion against his chest, small fists grabbing at his jacket. He stumbles back only to realize that he's pretty much run out of room. The raised lip of the building's roof meets the back of his legs, and his stomach lurches.

"Not long," Mob says, ignoring his brother. Their hand moves, landing gently upon the fingers clutching their jacket.

Reigen breathes short, shallows breaths, ignoring the open space at his back, the itching fear it brings. He focuses instead on the tension coursing through his neck and jaw. The faint prickle of cold and numbness.

"How long is not long?"

Ritsu goes very still.

"Hanazawa might already know."

Reigen swallows dryly.

"Really?" he asks. His eyes drift to the morning sun. It's risen up past the tops of the distant buildings. They really do have no time. His chest feel hollow, his throat tight.

"I think so," Mob says, and he has them look away from the sun, blinking away the spots. Their eyes land on Hanazawa. "Do you?"

Hanazawa meets their gaze, eyes a bit wide. He hasn't moved from his spot, but he now has one arm crossed in front of his chest, the other propped against it, hand covering his chin and mouth. "Do I what?" he asks, voice somewhat strangled.

"Do you know?" Mob repeats.

Hanazawa just sort of shakes his head slowly, eyes never leaving Reigen's. "I think... I would really rather hear you explain."
Mob blinks, and Reigen tries to ignore the growing seed of panic. Too long, Reigen thinks. This is taking too long. He tries saying as much.

"Mob, we really need to--"

But Mob shifts their gaze back to his brother, and Reigen's forced to swallow his words.

Ritsu's eyes have lost their furious glare, and instead he's moved away as far as his arms would let him. He stares at Reigen almost side-on, eyes very wide.

"Ritsu," Mob says, sort of taps Ritsu's white-knuckled fist. "Can you let go, please?"

Ritsu breathes in sharply and jerks his hand away. Puts distance between them like Reigen has some kind of disease. Reigen breathes in relief and and stumbles away from the roof's edge.

"Thanks." Reigen's not sure whether he or Mob says that one. "Master is afraid of heights." Ah, it was Mob.

"What the fuck." Ritsu is standing next to Hanazawa now, nearly trembling. "What the fuck."

They should probably try and clear that up, but... Reigen turns away and looks down at the industrial area below. At the silent warehouses and rusted gates. He breathes in and out slowly, hating the jittery feeling of it all.

"Dammit," he says, more to himself than anything. "If we're not down there in--" He slips their hand into his pocket and pulls out his phone, time distorted beyond the cracked glass. "--eleven minutes, you do realize that you might die, right?"

Mob seems to hesitate, then nods their head. "I can do it," he says.

"Eleven minutes, Mob," Reigen repeats, but Mob's already turned them back around. Already meeting the wary stares.

"Hanazawa," Mob calls out, "you tracked my psychic powers here, right?"

Hanazawa blinks, expression reminiscent of a frozen smile. "I tracked Kageyama's psychic powers here."

Mob glances up and away briefly. "Um, yes," he says. "Because uh..." He steps forwards, only pausing when Ritsu flinches. "Um... my body. Is down there." Reigen's arm gestures out, down, towards the warehouses.

"...your body." Ritsu echoes faintly.

Mob nods again. "And I'm in here."

Reigen adds a sort of pointed gesture. Right at their own skull. Just to help speed matters along. "Mob's possessing me."

Ritsu looks faintly queasy, and utters a quiet, "That's impossible."

Reigen almost wants to laugh at that. Impossible! If only! But Mob takes control of their voice and lungs, so Reigen's left to wallow in the absurdity alone.

"Master was in danger," Mob says, small frown pulling at their brow. "And this was all I could do to help."
"Danger?" Hanzawa echoes, voice soft. "But what kind of danger could possib–"

"No, no no--" Ritsu's voice cuts in, growing louder. He shakes his head, arms waving as if to dispel the notion. "I don't believe this. This is all just one of your... tricks. Your scams."

Ah Ritsu, ever the cynic. "It isn't a lie, Ritsu," says Mob. The pressure starts building again. "It really is me."

Ritsu stares, nearly shaking, looking as if he's about to attack again. "I don't-- I don't believe you," he shouts. "Where is my brother! Where have you put him?"

Reigen's eye twitches ever so slightly. This is going nowhere. They have to--

"Last week," Mob says suddenly, and Reigen nearly clamps his teeth shut in surprise. "Last week you told me you were thinking of leaving the student council. And I said okay, because you... you get to choose what you do with your free time."

Ritsu stares, eyes wide. Reigen kind of feels the same.

"A-and then," Mob continues in Reigen's voice. "You smiled, Ritsu. And said-- I think you were surprised. You said you thought I'd try convincing you to not drop out. Something about hard work p-paying off..."

"Stop," Ritsu says. The word barely carries between them, and Reigen feels the pull at the corners of their lips, the fold between their brows.

"But I told you--" Mob swallows heavily. "That you know what's best for you. You gotta find something you like doing, Ritsu. Or else your hard work won't--"

"STOP!"

Ritsu's shout echoes in the empty space around them, and Reigen has the awful notion that they could easily be overheard. Up here. They are only a couple hundred feet away, really. From the place the men-in-suits must surely be waiting. This is stupid and reckless, but... Reigen doesn't move, doesn't say anything. Just waits. Like Hanzawa is waiting. Like Ritsu, wild-eyed and heaving, is waiting.

"Or else your hard work," Mob says after the small lull of silence. "Won't have any meaning." The words sound small despite the timbre of Reigen's voice. "'I'm really here Ritsu. Please believe us."

Mob retreats, and control slips back easily. Reigen blinks, almost in a daze. And then, in what must be a brief lapse of sanity, he sort of raises a hand and takes a step forwards.

"Yes hi," he says, "it's me again." He points at Ritsu. "Mob's right. About the work thing and about this." He points at himself. "Trust your brother. And also--" His hand drops. "--We've really, really run out of time. So I actually don't care if you believe us. We've got to go."

And with that he rocks back on his heels, grits his teeth, and turns around.

"Can we help?"

It's Hanzawa that asks. No follow up statement from Ritsu. That in itself is telling. Telling of what, Reigen's not entirely sure. He stares out beyond the edge of the roof.

"Probably. But it's dangerous."
"You haven't even told us what it is." Hanazawa replies.

"It's..." Reigen shakes his head. "A hostage situation. They have Mob's body down there."

"And Dimple," adds Mob, right off the end of Reigen's sentence. "The bad men said they'd hurt them if we don't show up. We need to save them."

He hears the scuff of footsteps on the hard concrete of the roof. Coming closer.

"We can help then." Reigen thinks Hanazawa sounds far too confident. "Between the three– four of us..."

"What do they want?" Ritsu, voice hoarse and devoid of emotion. "What do these people want?"

Reigen sucks in a breath, glances at his phone. The thud-thudding of his heart feels like a countdown. "They want to kill psychics," he says, surprised Mob is letting him take this. "It's what they do. They think they're too dangerous to let live. And they tracked me down to try and kill me. But it didn't work. And this is what happened."

There's a small pause. Hanazawa sort of lifts a hand. "Which um, one of you said that?"


There's the smallest hint of that frozen smile. "Let me get this straight. They thought you, Reigen, were an esper, not you, Kageyama?"

It's Mob that has them blink. "Oh, yeah. That's right."

Reigen takes back his voice. "They don't know about Mob," he adds. "They think they're holding just a normal kid, probably. As long as Dimple hasn't messed anything up."

"They have Dimple too?"

Something comes together, in Reigen's thoughts. The bare workings of a plan. He waves Hanazawa's words away. "They don't know about Mob," he says again. "And they want me to just waltz in there and give myself up, in return for Mob's body."

It's Ritsu that steps forwards, eyes no longer down-turned. "You have a plan."

Reigen does have a plan. A very bad one, but a plan nonetheless. He can almost feel Mob crowd in close, as if listening intently. "Yes," he says, corner of his lip quirking upwards. "I'm going give myself up." And then, before the pressure can get too bad, "But that's when things are going to get complicated..."

Chapter End Notes

(Okay so. First off. At least one person found my tumblr last week, due to my absence. Wanted to make sure I was okay. Which was really sweet and actually a pleasant surprise. I was feeling guilty about missing my own deadline, so it was nice to be able to explain it to at least one or two readers. I figured I should let other people know, in case something like this happens again. So if anyone ever wants to drop by and ask about the fic's status or whatever, you can find me at comeonblub.tumblr.com.)
Secondly, small note: I really was on the fence about using "Brother-kun" as part of Hanazawa's dialogue. Because for the most part I've been dropping honorifics. But "Little brother" just didn't feel right. If you have any opinions regarding this, please let me know. I'm open to suggestions!

That all said, thank you so so much for all the support and comments and kudos and whatnot. Each one continues to brighten my day. You folks are the best. I hope this fic continues to hold your interest.)
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The thing about plans is that they don't always work.

Chapter Notes

*SCREAMS*

*HITS POST WITHOUT PREVIEW*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The semi-translucent barrier flickers the moment Reigen steps foot in the warehouse. Two feet in it dissolves entirely. Like a flame deprived of oxygen. It leaves in its wake a sick sense of despair.

"Oh," he says quietly. "That's not good."

There's a soft touch of cold at his shoulder, the slightest hint of movement in the shadows, and a muffled swear. Reigen glances behind him. Quickly, just once, and sees nothing. Just the open entrance and perhaps the faintest impression of white fog.

This is not good at all.

There's no time to ask what went wrong. The barrier doesn't reappear. Reigen turns back around, swallowing dryly.

"It's okay," he whispers. Partly to himself. Partly to whoever might be listening. "I'll just go without."

His chest feels heavy, his lungs weak. Fear pricks at the back of his neck, and there's the distinct sensation of being watched. But the warehouse, extending out into the poorly lit gloom, looks empty. Only piles of metal beams and discarded machinery, old stacks of wooden crates and pallets. An open, empty row in which to walk and many, many places for people to hide.

Reigen breathes in, then out. Fixes a smile on his face, just in case. It's too late to back out now. There's nothing for it.

"I'm going on ahead," he breathes, almost wishing for that squeeze of pressure to just know he's not alone.

He starts striding forwards.

His Master starts striding forwards.

His Master, without a barrier, starts striding forwards.
Something is wrong.

Something is definitely wrong. Something is wrong with the building. Reigen can feel it pressing in the further he walks. A creeping sensation, something that chills his skin. And the more he walks the more it crawls into his chest, burrows into his throat.

Reigen stops.

He slides his phone out of his pocket with only the smallest of tremors and uses it to light up the ground in front of his feet.

Dark concrete and dust and—

Thick, black lines of paint.

In the pale light of his phone they glisten as if wet. Reigen tilts the phone up, letting its thin light spread, and it reveals more splotches and sweeping strokes. Crisscrossing the floor and darting out into the dark corners of the warehouse. Reigen sucks in a breath, eyes tracing the lines. They're everywhere.

This must be what smothered the barrier. These people have done something to the warehouse. And if Reigen can feel it, crawling under his skin, he wonders how bad it is for Mob. For Mob's brother. He wonders if Hanazawa, outside, can feel it too. The sense of wrongness. The suppression.

Hesitantly, he slides his foot over the closest line, but the paint doesn't smudge. It does however leave an odd tingling feeling in his leg and a peculiar shortness of breath.

Reigen swallows, slides his shaking hands into his pockets, and refuses to move any further.

This is very bad, and it takes all he has to not turn tail and run.

Reigen closes his eyes, just for a moment. In the next, he relaxes his posture, leans back confidently, and peers casually into the depths of the warehouse.

"Hello?" he calls out loudly. "Anyone there? It's Reigen Arataka! I'm here to give myself up!"

His Master is speaking, but the words sound distant and faded.

"Hell-ooo?" More words, a few steps. "Is... right place?"

His Master is speaking, is walking, so the plan must still be a go. No running away this time. Even though the room hurts. Even though Ritsu's barrier didn't work. Even though he feels cold and sparse. Even though he feels altogether too little of anything.

His Master is still trying.

So he needs to try too.

He needs to find his body.

Reigen needs to find Mob's body.
He needs to find the rest of the psychic killers too, actually. Because so far he's seen no one, and his words have been met with silence. But at the very least he needs to find Mob's body.

"Hello?" he calls out again, struggling to smother his growing concern.

Still nothing.

Reigen sighs, stands in place, and extend his hands out in a gesture of vulnerability.

"Okay look! I'm here. I'm alone—" Hopefully that's true. Hopefully Ritsu is still by the entrance. Hopefully there's no lookout outside that might see what Hanazawa is doing. "—What else are you waiting for?" He pauses, then takes a step forwards, head pounding its typical thrum of pain. "Can you at least tell me if the kid safe?"

It's a soft noise that draws his attention first, off the to side, far closer than he expected. The scruff of a muffled footstep. Reigen's fingers twitch, muscles tensing, and he quickly turns. Crates, an old forklift, a few packages.

But then another sound, this one from deeper in the room. A light cough. Reigen whips back around, wide eyes shifting from one shadow to the next. Searching. His own breathing sounds loud in his ears.

"Hello?" he tries once more.

"Mister Reigen," a voice calls back, finally, from deep in the room. "Continue to the center of the room."

Reigen blinks, then breathes, eyes trained in the direction of the voice.

"Is Mob safe?" he says aloud, surprised at his own steadiness.

The voice – a woman – pauses, and then says at length, "Your boy is safe."

Reigen exhales, and hazards another step forwards. "Good, that's good. Thank you."

"However," the woman continues. "I wouldn't suggest you keep playing these games."

He stops. "I'm not– No games, m'am. You should know why I'm here."

Another pause, and then, "Of course." The voice is sharp, but not as cold as it could be. "But please do not think we'd trust your intentions on that fact alone."

Reigen nods just a bit, despite the fact that he's doubtful they can see him. "Entirely understandable. Trust in this situation would be foolish, after all."

He thinks he hears a soft sigh.

"Mister Reigen," the woman continues after prolonged pause. "If you understand the situation—"

"Yes, yes," Reigen cuts in. He needs to steer this conversation. "Me for the kid. I understand. That part is crystal clear. However I have just one concern."

"Mister Reigen—" A man's voice, this time. "You are not in a position to be making demands."

"Actually, you see," Reigen continues loudly. "I was hoping to have some sort of guarantee, you know? That this, um, trade will work out. That Mob– the boy, will be returned safely."
"Mister Reigen." The woman again, and yes, Reigen knows for sure where they are now. "I have to ask you keep moving forwards."

"Aah--" Reigen goes as far as to wave a finger through the air. "See this is what I'm talking about. How do I know you won't just kill me the moment I step into view?"

"You are wasting time." A different man, this time. A familiar voice.

"No, no no no." Reigen swallows dryly and blinks away the mounting headache. "I'm not. I'm just-- You have to understand where I'm coming from, right? I mean, hahah--" Reigen twirls his hand in a roundabout gesture. "You guys want to kill me."

There's the barest of hesitations. "Move forwards, Reigen Arataka."

Reigen does not continue forwards. "You want to kill me," he repeats, fingers now digging into his palm. "A-and you've done... something. To the building. Very clever, with the floor, the symbols. I can't protect myself. So how am I supposed to know tha--"

There's another noise off to the side again, movement out of the corner of his eye.

Reigen turns quickly, muscles tensing in preparation, but nothing comes his way. In fact, the thing move away, behind another stack of crates. Reigen stares with wide eyes, and he can hear the soft hum of hushed conversation from deeper in the room.

He can only pray they can't hear the noise of soft footsteps.

Because it's not one of the psychic killers, lurking in the darkness, moving deeper into the room. No – from Reigen's quick glimpse of dark clothes and pale skin – it's a young boy about to make an incredibly stupid decision.

"Soo! You see," Reigen interjects as loud as he dares, turning rigidly back towards open space. "If I can't protect myself, how am I supposed to know that I'll be able to see Mob to safety! I'm not going to do anything careless or-- or rash. I'm just thinking things through." Reigen glances again to the side, then sets his gaze forwards. "All I want is-- is just to see the boy, okay? That's all. I want to make sure he walks free. That he gets outside. As long as I see that-- then I'll go. To the center of the room, or w-whatever you want."

There seems to be a prolonged moment of silence after that. Which is then broken by a the rustle of cloth, the skid of feet on the ground, a quiet thump.

"Reigen Arataka," the familiar voice says again.

Reigen gulps, heart picking up speed. He slides another foot forwards, fists clenched. "What was that noise?"

"My associates," a man says. "Are being awfully polite. Awfully patient. But seing as you were significantly late to this arrangement, and continue to delay the inevitable, I've convinced them you need some additional... encouragement to proceed."

Reigen blinks. The familiar voice. It's the man from the alley.

"I'm n-not," Reigen stutters, stumbling backwards, just a single step, as if trying to escape the vivid sensation of a gun pressed against his head. Words seem to fail him then, which in turn lets him hear in painstaking clarity a small, choked gasp.
Followed by a quiet, "Sorry kid."

And then a single, chilling crack.

There's a brief, agonizing moment of disbelief. And then a muffled scream shatters the silence.

"N-no!" Reigen shouts, staggering forwards. His frantic footsteps echo loudly against the floor. It only takes a few feet for the group to come into view. Six, no – Reigen staggers to stop – seven people. Standing off to the far right, in the middle of another open space.

But it's Mob that draws his attention. Mob, on his knees, the man behind him, forcing him down by the neck in what must be a bruising restraint.

The man's other hand holds Mob's arm. Twisted up, and back. And when the man lets go the limb drops lifelessly, bending the wrong way, falling to the sounds of another choked gasp.

Nausea twists in his gut and crawls up his throat. And Reigen stumbled forwards a handful of steps, towards the group, hand raised uselessly. He barely notices the collective ripple of unease his actions provoke – the older man who takes a step back, the pale woman who flinches – focused as he is on Mob's trembling form, gagged mouth, broken arm.

He barely notices.

But Reigen can't help but take note of the two handguns suddenly trained on his person.

And he sure as hell doesn't miss the third gun shoved right into the back of Mob's head.

There's a gun pointing at his head, and he doesn't know what to do.

The weird barrier around his body wouldn't let him in. It wouldn't. No matter how hard he tried. Dimple hadn't even seemed to notice his efforts, couldn't even see him.

So he floats now, above his body, and he can hear talking, can still see movement, but it's all white noise. He doesn't know what to do. He thinks he might be scared, but it's so hard to feel like this that he doesn't even know.

His Master is still here though.

His Master is here.

Mob doesn't know what to do, but his Master might.

Reigen does not know what to do.

"Step away from our circle, mister Reigen!"

His breaths come in short, shallow gasps. Hands raised, empty palms up. Fingers twitching. And he stares. Stares at Mob, who now stares back, mouth gagged, black symbols covering pale skin.

Stares at Mob, and then past Mob.

His legs feel weak, shaky. "Stop," he says. "Stop, please."

Past Mob, at Ritsu.
Ritsu, who clearly hadn't heeded any of Reigen's prior words. Who had crept along the side of the warehouse all the way to the back of the group. Who was now inching ever so carefully towards the man standing over his brother. Fourteen year-old Ritsu, who in all likelihood about to have them all killed.

Reigen slides a foot forwards, but freezes when the woman yells.

"That's enough!" They're afraid of him. "Stop moving this this way or the boy dies!" Afraid of what they think he can do. But there's nothing he can do. Not now. He can't think of any way to save this situation.

No. No, he needs to save the kids.

His vision swims, head pounding violently, and he suddenly feels unbearably cold.

"Don't do this," he begs, staring blankly ahead. "Please."

But Ritsu only inches forwards another step, eyes wild and gaze fixated on his brother.

The woman steps ahead of her group, chest heaving. "Step back, now. Three steps, or we will shoot."

Reigen can't. His legs feel numb, a weight presses down around him. He can't move away from the imminent tragedy. "Please," he tries one more time.

And that's enough, apparently, because the man behind Mob suddenly bares down on the small body, jamming the muzzle of the gun into the base of his head. Mob makes a pained noise, holding his arm close to his chest, and in that moment–

In that moment three things happen.

One, Reigen's vision flares white as a familiar pressure forces its way back into his skull.

Two, Ritsu careens full tilt into the man above Mob's body.

And three, a gunshot tears through the air.

Chapter End Notes

(Yikes.)

(Tried lots of different things in this chapter. Struggled a lot. The usual. My main shortcoming (I think) is that I have so much going on and such a limited point of view in which to express it. So I'm going to hazard a guess and say that this chapter might have confused some. If you're one of those people, feel free to let me know. I'd like to either a) apologize and help clarify my mess, and/or b) ask you about ways in which I can improve in the future.)

(Stayed tuned for more horror.)
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Called bluffs, blood, and bad decisions.
(Not necessarily in that order.)

Chapter Notes

You guys are real neat-o, you know that?
Thanks for the wide variety of comments last chapter. Each scream and swear made my small heart soar.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mob's presence claws into his mind and Reigen's knees give out.

At the same time, white hot pain erupts along the side of his jaw and neck, just below his ear.

He hits the ground hard, knees connecting with solid, unforgiving concrete. Head and neck ablaze. Someone screams – maybe him. But there's a lot of shouting going on too so it's hard to tell. He thinks he hears a frightened, "M-master?", and his neck hurts and his skull is bursting at the seams and all that Reigen knows is that somehow, for some reason, Mob is back.

"Master," his voice says again, lips barely moving. "M-my body. I– I couldn't–"

Pressure builds behind his eyes, in his chest. His skin crawls and burns and freezes, all at the same time. There's a rushing sound in his ears. But it doesn't drown out the the yelling.

"No no no!" Someone shouting. "Don't s-shoot him!" Not yet!" The woman, Reigen thinks vaguely, frantic and terrified. "Don't you see how close he is!?"

Reigen snaps a hand up to his neck, palm slipping on something warm and wet. Red drips down, small splatters on the ground, on his knees. It hurts.

He thinks he might have been shot.

"I– I didn't mean–" A younger voice, stuttering. Reigen blinks owlishly at the ground, at the red spots, struggling to breathe. "That k-kid jumped out. Out of nowhere! I d-didn't–"

He hears a sharp intake of breath – it's him, but not. "R-Ritsu!" his voice gasps, but the sound is lost to the fanfare of noise surrounding them. His head looks up, away from the ground. The group of men and women have scattered, most away from him, which is odd. Not that Reigen is able to contemplate it all that much.

For just the briefest of moments, a shimmering translucent barrier forms before him. Bright cold pain,
fingertips burning. Barrier flickering a bare few inches in front of him. Then it's gone.

It's a desperate scream that finally manages to pull his gaze.

"You– you bastard!" Mob's brother, on the ground, clawing at the man from the alley. "You monster! Let– let go! Let go of Nii-san!"

"Ritsu," Mob breathes through Reigen's lips. Fear and horror. The barrier flickers again, a mere fraction of a second. Gone. The ground cracks beneath their knees, a small fissure, branching out through one of the symbols. The sensation of the sigil breaking is a negligible relief, no where close enough to matter. The scattered gasps and harried footsteps don't matter either – it's all background noise to what's in front of him.

The man on the ground twists, tries to dislodge Ritsu from atop him. Ritsu gasps and clutches the man's arm. "No no NO," he shouts, reaching out and tearing the gun from the man's grip in a sharp, desperate motion. The pistol flies through the air and lands a few feet away, skidding to a stop near a pile of wooden crates. The man yells, bewildered and outraged, and grabs Ritsu by the back of his shirt, pulling the younger boy off his chest.

And Mob– no, Mob's body, still. Not Mob. Mob's body curls away, dragging itself along with its one good arm, fingers clawing at the ground.

Reigen finds that his body lurches forwards, knee sliding along the ground, leg bending under him. His hand still presses fiercely into the raw graze on his neck, and he can feel blood trickling through his fingers, can feel a sort of hotness under his nose, the taste of iron on his lips. His head throbs violently, fingers spasming, and the barrier flickers again, there and then not.

"Don't move!" the woman shouts suddenly, but Reigen pays her no mind. He stumbles to his feet, vision darkening around the edges. The man on the ground twists again, getting a leg between him and Mob's brother, kicking Ritsu away. The barrier stutters into existence again and another small fracture splits the ground at Reigen's feet. The rush of pressure nearly blinds him.

"What the fuck is going on?" the man shouts, even as the woman screams at Reigen to back away. The shouting seems to propel another man – and older one – to action. Careening forwards, grabbing at Ritsu's arm, the back of his shirt.

The man from the alley pitches forwards and clasps Mob's leg.

Ritsu screeches, hands scratching, legs kicking out. "Let me go, let me go–" An elbow smacks into the older man's gut. "LET ME GO!" And Ritsu breaks freely, falling to his hands and knees. Ties to crawl back towards Mob's body. But the older man staggers forwards again and latches onto Ritsu's hair this time, pulling, tearing, dragging Ritsu back up to his feet.

"–no NO!" Ritsu screams, hands clawing at the hand in his hair. "Let– let me GO!" He tries kicking out at the man from the alley. "L-LEAVE NII-SAN ALONE!" His fingernails leave long red marks on the older man's arm.

Mob's body – which must still be Dimple – also kicks and scratches. Pulling at the smooth ground, kicking out with its free leg. Once, twice. His foot connects with the man's arm, his hand. But the man just grunts and jerks Mob's body back towards him.

"N-no," Reigen gasps, breaths too shallow and head too heavy. The woman is still yelling, voice nearly dissolving into hysterics, and Reigen knows there must be at least one gun still trained on him, but he doesn't care. Blood continues to seep through his fingers, soaking his jacket collar but he
doesn't care. Mob – no, Dimple – rolls onto his back and tries to twist his leg free from the man's grip, shouting incoherently through the gag across his mouth. The bad arm flops limply with the motion, bending the wrong way at the elbow.

Nausea wells up in Reigen's gut, and either he or Mob stumbles forwards another step.

The movement causes a sudden whir of movement. Two of the group scatter, one shouting loudly and the other going so far as to cover her head. But what really draws his attention is the woman – the leader, she must be – snatching a gun from one of the younger men's hands and clutching it at arms' length.

"Stop!" she yells. "I said no further!" The gun is aimed first at him, as if on instinct. And then, when terror bleeds into her face, she jerks it away like a puppet on strings to point it at the small body writhing on the ground.

"NO!" It's Ritsu that shouts, trying to rip free. His scream turns to one of wordless anguish when the older man pulls back on the black locks of hair, and the woman's hands twitch on the trigger.

Reigen freezes, completely still. Wide eyes staring, barely breathing.

"Mob," he choke silently. A near plea. His arm extends out under Mob's control, fingers flexed–

And a barrier sparks to life. This time flickering above Mob's small body. Brief, bright vibrancy. The man jerks his hand away, as if burned, shouting. For Reigen it's freezing pain and aching lungs and the sharp overwhelming smell of ozone and ice. The woman yells, all fear and anger, and the barrier flickers. Like an old television with bad reception. Reigen feels the fierce wash Mob's fear, his terror. The pressure is excruciating and–

Another loud crack. Another fracture in the ground.

The woman's hands twitch again, startled. And this time it's enough.

The gunshot splits the air and Reigen's heart stops.


Silence.

And Reigen simply stands where he is, staring unblinkingly past the ends of his outstretched fingers. Staring at the solid, shimmering barrier enveloping Mob's body.

The bullet hangs suspended. Nearly vibrating. Bare inches away from Mob's face.

The woman speaks, says something. But Reigen doesn't hear it. Mob's fear continues to sing through his veins and crawl up his throat, and Reigen–

Reigen thinks he knows, right then. Knows what it takes. Knows that the symbols' power can break under enough force. Enough emotion.

Knows that he too will probably break enough of Mob's emotions.

Dimple-Mob stares up at the barrier with wide eyes, completely still except for a few small tremors. Reigen breathes, exhales, and the once-solid barrier finally flickers. The bullet falls, hitting Mob-Dimple's shoulder, then the ground. It clinks gently, then rolls away an inch or two.
Their hand drops, and the barrier dissipates altogether.

Reigen looks, finally. Back at the psychic killers. Another small crack rips along the ground, another painted symbols split in two, and this time he can feel strumming sensation its quiet surrender.

This time the psychic killers' fear is easy to see.

Reigen has a new plan.

"You–" He stops, swallows, vision too dark and too bright at the same time. He coughs, something wet and heavy in his lungs, and tries again. "You guys really messed up t-there, didn't you?"

He presses his one hand harder into the side of his neck, sharp tendrils of pain shooting out across his throat and jaw. Reigen focuses on breathing, and forces his posture to uncurl. Straightening up. Weight on his heels. A return to confidence, to casual. He has a new part to play.

"No. No closer–" The woman, still clutching the gun, now at her chest. "No closer. Or... Or I'll–"

"Or you'll what?" Reigen says, raising his chin. "You'll shoot?"

The man from the alley climbs to his feet. "We'll shoot the boy," he says, but makes no move towards Mob's trembling body. "Both boys."

Small specks of dirt and dust rise unsteadily in the air. Reigen's hair flutters ever so slightly around their head. Mob's presence is nearly suffocating, legs shaking, fingers quivering. Reigen's head is a single thunderous hum, drawn out and turned up to an agonizing volume.

"N-no you won't," Reigen forces out between clenched teeth. There's four left. Four psychic killers. The others have long since darted away – retreated behind the crates and machinery, probably vying for exits. Hopefully without success, if Hanazawa's part was played successfully. Reigen breathes, in and out. "You don't want to kill the kids. Or m-me. Not here." His eyes flit to Mob's body, to Ritsu, and the man still behind him. "You– you think I'll explode."

The woman glares wide-eyed, standing in her little protective circle. "Of course you'll explode," she practically spits, suddenly venomous. "It's what you psychics do! But don't think for a second that I would– that I wouldn't hesitate–"

"No no no, you see!" Reigen cuts in, this time pointing with his bloodied hand. His legs nearly give way. "That's w-where you messed up! You've all been— " The pressure in his head gives a sort of startled squeeze at the sight of their hand, and Reigen quickly presses back to the wound, vision swimming. "Y-you were bluffing. All of you! Th-this whole time. But you messed, d-didn't you. You don't want to shoot me. Not– not this close. You're scared. As long as I stand here–"

Something skids briefly along the ground. A small noise, barely discernable.

What is discernable is the choked gasp. Reigen looks back, longer this time. Mob's body, still on the ground, hand clasped over the bad arm, pulling it close to his chest. And Ritsu. Still held viciously by the hair, tears now streaming down his face. No longer struggling, but instead reaching out, a single arm, shaking, shuddering fingers splayed wide.

Oh. Oh no. Reigen stares, just long enough to see the forgotten gun on the ground twitch, a small momentary sheen of blue-gray flickering around it, before snapping his gaze back to the group.

No no no.
"What?" the woman hisses at Reigen's continued silence. "What will you do? Stand there for eternity? Endanger us all?" She hasn't noticed. None of them have, not yet. They're too hyper-focused on him, the perceived threat. "You seem like a good man, mister Reigen. And yet you have no fear– no fear of what you can do. No fear of your powers."

"No, of course n-not," Reigen says, creeping numbness spreading along his face, his arms. And then, "No, stop." But it's Mob that says that one, Mob that darts their eyes back to his brother. Reigen clamps their mouth shut, and another crack splits out from their feet. Another symbol severed. The gun rattles on the ground.

"No fear of who you might hurt!" the woman continues loudly over the noise, eyes wild. She's hurls her hands downwards, takes a single step forwards. Her pistol is still clasped tightly in one hand. "You even brought another child with you! Here! Even after knowing our demands! You never intended on giving yourself up! Never had any thought to the danger you pose!"

Mob's half-formed barrier flares up again. It doesn't hurt as much now – the crawling sensation having dissipated with each cracked sigil. It must be getting easier.

It's getting easier.

"Don't," Reigen says abruptly. But it's no longer to the woman. He stares at Ritsu. Small hand outstretched, hints of blue and gray flickering along his fingertips.

The man restraining him finally seems to notice. He stumbles back, still clutching Ritsu's hair, jerking the smaller boy's head back. "Fuck– Saito!" he yells. "This kid--"

"Ritsu!" Mob shouts with Reigen's voice, to which Reigen tacks on, "Stop!"

But it's too late.

The woman turns. Ritsu's power flares. And the gun, skipping haphazardly along the ground, suddenly hurtles into Ritsu's open hand.

To the casual observer, the warehouse would look entirely normal. Boring even. Which is good, Hanazawa supposes. Nothing to suggest the nature of its current occupants.

However if someone were to look closely, they'd probably notice the faint golden shimmer surrounding the place. Or perhaps the unnatural stone formations blocking the entrances, the side-doors. The large piece of concrete carved from the the very ground itself and inexplicably dumped in front of the large loading dock around back.

Hanazawa stands a dozen feet away. Not quite leaning against the chain link fence at his back, but close to it. His legs feel a little bit like jello, and a sheen of sweat broke out on his forehead a few minutes back.

"They better be alright in there," he mumbles for what must be the dozenth time.

God, how he'd rather be in the warehouse. Standing out here, just simply waiting, is practically torture. But he knew from the moment Reigen had explained his plan that he was the only one who could do this part.

His barrier – the largest one he's every attempted – glints in the air, a semi-translucent dome of protection. Or rather, of containment. One made to keep everyone and everything inside from escaping. It's quite the feat of psychic power, Hanazawa thinks, not for the first time. Impressive,
really. He's sure to be praised for it once everything's settled down. Brother-kun definitely wouldn't have been able to pull it off. And Kageyama, well— without his body it's not as if he could have managed it either.

"They really, really better be alright."

He keeps a close eye on the nearby entrance. The one Reigen and Ritsu (and Kageyama!) had disappeared through nearly ten minutes ago. The one Hanazawa had blocked last, before backing away and setting up the barrier itself.

_Rocks for the entrances, Reigen had said, to stop the actual humans from escaping. And a barrier to block, um, evil spirits or... anything else._

"Right," Hanazawa says aloud, rolling his shoulders and focusing on the shimmering shield. "Just keep the really big barrier up until the police get here. No big deal." He breathes in and out and forces his thoughts into something a bit more positive. "I mean, I'm sure everything's fine. This is really just a precaution, after all. Kageyama probably has it all totally under cont--"

The entire building shudders and Hanazawa's words trail off into breathlessness.

"It's... probably nothing," he says after a long moment, eyes wide and drifting about the warehouse at large. He puts all remaining strength into his barrier, just in case, vague recollections of obliterated school buildings and terrifying shadowed entities flitting through his thoughts. "Probably nothing."

In the far distance, he hears the first droning siren. Followed by another. Still many minutes out, but coming closer. Hopefully.

Hanazawa stares at the building. Tries to convince himself that the walls are not, in fact, warping inwards ever so slightly. He swallows dryly.

"Probably nothing."

Chapter End Notes

(Probably nothing.)

(This chapter... didn't necessarily go exactly in the direction I had envision it. But I'm not complaining. Ritsu returns to the roll of resident Bad Decision Maker™, and Hanazawa was a joy to write. Quite the welcomed respite, actually. Given the ongoing tension of, well, everything else.)

(Also, the pacing of this chapter (Reigen's whole bit, specifically) felt a little rollercoaster-y to me. I struggled to make things slow when they needed to be. Like, for example, after the mid-chapter gunshot. And in other places, when I needed things to be fast, it was as if there were too many things to describe. Too many people, or actions, or whatever. You know what I mean? Anyways, if you (yes you) have any suggestions or comments on the chapter's overall pacing, I'd love to hear them! Thanks for reading!!)
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Aftermath, Part 1.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The gun hurtles into Ritsu's open hand.

And it's as if time slows down. Just for that moment.

Reigen watches as the woman turns, mouth open in mid-yell, her gun already raised. The man behind Ritsu is still screeching, is now pushing him away instead of holding him back, and in that moment Reigen knows.

He knows that despite Mob's power burning at his fingertips and sparking through the air that it's too late.

His hand reaches out--

(It's too late, we're too late--)

Time ticks forwards.

(Toolatetoola--)

And a gunshot splits the air.

We're too late, Reigen thinks. It's the last thought he's able to form. The sudden gaping void of Mob's emotions crashes forwards and fills every space, tearing Reigen's consciousness to pieces.

The last thing he sees is his own outstretched hand, flickering like a mirage, with foreign darkness bleeding out from the edges.

***

Hanazawa's breath leaves him in one fell swoop. Gone. Like a punch to the gut. His barrier around the warehouse follows not a moment later. Not so much disintegrating as bursting outwards. Hanazawa barely has time raise his hands in front of his face before it hits him.

His back hits the fence hard and he gasps, pulling air into his lungs as the very atmosphere seems to ripple and swell. Like an explosion, only without the flames and fire. The warehouse walls crumple inwards in small, irregular intervals. The ground around its base flows as if liquid, only to suddenly harden in misshapen swells and spikes. Hanazawa tries, for just a moment, to pull up a barrier, only to find that his psychic power refuses to coalesce. Instead it simply bleeds away into the air, towards the warehouse.

Hanazawa gasps again, lungs suddenly burning, and he turns away, curling against the fence.
Moments later that too bends and gives way. He tumbles with it to the ground, arms cradling his head. The sounds of screeching metal and white static fill the air.

It is terrifying and far too much and Hanazawa can feel the twisting and snapping of power in the air. Dark and electric. Dangerous. It all seems to surge suddenly, and Hanazawa clenches his eyes shut.

Then, in the very next moment, it all stops.

Hanazawa breathes in. A shuddering, shivering gasp. It takes another few moments of piercing silence before he opens his eyes.

The warehouse… is still there. He'd thought for a moment… but no. It's just several feet lower than moments ago. In its own sort of crater. The ground around it collapsed large, rocky chunks. First sloping upwards, only to drop off in sharp, jagged edges.

Hanazawa stares with wide eyes, ears ringing, until a loud crack splits the air and a large section of outer brick and stone crumbles away. The structure shudders under the damage. Hanazawa swears under his breath and stumbles to his feet, blinking away the spots in his eyes. Without another thought he starts forwards.

"–id, hey kid!"

The sudden shout – from somewhere behind him – is startling. Spinning around, Hanazawa scrambles up a chunk of stone and looks past twisted metal gate of the yard.

Uniformed men and women, and two– Hanazawa blinks– no, three cars. Police. Paramedic. It's then that Hanazawa realizes the ringing in his head is actually the police's sirens.

Oh right, he thinks belatedly, this was part of the plan. Hanazawa stares, blinks slowly, then tries straightening up.

"H-hey, over here!" he shouts, surprised at how breathless he is. "This way! H-help! We need help!"

There's another loud groan from behind him, and Hanazawa whips back around in time to see a sheet of metal roofing tumble off the side of the warehouse. Its clanging fall echoes ominously from the otherwise silent building.

Kageyama, he thinks suddenly. Ritsu, Reigen. There hasn't been a single sign since the explosion. There warehouse is collapsing down around them but not a single person has made it out.

Hanazawa's lips pull back from his teeth, breaths gusting harshly through his mouth. He spares a wide-eyed glance behind him, to the two officers heading his way, and then without another thought he scampers down the mound of rock and dirt. Towards the warehouse.

"Hey! Hey, kid!"

Hanazawa splays a hand forwards, pushing at the air to move the debris from his path. It doesn't work.

"Kid, wait! We're–"

He tries vaulting himself over the next rise and fall of broken rock with a burst of psychic power. Nothing happens, and he's left scrambling up the slope on his hands and feet.

"Kid, wait– Stop! It's dangerous–"
Hanazawa spins on his heel, pausing only long enough to make eye contact.

"My friends," he pleads, and he doesn't wait to see the officer's eyes widen in realization. The warehouse creaks and groans and Hanazawa turns back towards it with raw determination singing through his veins and desperation nipping at his heels.

***

Early morning sunlight filters faintly from above, chasing away the earlier gloom. Its patchwork pattern spreads out into the far corners; small spots of brightness littered among the shadows.

Reigen doesn't notice it.

The air is sharp, but the swaths of light reflect off the dust floating lazily about. The warehouse is quiet, but the spots of brightness illuminate wild fractures and shattered stone. The light is bright and warm, but it shines off arching aluminum walls, twisted metal pipes, and silent bodies.

But Reigen doesn't notice.

He notices very little, in fact.

He is rather more concerned with remembering what exactly it was to be something.

Air fills his lungs in even breaths, and his eyes blink once, slowly. But it's automatic, and unimportant, and Reigen only really acknowledges the breathing and blinking in the most distant of ways. The focus here is existing. In this quiet. In this stasis. Breathing in, and out, thinking about nothing much at all.

But then there's a loud creak of metal and something from above tears away with a tortured screech. His eyes blink again, a bit faster, and the debris crashes down somewhere in a cacophony of noise.

That's a bit harder not to notice, and with that thought in mind his breathing stutters and catches, only for his lungs to then draw in a deep, shuddering breath. His body suddenly lurches forwards and really at this point it's all too much to ignore because even though it seems like he might be trying to walk his legs are giving way and the ground is rushing up to meet him.

His knees hit first, followed unceremoniously by the rest of his body. Face first, into cracked concrete.

Reigen takes a long, slow second to contemplate this new vantage point before finally realizing that it was supposed to hurt.

It didn't.

It didn't feel like anything, actually. And even now, lying on the ground, Reigen feels nothing except for distant pressure. Like his skin is numb. Like his body isn't his own.

His head turns, and his eyes blink quickly, breaths coming faster. But it's not Reigen, and it's hard to think of it as important. There's a soft crunch of silt and dust as his chin tucks towards his chest, but he spares the movement no thought because he really doesn't have enough thought to spare. All this is too much and right now he's much too little and the only thing he remembers is that whatever had happened, it had been pain, it had been loud, and it had been horrible.

Reigen draws away, a bit deeper into his mind. Searching. He ignores the soft sobs, the blurring vision, and instead does all he can to gather up the fragments of his consciousness.
His lips move, and his voice might say something but Reigen doesn't know what, and a few seconds
(minutes, hours?) later his arms bend; pulling in, pushing down. The distant pressure goes from his
chest and stomach to his knees and palms. And then, after a particularly bad lurch of movement, it's
at the soles of his feet.

Reigen pauses to ponder this new position. Standing is... not great. His legs are numb, for one. And
the half-formed thoughts drifting through his mind tell him that he probably won't be able to walk,
but then between one blink and another he's walking anyways.

His feet drag along the ground, steps mismatched. Slow, but with purpose. Direction. Something
from above lets out another screech as it crashes down, but his steps don't falter. His gaze shifts
deliberately, staring at the cracks on the ground and following them to the motionless bodies of
several men and women.

Reigen wonders, vaguely, if this should mean something to him. His vision blurs. Soft, repetitive
sounds spill from his lips. There should be meaning there but Reigen doesn't know what.

Then his eyes slide past a large slab of buckled concrete to a pair of dark-haired boys, and things start
to slip back into place. Piece by piece. His body covers the remaining distance in a stumbling run.

"No no nonono--"

Mob and Ritsu. He remembers. Mob and Ritsu, but he doesn't know why. Doesn't recall how. But
it's Mob, sitting upright, saying something that Reigen can't hear. There's a strange bend to his arm
and stranger marks on his face, but that strangeness doesn't seem to matter because his eyes won't
leave Ritsu. Ritsu, who's curled on the ground next to Mob's side. Ritsu, who's quite still and silent
and--

And...

He slides to his knees before the two boys. And just like that, muffled and distant becomes sharp and
piercing. Sound gains meaning, touch becomes more than pressure. Reigen staggers, floundering
under their abrupt weight, and the next thing he knows a hand is squeezing his shoulder.

"-ey, hey. Shigeo?" He's given a rough shake. "Listen, is Reigen there?"

Mob's hand. Mob's voice. But it sounds wrong. The words don't make sense. Even so, his head
shakes back and forth in response. The hand squeezes again, and Mob's voice gains an edge it
usually never has.

"What do you mean?"

Good question. Reigen almost tries to say as much, but all he can do watch as his own hands hover
over Ritsu's still form.

"Is-- is Ritsu...?"

Ah, his own voice sounds wrong too. The hand on his shoulder tightens to the point of pain, and this
time so does the pressure surrounding Reigen's head.

"Oh he's, um--" Mob's voice sounds close. "Well you know, he got hit, but it's--"

The building creaks ominously and sound goes in and out for a second.

"-hey hey careful! Listen! Shigeo--" The hand twists in the fabric of his jacket and pulls. "You need
Reigen wishes he knew what to stop. But the distant pressure isn't distant anymore. No, it's close and it's everywhere and it hurts. His body refuses to cooperate with his demands, folding down instead of moving away. His hands clasp onto Ritsu like a drowning man, pulling at his shoulders and turning him on his back. Reigen thinks he hears Mob's voice say, "Ahh damn it. This is fucked. We're fucked," but it sounds so far away and so unlike Mob that it's hard to tell.

Ritsu's skin is pale, his eyes are closed, and something dark and sticky has soaked through the front of his shirt. It's all he can see. Vision tunnels and darkness presses in from all sides. Even so, something compels his hands to clamp down over the darkest, wettest spot. Red warmth immediately seeps between his fingers. Sound stretches. Goes distant and dream-like. There's a thudding in his ears that gets louder and louder and louder--

A hand grasps his chin, jerking his head away.

"...eathe-- listen just-- breathe!"

Air rushes into his lungs. A deep, trembling gasp. Things snap back into clarity, and the edges of his vision regain shape. Reigen's hands shudder, slip slightly, and then jerk back against the wet warmth beneath them. His head starts to turn--

"--no no don't look, he's fine. Ritsu's fine--"

Mob's voice is loud, too forceful, and it's wrong. It's not Mob. It doesn't make any sense but it can't be Mob because Mob is--

Mob is…

"Shigeo," demands Mob's voice. The last of the fragments slot into place.

The revelation doesn't show, nor does it really matter. Reigen can feel the quickness of the breaths, the pounding of his head, but can't do anything to alleviate the pain. Mob-- no, Dimple stares at Reigen, and Reigen's eyes stare right back. And then, unbidden, his eyes blink and tears blur his vision. In the next moment he's speaking, stumbling over his words.

"P-please, Ritsu-- he needs-- h-help him, please."

Dimple continues staring with Mob's wide eyes. Beneath the grime and dust are the sweeping black symbols. And limp against his side is the broken arm. But at some point between the explosion and now Dimple had scratched away at Mob's cheeks, and in more than one place the raised red lines cut clear through black marker. Then he grimaces and shakes his head.

"We have to get out of here, first."

"But--"

"No, listen to me!" Dimple clamps his hand over Reigen's mouth, squeezing his face. "This place is coming down, and I'm out of power. We need to get out."

The building creaks and groans as if just to prove it. Distantly there's a series of loud clangs, followed by a crash. There's a far off noise, something a little like voices, too distorted to make out clearly.

"–please–" Reigen's mouth tries beneath Dimple's hand.
"Is Reigen there?" Dimple asks instead. His gaze meets Reigen's eyes without blinking, insistent. Reigen feels his own breath stutter and stop in his chest. And then, after an almost deliberate squeeze of pressure around his head, his body relaxes. The only trace remains at his hands, pressing determinedly against Ritsu's abdomen. It's an invitation, an opening, and Reigen tries to move--

--is moved, by the hand at his face, tilting his chin up, and then side to side. Dimple looks, stares, but despite it all Reigen can't so much as blink. He stares back, painfully aware how his terror is not showing.

Dimple finally lets go, and bare seconds later the pressure returns, pulling Reigen's gaze immediately back to Ritsu.

"Shit," Dimple says quietly. There's a sort of exhaustion to his voice and it makes Mob sound decades older.

All the same, Reigen feels inclined to agree. Something's wrong. Very wrong. More so than just this situation. His body feels miles away and foreign and bad and it's as if the only thing keeping it going is Mob's presence.

There's another series of loud clanging, then the crack-bang of something breaking and falling inwards. The noise echoes through the air. The distant voices start to gain shape.

Dimple suddenly tugs on his shoulder.

"Shigeo," he says, and the tone almost sounds like Mob himself. Blank, a bit empty. "People are coming."

Oh right, Reigen thinks, watching as his hands shake and slip in the pooling blood. The police, and that Hanazawa kid. His eyes blink, wet and itchy. "It's our b-backup," Mob says in Reigen's voice. Their gaze lands on Ritsu's chest, waiting.

Dimple's hand lingers on Reigen's shoulder -- squeezing briefly -- before suddenly pushing down. Dimple stands up, using Reigen as support.

"Hey! We're over here!" he calls out over Reigen's bowed head.

The reply comes in a flurry of voices, muffled by distance and debris. The most prominent is a bright but panicked, "Kageyama!?"

The hand on his shoulder twitches before Mob's voice shouts back, "Uh, yeah, over here! We need help!"

There's a flurry of scattered wood and concrete chunks, and the warehouse walls creak in protest. Hanazawa's voice pipes up with another, "Kageyama! Hang on!"

There's a crack as something shatters, and Dimple shouts one last, "Hurry!" over the top of Reigen's head before he crouches back down with a muffled swear. In the same breath he asks, "Can you still use your powers?"

Reigen's eyes burn, but they refuse to blink. He can't tell if Ritsu's chest is moving, but he's pretty sure that staring until his eyes fill with tears isn't helping anyone. "Yes-- b-but it…" His voice sounds bad-- broken. "It hurts Master."

Dimple's hand twitches again, and he doesn't reply for a moment. "Yeah that, uh, probably doesn't matter too much anymore. But, um--" he continues quickly, "Fuck, sure, we should switch."
Something up above gives way with a loud ping. Old dust and rust drift down through the air.
Someone – not Hanazawa – yells something about moving the others.

"S-switch?" Mob echoes with Reigen's voice.

"Yes," Dimple says, a touch of panic to his voice. "Then use your powers to keep this place from–"

A particularly loud screech of metal swallows the rest of the words and sunlight suddenly washes over them, shining brightly. Reigen's eyes close, body bending over Ritsu's. He hears nearby yelling and Dimple swearing loudly but the rest gets lost to a deafening crash of metal and glass. Dust and debris rain around them, and for a moment Reigen can hear nothing but his own gasping breaths and a bright ringing in his ears.

Then a small warmth knocks into his side, and Mob's voice says quite loudly, "Shit fuck– fucking– switching now, one two thre–"

There's a hint of flash beyond Reigen's closed lids and suddenly Mob's body slumps against his. The building shakes and trembles and Reigen's eyes finally open to see Ritsu's bloodied stomach. Things are still falling, and his ears continue to ring, but beyond that he can also hear an echo-y, "Let's go Shigeo let's go–" and other people shouting and his own voice gasping–

"–okay just t-take care of Ritsu please."

And then his gaze snaps up to Dimple, small and glowing with frayed edges, and in the very next moment Mob's presence bleeds away. Like a long exhale. It's pale mist in the corner of his eye and odd sort of growing emptiness in his head. And then nothing.

The immediate sensation is relief.

The one directly following it is violent and nauseating as Reigen is abruptly wrenched straight back into the forefront of his mind. No more drifting. No more distance. Just sudden, inescapable existence.

His entire body jerks, muscles trembling. Dark spots haloed in brightness burst across his vision. He blinks once, twice, and the spots grow until they black out everything.

There's a slight jostle from his side, a few words, and a hand tilting his head back from where it had slumped, but then his muscles spasm again, and again, and only in the most primal of ways does Reigen realize this is his body giving up.

The darkness that comes to take him is neither gentle nor soft but Reigen welcomes it all the same.

Chapter End Notes

A) Schrödinger's Ritsu.

B) Wow this was just about as awful as anything I've ever written. Not in quality, hopefully. But in the actual writing process. Like, there was a physical sense of revulsion for a while there whenever I tried tackling this. I don't know what happened. Some odd kind of writer's block, maybe? Anyways, two and a half months isn't too bad, right? Ahhah yeah. Well. Here's hoping the next chapter won't take as long. (No promises though, I haven't even started it yet...)
C) Anecdote time (which you may feel free to ignore). Um, so, I wouldn't necessarily call myself an author. Fanfiction is a hobby, and I'm pretty average at it. So please feel free to ignore the bit of advice I'm about to try and impart because this is literally just a personal experience tidbit. Don't stop writing. But don't force yourself to keep writing a piece that isn't working. If you feel the need to switch gears to something else just to keep the words coming, do it. I didn't. I sat my ass in front of this chapter and told myself that I would write nothing else but this. That was two months ago. And you know what happened? I stopped writing altogether. This chapter was beating me down and really, I think if I had let myself take a break to write some lighter one-shot or whatever, I would have had a much better time. But no. Instead my break consisted of no writing at all. It was really tough getting back into the swing of things and it's something I really regret doing. Anyways, all that to say that if I had any advice to offer, it would be to not force yourself into one project while stopping your involvement with others because you're gonna burn out. It's not fun.

D) Thanks for reading and sticking with this. You folks are awesome. Special shout outs to buddingsaccharomyces for being really really nice and helping me feel a little less down and to clori-eden who drew this amazing comic piece for chapter 9. Like hot damn. I'm still not over it.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Aftermath, Part 2.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Leaving is different this time. It takes more effort. A bigger push. But Shigeo does it. He leaves Master Reigen's body and gives himself over to the white noise.

Except… it isn't white noise. The weightlessness he expects to feel doesn’t happen. Leaving was difficult but this—this is easy. Slipping back into his proper body is nearly effortless. It's as if there's a magnetic pull, drawing his consciousness back where it belongs. Shigeo can't help but follow it.

It feels like coming home.

Shigeo settles into his proper body, and for one moment everything feels right.

Then it's as if something locks into place, and his awareness of what's him shifts.

The first lungful of air rocks through his body. He's suddenly more than just his own consciousness; he's blood, bones, muscles and skin. Burning weight settles in his limbs and chest and head. His ears ring. It all returns—everything at once, and Shigeo thinks wait—hold on. But it doesn't. He's trapped and the full force of existence crashes over him like a wave. It threatens to pull him under.

For one terrifying second Shigeo thinks he might just pass out.

—No! Shigeo jolts, eyes flying open. The world blurs almost immediately but he refuses to blink. He can't pass out—Not now. Not here, not again. He gasps, sucking in more and more air. There's something dangerous to unconsciousness. He has to stay awake. He must stay awake.

Shigeo's heart pounds loud in his ears. He can feel it, in his chest and wrists and in the hollow if his throat. It's real. It's warm and heavy and Shigeo hadn't realized how much he's missed it. Missed its comfort. Missed the way he can feel it instead of simply knowing it exists. Master Reigen's head-space had anchored him, but existing there been nothing but numbness and silence. Now he has lungs, and eyes, and hands and feet and—

"Shigeo! If you don't move right now—"

Shigeo blinks before he can stop himself, and his vision finally clears. Something that had been a green blur resolves itself into something that is still green, but significantly more Dimple-shaped.

"—going to collapse and guess what! You'll all be dead!"

Shigeo stares, then blinks some more. Dimple is close, and no longer blurry, but his edges flutter like fire in wind, voice shrill. This is Dimple panicking, Shigeo realizes.
Why would Dimple be panicking?

It comes back to him, all at once. Shigeo gasps, and it's like his ears pop – dull roaring giving way to sudden noise. Dimple is swearing, the warehouse is collapsing, and all around are distant shouts and screams as death comes hurtling down from above.

Shigeo extends both arms up in front of him– or rather, tries to. Only one makes the journey. A wave of crippling pain radiates outwards from his shoulder, but Shigeo blinks through the spots bursting across his vision and sucks in another breath. One arm is more than enough. He focuses on what's left of the warehouse and lets his power go. Up. Out. Stop, he thinks.


He watches through his own eyes – eyes that see colors the right way, eyes that don't blur things up close, wonderful amazing eyes – as sky speckled magenta coats his hand. And then, keeps watching, as magenta speckled sky manifests along every bit of structure in sight. Pieces freeze mid-fall. The walls and patchwork ceiling glow. Dust seems to still in the air.

It all stops, and for a moment things get quiet.

It's nice.

What's less nice, however, is the way his arm trembles. Or the hot throbbing in his other shoulder. The sharp sting across his cheeks and hands and knees. What's less nice is the way his lungs seize when he hears a distant but familiar, "Kageyama!" and the way his eyes burn at Ritsu and Master Reigen's continued silence.

This isn't right. It's not nice.

It's terrifying.

"–so change of plan, okay?" Dimple says– has been saying. Shigeo wants to listen but the silence is too loud. "I'll possess Ritsu, you keep us all from being squished, and– Hey, are you with me?"

Yes, Shigeo thinks, but the thought's a fleeting one. Instead he's occupied by the notion of Ritsu and Master Reigen. Why– why is it quiet? Why hasn't anyone moved? Shigeo can't see much except for Dimple, and even he has stilled and quieted. Shigeo knows Ritsu and Master Reigen are there – right there, inches away. But the silence and stillness make that distance seem like miles. Shigeo– he needs to cross that distance. He needs to–

He flattens his hand to the ground and tries to push up.

Pain – bright and blinding – shoots through his shoulder. Shigeo chokes and jerks away, the back of his head hitting the ground. Spots cloud his vision. For one terrifying moment his powers surge as hot agony burns through his arm.

It takes a monumental effort to pull it back under control, and through it all Shigeo is left with the faint impression of something green arching towards his brother. Dimple is gone, and Shigeo lies there, alone and gasping from the pain. His powers writh and snap, as if finally deciding they've had enough. Shigeo can't– he has to keep it safe. He has to protect Ritsu, and Master Reigen and Dimple. So he stares straight ahead, unblinking, with tears burning in his eyes. Because it's all he can do. He keeps the warehouse from caving in, because it's all he can do. It's all he can– it's not– It's not enough– it hurts but Master Reigen and Ritsu are hurt more and he has to– there must be something–

Shigeo only realizes someone else is there when he feels a hand smoothing away his tears. Shigeo
finds that he can barely muster up the energy required to blink. His powers continue to whirl underneath his skin, restless and raw, but the panic has been dulled by exhaustion. When Hanazawa's face swims into view Shigeo can do nothing more than stare.

Hanazawa doesn't react to Shigeo's blank gaze, warm hands brushing over his forehead and swiping gently over the scrapes on his face. He talks over Shigeo's head, as if to someone else, and Shigeo suddenly realizes that Hanazawa isn't the only one who's arrived unnoticed.

Another blink and a slow shift of his gaze reveals a uniformed woman leaning over where his brother lays, and Shigeo can hear a man's voice somewhere nearby. Shigeo catches words like 'pressure' and 'steady' and 'one-two-three-up–'

Someone coughs, soft and wet. The sound cuts right through Shigeo, makes his throat clench and vision sharp. But no one else seems to notice. He sees Ritsu now– finally, out of the corner of his eye, lifted– lifted onto something, nearly out of view, and it's at that very moment that Shigeo finally finds the strength to sit up.

"--oh, oh-- okay easy, careful," Hanazawa says suddenly as the world tilts and blurs, and, "It's okay, it's alright, not too fast." There's a hand on his back, another at his elbow. "It's alright. Ritsu is okay, you're okay."

Shigeo's chest hurts, and his arm feels like hot static, so he's pretty sure he's not okay. But Hanazawa seems determined, repeating the words over and over. Shigeo breathes in and out and tries his best to believe him.

He looks around, far slower than he'd like, and takes stock of the situation.

Ritsu is lying on a bright orange board, looking both better and worse for it. There's a man and woman tending to him. Two more strangers are next to Master Reigen, barely a few feet away, and Shigeo watches unblinkingly as one holds Master Reigen's wrist. There's some signal then, that passes between the two strangers, because one of them suddenly places a small mask-and-pump thing over Master's nose and mouth while the other starts chest compressions.

Hanazawa says something right then. But there's a hollow absence where the voice should be. A blip of nothingness. As if Shigeo blinks. Blinks, and somehow misses the words entirely.

In fact, he seems to have missed a bit more than that. People have moved. Master Reigen is being lifted up and away by the two strangers, Ritsu is no longer in sight, and Hanazawa is leaning into Shigeo's vision and speaking--

"–ey Kageyama, can you stand?"

Shigeo swallows, and croaks out, "No."

Hanazawa exhales. "Okay," he says, and Shigeo can feel the warmth of Hanazawa's hands as he slides them around his back. "Okay, they told me to help you," Hanazawa is saying, "We'll stand up together, just lean--" and once again Shigeo's blink seems to last longer than it should because now they're standing. Walking.

The strangers carrying Ritsu and Master Reigen pick their way through the rubble. Hanazawa has them take the same path, just a few steps behind. Shigeo can't watch. He looks down at his hand instead, staring blankly at the kaleidoscopic colors wreathing his palm.

He could help, maybe. Float them all outside. He could probably do that and more, given how eager his powers are to be used. But then Shigeo looks up, and he realizes they have left the warehouse
behind them. He blinks in the morning sun, eyes burning.

There's a small crowd of people up ahead, several cars with flashing lights. Shigeo wants to feel relieved, but he just feels… empty. Tired. Shigeo only realizes that they have stopped walking when Hanazawa clasps a hand to his wrist and says, "You can let it go."

Shigeo's drifting gaze takes a moment to find Hanazawa. He blinks slowly, uncomprehending.

"The warehouse," Hanazawa clarifies, gently squeezing Shigeo's wrist. "You can let it go now. We're out."

Shigeo blinks, looks at his hand, then sucks in a breath.

"The... people..." he tries to say, thinking of the scary woman with the gun, of the angry man, the others. His tongue feels heavy in his mouth. "They're still..."

Hanazawa's hold is no longer gentle. He stares at Shigeo for a moment, the nearby sirens making weird shadows play along his face. Ritsu and Master Reigen disappear into the back of an ambulance.

"They weren't..." Hanazawa starts, then stops. He shakes his head again. "No one's left in there. It's okay. Let it go, please." One of the uniformed people comes towards them, and Hanazawa slides his hand down to Shigeo's, and folds Shigeo's fingers into his palm.

Shigeo lets him.

The building collapses. More noise than movement. More folding in than a falling apart. The screeching of old metal fills the air, louder than the ambulance's sirens for a few seconds, and then it's over.

He stares at the ruins as he's lifted into the ambulance, Hanazawa close behind him. Letting go. Let it go, Hanazawa had asked, as if it were that easy. It would have been better to say wrap it up. Pull back. Lock in. Letting go would be the opposite really. But it doesn't seem like the place or time to mention it, so he doesn't.

Shigeo closes his eyes, and the ambulance speeds away.

***

The ride passes in a blur.

Teruki sits next to Kageyama, buckled in on the bench. There's a heavy blanket tucked around his shoulders. He isn't cold, but the paramedic had insisted he keep it. Kageyama has one too, but Kageyama is shivering, so at least his blanket makes sense.

"Is the boy on any medications?" the EMT asks, stretching over Brother-kun. She hangs a clear plastic bag from the stretcher.

When Kageyama's silence stretches, Teruki offers a quiet, "I don't know."

The EMT barely spares him a glance. Teruki doesn't blame her. There's far too much for her to do, and it's not like Teruki needs the attention.

"Does the man have a history of seizures?"

He watches her squeeze past Reigen, grabbing a large red pack and pulling out gauze and some sort
of pen light. Teruki tucks his legs in as much as possible but he knows it doesn't help. There just isn't enough room.

"I'm sorry," Teruki says as she shines the light under Reigen's lids. "I don't know."

Kageyama moves then, but it’s only to curl inwards, arms cradled in his lap. He's still shivering. Teruki doesn't know what to do. The EMT ignores them and pulls her pack and gauze over to Brother-kun.

"Does the boy have any known allergies?" A pause. "Latex? Painkillers? Other drugs?"

Kageyama stays silent, and Teruki closes his eyes. "I don't know."

The hospital is ready for them when they arrive. There's a flurry of voices and people and movement, and Brother-kun and Reigen are quickly carted off. It's efficient and practiced and when Teruki and Kageyama are brought to a wide space with small beds and smaller chairs, Kageyama's parents are there. Waiting.

Kageyama's mother cries.

Teruki pretends that he doesn't mind when a nurse leads him to his own separate bed. He hears the rattle of the curtains being drawn on either side the Kageyamas, and then watches as the nurse pulls out the ones next to his own bed. The distance and fabric almost completely muffle Mrs. Kageyama's tears.

"Why am I here?" he asks, mostly to himself.

The nurse presses him towards the bed and gently grabs his arm.

"Disinfectant," she says. "And from the looks of it, stitches too."

The nurse gently twists his wrist and bends his elbow, and Teruki blinks down at a large gash along the fleshy bit of his arm.

"Oh," he says quietly.

The cut stings when it's cleaned, and the nurse removes three small chips of stone before pinching the skin together and stitching the wound shut. She finishes off by wrapping the whole thing in a couple layers of bandages.

"There, not so bad, right?" she says, she wiping her hands with a damp cloth.

Teruki stares. "It's fine. Can I leave?"

"Oh, well yes. But first--" She grabs a sheet of paper from a clipboard and hands it to him. "Your next appointment and instructions for the stitches. Just keep the bandages dry and clean, and don't flex your wrist too much for the next--"

"Thanks," he interrupts, folding the paper and stuffing it in his pocket. He feels a slight twinge along his arm. "Can I leave now?"

There's a slight pause, as if the nurse is silently reevaluating her opinion of him. "Yes," she says at length. "You can find the exit by following the green arrows down the hall."

Teruki turns and pulls his curtain aside. The section that had held the Kageyamas is open and empty. He blinks at the bed, sheets rumpled and chairs slightly askew. He looks around, seeing nothing but
strangers, then rounds on the nurse.

"Where is he?"

She looks at him, then looks down at her clipboard. "The boy with the broken arm? They probably brought him to surgery. Did you come in with him?"

"Yes. How do I get there?"

The nurse takes a breath, but then simply sighs, and Teruki has to fight back the sudden, vicious desire to rip the clipboard from her hands. She glances back at him as if she knows his thoughts.

"Follow the blue dots," she finally says, and when Teruki leaves he’s practically running.

No one stops him. No one asks questions. And still doubt bleeds into his thoughts. He turns a corner, moves aside for a gurney, and is barely able to start moving again for the weighty sensation of uncertainty. He hates it. He hates this. He follows the blue dots around a corner, gaze set downwards, and pretends he isn't panicking

Then he runs straight through Dimple.

Teruki stops and spins on his heel.

"–oh hey!" the spirit is already saying. "It's you!"

"You," Teruki says.

"No you," the spirit shoots back with a grin.

"What? No– you were there," Teruki states, remembering fever bright cheeks and green-specked aura.

"Where? Creepy murder barn?" The spirit drifts closer, looking almost unsettled. "Yeah, I was there. Everyone was there. Ah, wait– were you there?"

"Of course I was!" Teruki shouts, only to smother it with a cough when someone turns the corner. Teruki turns away, suddenly grateful for the otherwise empty hallway. The person passes with no comment, and Teruki glares up at the spirit.

"I was there," he hisses when the coast is clear. He wants to say more, but finds his throat tight with some sickly feeling.

"Alright sure," the spirit acquiesces, complete with an eye-roll. "But not when it counted."

It's said flippantly. A throwaway sentence. Barely a few words strung together meant to embarrass him at most.

It hurts far more than it should.

Teruki walks away, barely remembering the pattern on floor he's supposed to be following. Arrows? No, blue dots…

"Hey, quick question," the spirit continues, following Teruki as if the retreat wasn't a purposeful attempt to get away. "You seen Shigeo around?"

Teruki doesn't answer.
"No? No answer?" The spirit actually has the gall to float directly in front of Teruki's face. "Hey, you're not gonna pass out, are ya'? Because you look like shit."

Teruki's face runs hot. "Shut up," he spits. The anger helps burn away the guilt. "You were possessing Brother-kun," he accuses suddenly.

"There! That's more like it!" The spirit flutters ahead a few feet. "And yeah, I left him like a minute ago."

Teruki tries to hold on to the feeling of anger, letting it drive him forward. "What did you do to him?"

"Hmm, nothing much, really. Just kept him alive for fifteen minutes or so? Nothing big." The spirit manifests a single arm just so he could peer disinterestedly at his non-existent nails.

Teruki blinks. "You… what?" He stops walking.

The spirit spins in a neat little circle. "Kept his heart beating. Pumped some blood. Did a little breathing. I call it the spiritual… defibrillator. The spi-fibrillator. Hm, no? Whatever. It was all good fun… except, no not really. It was pretty awful. But I did it anyways. Never let it be said that I'm not a kind and benevolent god."

Teruki feels unbalanced. The spirit– Dimple had… kept Brother-kun alive? But if he's here now, then that means–

"Is Brother-kun…"

"Getting a bullet removed from his gut?" Dimple's ghostly tail flickers back and forth. "You bet he is. It's some next level shit, let me tell ya'."

"He's alive?"

"He sure ain't dead, not with all those machines hooked up to him. Not that he didn't give it a real good go. Can you believe he got himself shot? In front of Shigeo! I thought we were all done for! What a moron!"

Teruki exhales slowly, and let his eyes close. When he opens them a moment later, he's mortified to find that they feel suspiciously hot. He swallows, trying to get rid of the sudden lump in his throat. Dimple doesn't help matters any by floating up all close, face twisting within his spectral mass.

"Hey seriously, are you gonna faint? If so, let me know." A nurse turns the nearby corner and clips Dimple as she walks past. Dimple seems unconcerned. "I don't wanna pass up a good chance to watch you fall flat on your face."

"Wow hang on," Dimple continues, suddenly grinning. "Are you gonna cry?"

Teruki presses onwards, following the blue dots around the corner. With Dimple briefly out of sight, Teruki presses a hand against his chest and breathes in deeply. Unfortunately, the next exhale stutters a bit, and then there's still that damn lump in his throat. In a desperate attempt to keep his composure, Teruki ducks his head and increases his pace.

"Oh my god," Dimple says from behind him. "You totally are!"
Teruki keeps his gaze on the row of blue dots, and surreptitiously swipes at his eyes. He ignores the spirit when it draws up next to him, matching pace. He has to find Kageyama – find him, tell him about Brother-kun. That he's okay. That Reigen is… probably okay? Yeah, probably. That everything's alright and that the kidnappers are… Well Teruki will have to lie about that one, because Kageyama would never be able to forgive himself if he knew the truth.

"Hey," Dimple's voice echoes right above his ear. "Where you going?"

Teruki doesn't reply.

"Jeez," the spirit complains as they turn another corner. The blue dot path spills into a sparsely decorated, sparsely populated room, and then ends. "And here I was led to believe you got all mellow after traumatic incidents."

Teruki stops and looks. They've come to a waiting area.

"Oh hey look," Dimple says, circling Teruki's head. "It's Mr. Dad."

He's right. Kageyama's father sits several seats away, up against the wall. His elbows are propped up on his knees, one hand supporting his head. There are a few other people – an elderly couple leaning against each other, a mother and daughter over in the corner by the magazines, a young adult with their eyes closed and headphones over their ears. None of them seem to notice Teruki hovering.

"So," Dimple says after a moment, settling right above Teruki's shoulder. "How is Shigeo?"

Teruki swallows once more, and half turns away from the room. He wants to continue ignoring the spirit, but he knows it would be petty. "Broken arm," he says instead, staring at the wall. "Um, shock too. I think." He tries to blink the wetness away from his eyes.

The spirit hums, seemingly almost sympathetic. "Well, he kinda did go supernova there for a few seconds, didn't he– that sure was something. Think he's alright?"

Teruki looks down at his hands. Supernova. That's one word for it. Teruki rather thinks that it was a bit more like a black hole, sucking in all energy, unfathomable. "That's not--" he starts. Stops. Starts again. "I'm not worried about that," he lies, hands shaking. "Kageyama– he'll be fine. As long as… everyone else is."

There's a small pause.

"Hate to break it to you kid, but everyone else is definitely not fine."

Teruki crosses his arms and tucks his hands under his armpits. "I know." He breathes in and out, tilts his head up, closes his eyes. "But Brother-kun, and… and Reigen– have you seen him?"

Dimple is right, everyone is not fine. There are a few who are in fact quite dead, back under the rubble of the warehouse. But if Brother-kun and Reigen make it, if they can recover--

"Not since possessing Ritsu. But uhh--" There's another pause, and Teruki blinks his eyes open and find Dimple spinning slowly. "I don't know. Something's up."

"How so?"

"Well," Dimple starts, and Teruki prepares himself for the worst. "I was pretty certain Reigen died."

Teruki's breath leaves him in a soft, "Oh."
"Right? Awkward." Dimple continues spinning, almost as if he's contemplating something. "But now I'm not so sure."

Teruki's chest feels all funny. He remembers the warehouse, Reigen lying next to Kageyama and Brother-kun. He'd been so still, and then the paramedics were there, taking his pulse, pumping air--

"They revived him," Teruki says suddenly.

"Oh did they?" Dimple stops, form barely wavering. There's a prolonged moment of consideration, and then, "Well that might complicate things."

Teruki doesn't know what to say to that. Dimple flits back around, facing Teruki.

"I'm gonna go check something out," he says. "Don't tell Shigeo what I said about Reigen, alright? If he asks just, I dunno, deflect? Or lie. Whatever. You'll figure it out. Mr. Dad has spotted you by the way."

"Wait," Teruki says, but Dimple has already zipped through the ceiling. Teruki stares up for a long moment, struggling to make sense of his thoughts. Finally giving up, he turns back towards the waiting room.

Mr. Kageyama is indeed looking his way, and as soon as Teruki makes eye contact the man sits a little straighter. Then, as if just waiting to be acknowledged, Kageyama's father gestures to the empty seat next to him.

There's one moment where Teruki nearly turns back around, but the next thing he knows he's slowly crossing the distance between them.

"Hanazawa, right?" Mr. Kageyama asks as Teruki sits down. It isn't a question. "You found our boys."

Teruki wants to deny it, but it's the one thing he did actually accomplish. There's a few more seconds of silence before Mr. Kageyama continues.

"Shige will be alright, y'know!" Mr. Kageyama's voice is a bit too bright, but it snaps Teruki out of his daze. "They're just uh-- I get nauseous, with blood. And uh, broken bones. So my wife's with him right now. The doctor said they were going to set Shige's arm and... and give him something for the pain. I think. It shouldn't take long. Then we're all going to wait for Ritsu."

Teruki nods politely in response and clasps his hands together over his lap.

"We were worried," Mr. Kageyama continues after a moment, as if needing to fill the silence. "Last night, with the police. Shigeo first, and then Ritsu this morning. The accusations, we thought--" He shakes his head. "We didn't know what to think. But you found them." Mr. Kageyama pauses, and takes a breath. "Thank you, Hanazawa."

The final words are so utterly sincere that Teruki jerks around to stare at him. Mr. Kageyama blinks back, brows raised.

"Don't thank me," Teruki practically chokes, the honesty catching him by surprise. "$I didn't do anything."

Mr. Kageyama smiles at him, though it comes across more weary than anything. He places a heavy hand on Teruki's shoulder.
"You were there," he says. "You called the police. You led them to my sons. You did more than…" Mr. Kageyama stops for moment, and the weight of his hand nearly lifts altogether. "The police are still investigating, and Shige's barely said a word, so I don't know everything that… All that happened. But I know enough— to feel guilty. And useless." Mr. Kageyama takes a deep breath and looks out into the waiting room. "So please know that whatever you did, it's far more than me.

Teruki takes a deep breath of his own, twisting his hands together and welcoming the twinge of pain along the stitches in his arm. The weight on his shoulder is distracting, but he doesn't dare shrug it off.

"You didn't know what to think," he says hesitantly, parroting Mr. Kageyama's words back at him. He's not really sure how to do this, how to talk to this man. But if he thinks too long about his words the lump in his throat threatens to return. "There were… psychic powers involved. You couldn't have helped anyway."

Mr. Kageyama smiles again, this time a bit ruefully. "That doesn't really make me feel better, kid. But thanks for trying." He pats Teruki's shoulder then sits back in his seat. And then, like it's a given, "Shige will be glad to see you. He talks a lot about you, y'know. You're a good friend."

Teruki suddenly doesn't trust his voice, so he just nods once, even if he feels like it's a lie.

Mr. Kageyama finally lets the silence be, and after a few minutes Teruki relaxes back into his seat. He just has to wait. For Kageyama and Brother-kun. For Reigen and Dimple. He has to wait, and hope that this time, nothing comes along to mess it all up.

Teruki wishes he was good at waiting.

Chapter End Notes

Heck guys my bad. This... never should have taken this long.

I'm really grateful for all the comments and kudos up until this point. You all are very patient, and very forgiving. Couldn't ask for better readers. I've got, hm, another 5000 words written after this batch? I was actually going to try and finish the whole thing and post the last couple chapters in succession, but eh. That's not happening. But so long as I don't chicken out, the next chapter should be much, much sooner than this past one. Then an epilogue. And then it's done.

Not sure all who's left, but hey, thanks. Your comments have really played a big part in getting me back on this thing. Much appreciated.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Aftermath, Part 3.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Before anything else there is confusion.

Opening his eyes doesn't help matters any. In fact, it kind of makes things worse. He stares up at the white ceiling, feeling horribly out of sorts. He's almost afraid to look away. Looking away would imply looking at something else, and that's a big commitment. Who knows what he might see. Could be bad. Could be really bad. Best to just ignore it until things make a bit more sense.

Reigen closes his eyes. Then he mulls over a few important facts.

One: He's not dead.

That in itself seems important. Impressive even. He's not sure why, exactly. But then again, he's no stranger to close calls. Which brings up point number two:

Something happened.

Reigen turns that thought over in his head. Something happened. Something big. Something to land him here, wherever that is. Something happened, and he doesn't quite remember what.

But consider point one:

He's not dead.

Reigen blinks his eyes open. Being Not Dead is feeling especially strange at the moment. Like something's slightly… misaligned. Like he hasn't quite slotted back into the space he's supposed to occupy. There's an odd spaciousness to his… everything, really. His chest, his limbs, his head. Definitely his head. He hasn't moved yet – still working up to it – but he's a bit concerned about things not fitting right. Like wearing a suit a couple sizes too big. Except that suits and bodies are entirely different things.

Reigen exhales slowly, still staring straight up. Okay, he thinks as the seconds tick by. Okay. The ceiling holds no secrets. He gave it a good hard look. If it had secrets, it would have revealed them. He blinks, slower than he'd like, and tries to swallow back the bitter dryness in his mouth. He's just gotta look around now. No big deal. It's just looking.

Reigen takes a deep breath, clenches his eyes shut, and heaves himself up on to his elbows.

Right away he decides that movement was a bad idea. His arms don't behave at all like he expected them too, too stiff and too slow. They barely take his weight and tremble almost immediately. Lifting his head is a bit better, but not by much. He tries looking around, but any deliberate movement feel several ticks slower than his thoughts. He barely lasts a handful of seconds before admitting defeat.
The bed welcomes his tactical retreat, flat pillow crinkling as Reigen flops down.


Reigen contemplates his findings and comes up with a somewhat dizzying impression that he's in a hospital. Not good, that. But that would explain some things. Like the confusion. Reigen closes his eyes, distinctly aware of the delay between intention and completion. Yeah, not good at all. Something big happened alright. If he could just remember--

"Hey you're not dead."

Reigen cracks open an eyelid – a little faster than before, nice – and lets his gaze slide towards the voice.

"Debatable," he says before he can have a chance to consider how talking might work. The word scratches along his throat before croaking from his lips. It's a pitiful thing. Reigen is suddenly dreadfully thirsty.

"Was that a cough or an attempt to speak?"

Reigen tries to answer. He really does. But when he takes a breath the air seems to stick to his tongue and throat. He can't help it. The cough rips through his chest. And then another. And then another one after that. When he finally sucks in a fresh breath of air and blinks through the tears, there's a glass of water hovering above his face.

"Take a sip for the love of god before you hack up your lungs."

Once again movement doesn't quite work as expected. His arm jerks to life seconds after he tries lifting it, knuckles bashing into the bedside railing. He resorts to sliding back along his bed, propping his back up against his pillow. There is in no way in hell he's capable of grabbing that glass.

"Wow you're like, really out of it." The glass floats towards him. "But don't worry, my bedside manners are impeccable. This will in no way go wrong. I tip you sip."

To be fair, Reigen does manage a few gulps of water before it does inevitably go wrong. And even so, he doesn't particularly mind the cool feeling of water soaking into the collar of his shirt – gown? – or dripping down his neck. He lies back against his pillow, a little damp and completely exhausted.

"Thanks," he rasps, peering upwards. His field of view has changed slightly. He can now see the top of an IV poll and what looks like the back of a couple machines. Something beeps steadily. "Wha… why'm I here?"

The mostly-empty glass clatters back onto the bedside table. "That's a good question-- perfectly sensible. I'll answer it, definitely, but first I'm gonna check a couple things. Standard procedure, I think. What's your name?"

Reigen blinks, nice and slow because that's about the only speed he can manage. "Arataka."

"Good good. Now what's mine?"

Reigen blinks again, even slower. Just out of spite.

"Fartcloud," he answers, feeling unreasonably smug.

Dimple wafts closer, tiny arms crossing under his face. "Ha ha, glad to see your sense of humor is
intact." Dimple pauses, smirk stretching his features. Then, after a few beats of silence, his expression smooths into something blank. "It's a joke right? Please tell me 'Fartcloud' was a joke."

*Of course,* Reigen wants to reply with a grin and wave of his hand. But that's a bit out of his reach at the moment. Instead he blinks again – one of the only reactions that's squarely within his capabilities – and with as much levity as possible says, "Joke, Dimple."

The words kind of slur together, unfortunately. Not too bad, but nothing close to Reigen's usual eloquence.

As it is, Dimple brightens immediately.

"Oh good– Not that it wouldn't have been a riot if you didn't remember me. Imagine the possibilities. Imagine the pranks. It'd be *hilarious.* Really, truly. But…” Dimple's arms morph back into his body as he floats a few feet back. "I wouldn't get the same satisfaction, y'know, and where's the fun in that? When you trip up your next flight of stairs I want you to *know* that's it me."

What Reigen wants to do at the moment is roll his eyes, but he doesn't think that would turn out so well. "I swear--" God it takes forever to talk. "—one of these days… I'll have Mob exorcise you."

The joke falls flat thanks to his horrendous timing and tone, but even so, Dimple's reaction is unexpected.

"Shigeo huh?" Dimple floats past the IV poll and out of sight. "Don't think he'll do any exorcising any time soon, so I'm probably safe for at least one good prank."

"…What?"

"C'mon, it'd be funny. I'm already laughing."

"No--" Reigen tries to tilt his head with limited success. "What about… Mob?"

Dimple flits back into view, circling one of the machines. "Oh y'know how it is. He'll probably be out of it for a couple days. Maybe a week? Trauma leaves its marks. Speaking of trauma, how are you feeling?"

Reigen suddenly wants to be able to do much more than just blink and stare. "Wait," he says, hating how clumsily he shapes the word. "Wait, what-- what happened?"

"Oh right!" Dimple says as if suddenly remembering something. "I did say I was gonna answer that." He settles practically motionlessly atop the heart monitor. "You died."

It's at that particular moment that someone walks in.

Dimple at least has the decency to look apologetic as Reigen's teeth click shut. Reigen can't see the door, but he hears footsteps squeak to a stop followed by an abrupt gasp. A second later there's the clatter of something hitting ground.

"Oh god," a woman says. "You're awake."

Reigen makes the monumental effort to turn his head, and a nurse comes into view without too much difficulty. Encouraged, he even tries lifting his hand again. It flops weakly onto the bedside railing. Progress.

"Hi," he says, making an effort to ignore Dimple. "You… dropped something."
The nurse stands with papers strewn about her feet, which she quickly scoops up before hurrying to the bed. "I'm so sorry," she says, pulling out a device from her pocket and checking it with a betrayed look. "You must be confused, I'm sorry… I usually get an alert when someone's waking up." She rounds the side of the bed, and Reigen carefully (but successfully!) pushes himself into more of a seated position as he tracks her movement. "My monitor must be broken, because you're clearly…” She trails off, standing before the two machines.

Reigen listens to the steady beeping for a few moments, waiting for the nurse to continue. When it's apparent she done talking, he takes a breath.

"Miss Nurse?" he asks.

She jumps as if she'd forgotten he was there. "I'm so sorry," she says again, this time with a touch of desperation. "Please forgive me – I'm just–" She glances at the machines, then steps around them. "– Being very unprofessional, I'm terribly sorry. My name's Yuna."

"Right," Reigen says, gaze wandering. "Hello Yuna." He looks at Dimple, floating Merrily above the IV poll. The spirit catches his stare and makes a show of pointing at the nurse and shrugging melodramatically. Yuna, of course, neither sees nor hears him, and instead continues staring at Reigen as if trying to decipher a mystery.

"You're in a hospital," she says abruptly. "I'm sorry, I should have told you that. You're at Seasoning City General."

"Yes." Reigen pauses, slowly but surely getting a handle on the odd delay of things. He considers his next question, and settles on, "Why?"

Yuna blinks, then glances at the mess of papers in her hands. "Oh right, um." She flips one over, then relegates it to the bottom of the pile. "Oh– You… Arataka Reigen right?" He hums in agreement when she looks at him. "Right, you experienced a tonic-clonic seizure several hours ago, leading to… sudden cardiac arrest. You were resuscitated on scene, but failed to regain consciousness." She pauses to peek once more at the heart monitor. "So you've been brought in for minor surgery and further diagnosis. I was actually on my way here to take you for an MRI, but now that you're awake your priority might be shifted."

"I… had a heart attack?"

Dimple swoops past the nurse's shoulder, unseen. "You had a heart attack!" he echoes nearly gleefully. "Like an 80 year-old geezer!"

"Not quite," Yuna says, blissfully unaware of Dimple's shenanigans. "But close enough. Your heart stopped beating, and we're not sure why."

"Oh, hm."

"All we know," Yuna continues, apparently determined to continue reading Reigen's prognosis to him like some kind of weekly TV show drama. "Is that you've suffered significant head, neck, and torso trauma, as well as a fractured wrist, though that's the least of your worries. I'm honestly… Well it's a surprise you're awake right now, let alone holding this conversation."

Reigen sits in the hospital bed, hands folded neatly in his lap. There's an IV line in the back of one of them and a clip sensor on the tip of his index finger. He palms are sweaty and thin blanket over his legs does nothing to help the chill in his thoughts. His right wrist is all wrapped up, and now that he thinks to acknowledge it, he can feel the pressure of thick bandages around his neck. He remembers
an alleyway and an empty warehouse at the break of dawn.

"Me too," he says at length, suddenly inescapably aware of the spaciousness within his own head.

"Do you mind if I take your vitals?

At Reigen's assent, Yuna falls into silence as she measures his pulse, three fingers pressed firmly against the inside of his wrist and eyes on the clock across the room. After about a minute, she frowns and lifts her hand away. "Do you mind?" she asks, hand hovering in front of Reigen's neck.

"Go ahead," Reigen says, barely keeping the questioning tone from his voice. He tilts his chin, and Yuna finds Reigen's pulse at his throat, eyes once again on the clock. Dimple floats in close, expression far too interested for Reigen's liking.

"Y'know," Dimple starts, almost conspiratorially, as if Yuna could possibly hear him. "I'm sure this isn't the rarest thing to ever happen, but it sure is a first for me. Figures you'd be the kind of guy who couldn't even die properly."

For lack of a verbal reply, Reigen settles on his slowest blink yet. By the time he opens his eyes, Yuna is already fixing him with a carefully composed stare.

"So your pulse is pretty slow," she says evenly. "Um. How do you feel?"

Good question. How does he feel? Things are too bright, for one. Bright in a hazy kind of way, like an overexposed picture, and noise in general seems dialed up past the point of comfort. The heart monitor – nice and slow as it is – has been putting him increasingly on edge, and both Yuna and Dimple's voices have been, well, loud. The kind of loud that happens at just before midnight in a hotel when you're trying to sleep but the guests next door are still watching TV or having a conversation or being entirely normal but you're trying to sleep and could they just quiet down please, ten minutes, that's all.

Thinking about it, Reigen is left with the distinct suspicion that he should be suffering from a rather nasty headache.

He isn't. He doesn't feel much of anything, expect for pressure.

"Bad," is his answer. It's an understatement. "A bit… wrong."

"Ha!" Dimple says, too close and – surprise, surprise – too loud. "A bit wrong! Let's just put it this way – between you and Ritsu you make one whole dead person."

"What?" Reigen asks before he can stop himself.

Yuna blinks and straightens up. "Oh I didn't mean to stare," she says hurriedly, but Reigen's barely paying her any attention. She continues speaking, mumbling something about scans and impossibilities even while Reigen stares down the spot above her shoulder. Dimple has the gall to mimic a yawn.

"I should put in a few requests," Yuna says suddenly. "For an EEG, and some other tests."

"For a what?" Reigen asks at the same time as Dimple's, "Oh no."

Yuna's already stepping towards the door. "I'll be right back."

"No you won't," says Dimple and soars straight through Yuna's head.
Reigen watches in mild alarm as Yuna freezes mid-step, spine snapping straight and rigid. There's a brief moment where her arms jerk and her eyes go wide, but then her limbs relax and her expression clears of anything at all. Her papers slip from her fingers and flutter aimlessly to the ground.

"Was that necessary?" Reigen asks.

Yuna's eyes blink and fix him with a stare. "Of course it was necessary." Her voice is all wrong in a way that Reigen has become reluctantly accustomed to. "You think I just possess you humans for the fun of it?"

Reigen chooses not to address that last part. "She was just trying to do her job."

"She was trying to make you the next hospital freakshow." Her body bends, a little mechanically, and Dimple has her methodically pick up each scattered piece of paper. "Not her fault, of course. Only so much you can do when faced with an inexplicably conscious comatose body."

Reigen takes a good long moment to consider his next choice of words. In the interim, Dimple stacks Yuna's papers and clips them onto her as-of-yet unused clipboard.

"What happened?" Reigen asks at last.

Dimple turns to face him. "Big picture? Or specifically to you?"

Guns and wooden crates and swirling symbols painted on concrete and skin. Plans falling apart. "Me," Reigen says. "No wait, is Mob okay?"

"Wow okay, points to you for that," Dimple says. "He's fine. Will be fine. Probably. He's back in his own body, at least. Do you remember that much?"

"Yes. He's… not here." The spaciousness of Reigen's head is impossible to ignore. "Is he… like this?" Kind of empty and misaligned. Wrong. "Is he like me?"

"Ahaha no, this is exclusively a 'you' problem." Dimple closes the distance and props Yuna's body on the base of the bed. "I'm curious; what's the last thing you remember?"

Dread twists in his chest, and Reigen feels nauseous in every way but the literal one. It comes to him, suddenly. That Mob's brother had been shot. And just as quickly, he realizes that's where it all ends. There's the distinct sensation of being too late, and then nothing.

"Mob's brother," Reigen says. He'd failed. He'd been too late. "He got shot."

"Yep," Dimple says. "Figured that'd be it."

"He's dead."

"Aaahh–" Dimple holds out one of Yuna's hands, index finger pointed upwards. "He isn't, actually! See unlike you, Ritsu went about his near-death experience the normal way."

Reigen tries to think past the emptiness in his head. "What do you mean?"

Dimple makes a face at that. Sort of puffs up Yuna's cheeks and then lets the air out all at once in a big whooshing sound. "Beats me," he says. "But he's alive, and you're… hm. Look, rare moment of honesty here – I don't really know what happened back there. A lot was going on. I was focusing on keeping Shigeo and Ritsu alive, because I actually take care of my possessions…" He pauses for a moment, looking up from Yuna's nails. "That was a pun. Possessions, get it? It's relevant too, 'cause
"I'm seeing right now?" He pauses again, and Reigen sort of wants to hit him. "Possession."

Those were a lot of words with a lot of meaning and Reigen grudgingly takes his time to parse through them. "I'm being possessed," he says slowly, knowing even as the words leave his mouth that that isn't the correct answer. He knows what being possessed is like. This, this is–

"The opposite, actually. You're the one doing the possessing."

Reigen isn't quite sure what to make of that.

"See," Dimple continues, "we spirits can't possess dead bodies. Some kinda divine law, or whatever. So what probably happened is that– hm, Shigeo kicks you out of the driver's seat and you become a spirit. No biggie. Except then he leaves, and your body dies before you can get behind the wheel." Dimple is points at Reigen and then gestures broadly. "You probably would have just faded away soon after, because lemme tell you, becoming a bona fide spirit is hard, but then plot twist! Your body is resuscitated and suddenly there you have it, an empty shell waiting for you to possess. And here we are."

Dimple ends his tirade with a twirl of his wrist and an expectant grin.

Reigen isn't sure what to make of this, either.

"C'mon, it'll be fine," Dimple says as the silence stretches. Like Reigen needs the assurance. Like it's no big deal. "I really should be welcoming you to the club! Congratulations on overcoming the bounds of your mortal existence. How does it feel to possess the shell of who you used to be?"

Dimple's looking for a reaction. Looking for something. He's pushing too hard, too fast, with all the wrong words. Reigen swallows back the growing hysteria and looks up from his own hands.

"Feels exhausting," he says. At least it's the truth.

That doesn't seem to be the something Dimple's looking for. Reigen watches the resulting display of emotions – a hint of sympathy that quickly smooths into practiced apathy. "Bah, you'll get over it. Just look at it this way, you probably have psychic powers now. Every spirit does. Think of it as… a career move."

"Don't–" Reigen starts. He swallows, throat still dry, but it's something he can barely feel. "Just, that's enough. Please. I'm… tired."

More than that, he's afraid.

There's a void in his head, a dullness to his senses, and a cold burning in his lungs. He's dead, but not. Reigen knows he's expected to take in stride, that Dimple doesn't get it. Not really. But it feels like he might suffocate even though his breaths come steady and his heartrate keeps even. He's not even alive enough to properly panic.

Reigen closes his eyes and tries to stop thinking.

In the silence his bed shifts and Reigen hears Dimple moving away. Yuna's voice sounds from somewhere a little closer to the door.

"I'll give you as long as I can," Dimple says. "A few hours, max. Will that be enough?"

Enough to what? Mourn? Embrace the new him? No, it won't be. Reigen shrugs, nothing more than
a small jerk of his shoulders. Dimple probably didn't see it. It doesn't matter.

"I won't be able to hold on to Yuna forever," Dimple continues. Reigen wonders if he's watching him. "Someone else will be here eventually. Doctors. Police too, if I've heard correctly. You'll have to explain."

Fantastic. Reigen cracks open an eyelid and Dimple is indeed staring at him. "Fine," he hears himself say. "I'll think of something. I usually do."

Dimple tips his head. "Just be careful."

Reigen closes his eyes again and hums. Dimple's words sounds like genuine advice. Be careful. Bit too late for that, though, isn't it. What's done is done. Reigen hears footsteps, then the door. When he opens his eyes a few minutes later, he's alone.

Chapter End Notes

A long time coming? Yes.

Questions answered? Hopefully.

How much more is there? A final chapter / epilogue is in the works, and it currently has about 6,000 words. Depending on when I wrap it up, it may be delivered in two parts. Then we're done guys. I'm dead, just like Reigen.

Here's to anyone who's still waiting on this. You're all absolutely angels.
The pen glides across the paper with quick, efficient strokes. Reigen watches it and the words it forms. He's long past caring whether it would be seen as impolite. From his angle, the notes are upside down. Barely legible. And it's his own answers that are being recorded, so what would it matter anyways.

"Thank you," the woman across from him says. "We're nearly done here. Is there anything else you think we should know? Any other information you would like to provide?"

Reigen's throat is dry and the glass in front of him has long been empty. "No," he says. "I think we're good here."

The woman makes a short note. "Okay," she says. "If you think of anything else that may be of help in the investigation, you know how to reach us."

Reigen nods. Another penned note.

"If that's all," the woman continues. "Then the time is 2:49 p.m. and this interview is now concluded." She reaches for the recorder, resting upright on the lacquered table, and presses a button. "Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Reigen. Do you need anything else before you leave?"

Reigen swallows, wishing desperately for more water. Instead he asks, "Have you found them all? The ones that got away?"

"I'm sorry, that information is confidential."

That's fair. Reigen nods again, a quick down-up of his chin. It feels delayed to him, but like most things he hopes it comes across as perfectly natural. He's been practicing.

"If that's everything," the woman continues. "Officer Oota will show you to the exit."

Reigen walks the halls with mechanical precision. The sun outside hurts his eyes, but its warmth is barely noticeable. He rubs his arms to chase off a nonexistent chill, and turns for the small visitor parking lot. A sturdy, box-like sedan waits for him. When Reigen is still several feet away, the driver's door opens and Mrs. Kageyama steps out.

She waits until he's at the passenger's door to speak.

"How did it go?"

"Good," says Reigen quickly. He nearly slurs the word. Whoops. Better work on that pronunciation. "Fine. Nothing exciting. It was just a witness statement, after all."
Mrs. Kageyama hums shortly. Reigen isn't sure what to make of that. He glances over the roof of the car, hesitating. But when nothing else seems to be imminent, he nods his head, and then gets in the car. Moments later Mrs. Kageyama joins him.

"You know," Reigen says as Mrs. Kageyama starts the engine. "You really didn't have to wait around. Driving me here was plenty enough."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Kageyama says. Her face is pinched, as if the idea itself leaves a sour taste in her mouth. "Of course I'd wait. I wouldn't very well leave you. Especially not after– well, you know." She stops herself. "Are you heading straight home?"

"Yes, please."

They drive in silence for several long minutes. Reigen stares out the window, and when that starts to prove nauseating, he stares at the hands clasped in his lap. They still feel foreign – slow, clumsy, but it's getting better. Kind of. Not really.

"I know I already asked this," Mrs. Kageyama says abruptly. "But are you sure you've been cleared? It's barely been two days."

Reigen tries not to think about the hospital. About self-discharge forms and hastily signed papers. "Yes, I'm sure."

"You look quite pale. Is everything alright?"

"I'm fine," Reigen says quickly. Too quickly. The words are nearly gibberish. He tries again. "I'm fine, really. Just a little tired. But thank you. For the drive. Oh, turn left here. It's quicker."

Mrs. Kageyama turns left. When the silence starts to stretch again, Reigen digs for something else to say.

"How's Ritsu doing?" he asks, and almost cringes. Could have picked a better topic, there.

"...Good," Mrs. Kageyama says evenly. And yes, maybe this wasn't the best subject to broach. Just when Reigen thinks that's all she's going to say, Mrs. Kageyama sighs. "He was moved out of intensive care yesterday evening."

"Oh wow, that's great!"

"Yes, it's been quite the relief." Her voice softens. "He hasn't been awake much yet, but when he is, he's convinced he's ready to come home. I almost believe him, when he talks like that. I can't believe it's only been a couple days. Oh, hm, should I turn up here?"

"Next one," Reigen says. "And then another right after the light."

"Oh yes, I recognize the area now."

They stop at a pedestrian crosswalk. A few kids walk by. The silence isn't as heavy, this time, but it still comes as a relief when Mrs. Kageyama breaks it.

"Ritsu," she says. "I can understand him, at least." Her words hold a surprising amount of emotion, almost frustration. "He's tired and hurt and trying to hide it. That makes sense. I get that. I know what to do with that. But Shigeo…"

The crosswalk signal turns, and Mrs. Kageyama starts driving.
"...Shigeo?" Reigen prompts after a long moment. His head feels hollow, empty.

Mrs. Kageyama sighs, and it's heavy with something a little bit like exhaustion. "He's home at least. But I still don't– he's still not... I just want to know how to help him."

Reigen stares at his hands. Mrs. Kageyama's words fill the car, her worry a near tangible thing. Reigen isn't sure what to say – he's said everything he knows already, these past few days. He's said everything he can.

"He needs time," Reigen offers slowly. It's what he's been telling himself, ever since they'd seen each other at the hospital and Mob and all but completely shut down. "A lot happened. And he's probably trying to... process it all. He just needs time, I hope."

The car turns a corner. Reigen doesn't look up.

"I know," says Mrs. Kageyama. "I know that. I'm sorry. I just-- I wish I knew why he's acting like someone died."

And to that, Reigen has nothing to say.

The car comes to a stop. Reigen's apartment is across the street. Reigen thanks Mrs. Kageyama for the drive, and carefully climbs out. Before closing the door, he tilts his head back in.

"Will you-- Can you tell me if--" Reigen stops, takes a breath, and tries again. "Can you tell if anything changes?"

*About Mob*, goes unsaid. Reigen isn't even sure what compelled him to request that of Mrs. Kageyama, other than he genuinely wants to make sure Mob is doing alright. Mrs. Kageyama smiles. It reaches her eyes, but only barely.

"Of course." And then, almost so softly Reigen isn't sure he's meant to hear, "If I can tell."

Reigen manages a nod. He closes the door and Mrs. Kageyama drives away with a small wave. Reigen turns around and escapes to the emptiness of his apartment.

***

"To record a new message, press four."

Reigen presses four. His phone beeps.

"To begin recording, press one. To stop recording, press--"

Reigen presses one. The phone beeps, and then;

"Thanks for calling Spirits and Such," Reigen says, just like he practiced. "Home to the 21st century's greatest psychic, Reigen Arataka. Consultations and appointments, both ongoing and future, have been postponed until the end of the month. For emergencies, please leave a name and number after the tone, and I will do my best to get back to you." He pauses for a moment, and then takes a short breath. "Thank you for your patience and understanding at this time. Hope you have a spirit-free day!"
He presses one again just as another voice chimes in behind him.

"I see you're doing better."

Reigen sighs. "Dimple," he says. His phone continues to list options – Reigen taps one, saving his new voicemail, and then puts his phone down. "What are you doing here?"

Dimple hovers several feet away, looking bored. "Can't a guy check in on a pal?"

"You've checked," Reigen says. "Yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that."

"Oh c'mon--"

"I'd like to think," Reigen continues, lounging on his couch. "That I could get some privacy in my own apartment."

"Don't be so dramatic. I'm just passing through."

"Right. Well don't forget to close the door on the way out."

Reigen stands up and heads into the small kitchen. There's a pack of smokes in the cupboard next to the fridge. He manages to coordinate his movements enough to pull it free from the other boxes and loose papers without upsetting anything. Success. He turns back around and sees that Dimple has followed him.

"Smoking again, huh?" Dimple asks.

"I never quit," Reigen says. In the low light of the kitchen Dimple's aura is plainly visible. It's a very vibrant green. He'd always been green, of course, but there used to be an unsubstantiality to it. Not now, though. Now he's as solid as anything else in Reigen's kitchen. He won't admit it's unnerving. But well. It is.

"Hey I'm not blaming you." Dimple spins in a neat little circle, looking at things Reigen would rather not have judged. A sink full of dirty dishes. A garbage can overfilling with take-out containers. "Sometime I wish I still could. Death's stressful, y'know."

Reigen rummages around for a lighter, and while his hands don't tremble, they feel as slow and lazy as they had earlier this week. He's gotten used to it. Nearly. But still, the delayed movement and bouts of dizziness are starting to get on his nerves.

There should be a lighter here, god damnit.

"Here," Dimple says. He drifts closer, aura reflecting against dirty counter-tops. He's manifested a little green arm, enough to point to a lighter floating a foot or so in front of him, wreathed in green light. "Found it on top of the fridge."

Reigen wants to snatch it out of the air, but doesn't exactly trust his coordination at the moment. Instead he reaches out and carefully removes it from Dimple's influence.

"Thanks," he says curtly. And then, "Why are you here again? I assume it isn't just to make fun of me."

"No fun making here. Just enjoying the show."

"Fantastic."
Reigen leaves the kitchen. Dimple follows over his shoulder. He settles back on the couch and lights up a cigarette, taking a long drag. It make him feel – if anything – a bit cold.

"Hey," Dimple says suddenly. "Listen. You need sustenance."

Reigen blows out slowly, watching the smoke disperse. "What?"


"I'm not–" Reigen stops and then tries again. "I don't know what you're talking about. You saw the kitchen. It's not like I'm wasting away here. I'm just… taking time."

"That's not what I meant."

"Then enlighten me."

Dimple rolls his eyes, edges fluttering lightly. "I was chasing away some freeloader spirits down by the river earlier today and I found some unformed spectral energy. Just past that one weird tree. You know the one."

Reigen takes another drag, thinking carefully. He makes sure to exhale in Dimple's direction before saying quite simply, "I'm not eating ghosts."

"Oh c'mon, it's not like that."

"Still no."

"It's just unformed energy," Dimple says, drifting closer. "Like leftovers. Anyways, I'm serious here. You need it."

"I really don't?" Reigen waves his hand, pushing Dimple back a little ways. His fingers buzz at the point of contact. "But thanks for the offer, I guess."

"It's been how long?" Dimple asks. "A week?"

"Six days."

"Nearly a week. And you're still a baby spirit."

"I'm not a–" Reigen stops. He takes a deep breath. "I'm not a spirit."

"Denial doesn't look good on you, pal."

"I have a body," Reigen says, ignoring the way Dimple circles above his head. He takes a drag and quickly exhales. "I'm not a spirit."

"Body-smody. Your meat vessel isn't going to stop you from untimely exorcism." Dimple's voice sounds both condescending and tired.

"I'm not going be exorcised."

He's not. It's ridiculous. Reigen sits up straight, trying to catch Dimple's eye, ready to tell him off even further. To demand he leave. But to his surprise Dimple flits right down in front of Reigen's face and stares.

"Please," Dimple says, voice dripping with disdain. "Making you disappear would be a piece of
cake. Especially when you're this weak."

As soon as the words are said, green overtakes everything else. Reigen blinks, jerks backwards, and then in the very next moment is absolutely overcome by dizziness. He almost expects pressure, right then. That sense of otherness in his head. Instead, it's like someone has taken garden shears to a dozen thin strings.

All cut loose, all at once.

Dimple is nowhere to be seen.

"What happened?" Reigen tries quickly, only nothing happens. No sound. No movement. His mouth is so far away it might as well not be his. He tries again, "Dimple, what are you doing?"

As if from underwater, he hears his own voice respond. "Making a point."

Something gives him a push, and with a jolt Reigen realizes he's drifting. Drifting away. The distance between him and his body becomes something entirely literal, and Reigen is unable to do anything expect panic in utter silence.

His body looks up, expression foreign but familiar.

"See?" his voice says. "That was so easy I could have done it accidentally."

"Fucking fantastic!" Reigen wants to reply. "Put me back!"

"Hmm, in a moment." Dimple rolls his eyes, looking down at his hands. "I want to make sure I drive this point home. Oh, still lit. Nice."

Reigen's thoughts edge towards static as he watches Dimple take a slow drag from the cigarette Reigen had been smoking. Smoke drifts about around him, and he struggles to not simply drift apart along with it. He tries to close the distance between him and his body, but even just keeping himself together is exhausting.

"Having trouble?" Dimple asks distantly. "It's because you're so weak, y'know. You can barely form."

The dim apartment light seems as bright as the midday sun. Reigen struggles against it. Dimple lazily drops the cigarette in a nearby mug, ignoring him.

"I get it!" Reigen thinks. "I get it! Put me back! Please!"

"So polite," Dimple drawls. He stands up, closing the distance. "I think this is enough. Hold on."

A hand reaches out towards Reigen, and then grabs. Before Reigen can form any sort of thought on how that feels, there's a rush of movement and the distinct sensation of stepping into a space that has just been vacated. The distance closes entirely, and Reigen finds himself once again with limbs and eyes and lungs and nausea rolling uncomfortably in his stomach.

"Do you get it now?" Dimple's voice is distant, green aura bleeding into Reigen's vision from somewhere above him. "Please say you do. I don't want to have to do that again."

Reigen takes a deep breath. And then another, reacquainting himself with the feeling. His heart pounds steadily, but it's loud and warm in his ears. After a long moment of staring blankly at the far wall of his apartment, Reigen blinks and sits down. Dimple floats into view, smile gone and face
impassive.

"You good, pal?" he asks.

A clock ticks somewhere, barely audible. The fridge makes a low humming sound.

"That wasn't necessary," Reigen says at last, words thick in his mouth.

"Maybe not," Dimple says, and he almost sounds like he means it. "But you were being difficult, and I wanted to make a point. You're weak, Reigen. You need to get stronger."

Reigen swallows and makes a half-hearted attempt at a scowl. "Why?"

"Oh jeez, I dunno." Dimple flutters lower, voice pitched with sarcasm. "Maybe because any spirit worth half its weight could do what I just did now? You don't exactly radiate unshakable control. Or— or hell, consider what might happen if a well-meaning psychic waves their hand at you! Bye-bye master Reigen. There's no coming back from being exorcised. That's a one-way ticket."

Reigen runs a hand shakily through his hair. "That won't happen."

"Humor me," Dimple says.

Reigen very much does not want to. But that doesn't stop him from remembering Mob's emotions, tearing through his thoughts and through the ground beneath his feet. Also, he's done the dying thing once already. He's not entirely ready for a repeat affair. Reigen rubs his eyes.


"Yes, thank you." Dimple's voice is not nearly as smug as Reigen had expected. "Of course I'm right. I can't believe it took you this long to finally admit it."

"Oh shut up."

"I won't. You deserve it for how dumb you've been."

Reigen sighs. "You don't have to be mean."

"Hah! You better be grateful. I could have been far worse."

It's true. And honestly, though he won't admit it, Reigen is grateful. Dimple didn't need to do this. Hell, he hadn't had to do anything over the last week. He could have just as easily abandoned them without so much as a thought. But he hadn't. And he's here now, too.

It's stupid, but Reigen really is quite grateful.

Half an hour later, he's as dressed up as he's been in days. A clean shirt, pants instead of sweats, face washed and shaved. Dimple scoffs at him as he locks the apartment door.

"We're walking down to the river banks," he says over Reigen's shoulder. "Not to a dinner and movie. What's with the getup?"

"I needed it," Reigen says simply. He feels human again.

Dimple hums, but doesn't reply.

They walk in silence for a long while.
"I need to talk to Mob," Reigen says as they cross a bridge. The river below is calm. "He's been taking this about as well as I have, hasn't he."

"Hm, less moping, maybe." Dimple flits towards a well-trodden path, branching down and away from the sidewalk. "But yes. You could say that. To give the kid some credit, he's a bit better about hiding it."

Reigen's not sure if that's a compliment to Mob or a concern. It's all too easy to remember how little Mob had let them both feel when they had been sharing the same headspace. Reigen marks it down as just one more thing to talk about.

"Yeah," he says at last. He takes the dirt path with care, watching each and every one of his steps. "I'll call him as soon as we finish whatever we're doing here. Which, by the way, is what exactly?"

"Gaining spiritual strength so you don't die. For a second time."

"Hm," Reigen says. "Fun. And how might one do that?"

"Watch and learn, pal. Watch and learn."

They find the spectral energy, and Reigen watches. And he learns.

***

Two days later, Reigen calls Mob.


"No?" Reigen repeats. He'd been putting out ideas on a time to meet up. Get some ramen. Have a more meaningful conversation. He'd always done better reading Mob's body language than the tone of his voice. And the phone call now was, if anything, utterly obscure. "No," Reigen says again. "How about some other time then. Saturday, maybe? Does Saturday work? I can swing by around noon if Saturday works."

"No," Mob says again. And then, at last, elaboration. "I'm busy this weekend. Ritsu is coming home."

"Oh," Reigen says. "Oh, of course. That makes perfect sense. How is Ritsu, by the way? Is he good? He must be good if he's getting let out of the hospital. That's great!"

"Yes."

Back to one-word answers. Reigen sighs.

"Good, good. I'm glad to hear. Listen, I'll leave you to it. Call me when you're uh, free. We really should have a– a chat, at some point. But it can wait. If need be. I'll let you know if anything comes up. Sound good?"
"Yes," Mob says softly. And then even more softly, "Sorry."

"Don't worry about it," Reigen says. "Talk to you later."

When the silence persists on the other line, Reigen hangs up.

***

By the third call, Reigen tests a theory.

"I've invited Hanazawa out as well," he says. "He says he's available Wednesday. Wants me to pay, of course. But I figure it's the least I owe him. And you. He's a funny kid, that Hanazawa."

"Oh," Mob says. Softly. But there's something there that wasn't before. A measure of interest. A hint of consideration.

Reigen sees the opening and takes it.

"So how about it? Wednesday, ramen at the shop by that old shoe store. I'll meet you guys there at one o'clock. I believe Hanazawa said your house would be along the way?"

There's several beats of silence, but then at long last, they get somewhere.

"Okay," Mob says. "Wednesday."

"Wednesday!" says Reigen, trying and failing not to sound too relieved. "Perfect! Excellent! I'll see you then."

"See you then," Mob echoes.

As soon as Reigen hangs up, he immediately scrambles for Hanazawa's number. As the phone rings, he stands up and starts to pace. In the back of his mind, he marvels at how much easier movement has gotten in the past few days. He can pace again, without having to think about it. He can juggle the phone without trying. He can speak without his tongue feeling like cotton. Dimple had really been on to something, with that spectral energy. The rest of course has been down to practice.

"Hanazawa," Reigen says as soon as the line clicks. "Listen, you free Wednesday?"

"Reigen," Hanazawa says in way of reply. "I didn't think you had my number. How are you doing?"

"No time for that," Reigen says. "Wednesday. One o'clock. I need you to hang out with Mob. I'll be there too, of course. But it's important you're there. Can you do it?"

The silence on the other line feels heavy with something. Judgement, maybe.

"I'd always make time for Kageyama," Hanazawa says at length. "I take it this is something that's already been planned?"

"Hm, maybe, who knows." Reigen steps into the washroom. There's a small mirror hanging above the sink. Reigen practices an expression, jaw relaxed, brow slightly raised. "You should swing by his place first though. Pick him up. I'll meet you at this ramen place a few blocks from the office, by this old shoe store--"

"Gahame's Shoes and Fashion? I know the place."

"Oh. Good." Reigen tries another expression, lips upturned, gaze steady. "Then it's settled. You, me,
Mob. Ramen at 1 pm. Wednesday."
"Mhmm. I assume you'll be paying?"
"I assumed that as well."
"Good," says Hanazawa. And with that, he hangs up.


It doesn't come naturally, exactly. Not yet. But it's getting there. A new normal, perhaps.

***

On Wednesday it rains.

Reigen arrives at the ramen shop first, water dripping from his umbrella to form small pools of water on the polished wooden floor. Hanazawa and Mob arrive several minutes later, both miraculously dry. Or rather, it would have been miraculous had Reigen not seen the sheen of psychic energy. The moment they step under the awning, Hanazawa flicks his wrist, and the shimmering dome of protection dissipates. Mob's right arm hangs in a sling.

The meal is a bit subdued. The weather doesn't help. Reigen chats politely about casual and unimportant things. The rain. The food. School. Hanazawa participates wonderfully, sticking to the safe topics like a fly on honey.

Mob is, for the most part, silent.

"So," Reigen says as the conversation ebbs. "How is Ritsu? He's been home for what, several days now, right?"

Mob nods once. "Yes."

"And?" Reigen prompts. "How is he?"

The noodle broth reflects Mob's downturned gaze. "He's good. Bored, I think."

Hanazawa scoffs, leaning in from Mob's side. "Bored is putting it lightly. I noticed he seemed relegated to the couch? Did he choose that?"

"Mhmm," Mob says. "He's not supposed to do stairs yet. And he didn't want to be stuck in his room all day. Dad moved the couch so it would be easier for him."

It's the most Mob's said all meal.

"Oh?" Reigen says. "Sounds like he's in good hands. And how about you?"

Mob hum shortly. "I'm good."

Not terribly revealing, that. Reigen poses the same question to Hanazawa, because the kid deserves
it, and listens with half an ear while Hanazawa prattles on about trivial things. Mob offers a couple of
words here are there in between slow, steady bites of ramen. Reigen sifts through the spices and
saucers on the counter, and after some deliberation, adds just a touch of wasabi to his noodles. Taste
has been weird lately.

"–so really," Hanazawa says. "I've been quite busy. Oh, can you pass the soy sauce?"

Reigen tunes in enough to hear that last request. There's a small bottle by his elbow. He reaches for it
without thinking, misjudges the distance, and the bottle goes tumbling off the edge of the counter.
Reigen bites back a swear. He twists in time to see Mob' hand move, fingers extended in a familiar
pose, only to suddenly jerk back as if burned. The bottle hits the floor with a dull thud.

"Sorry," Reigen says on instinct. He stares at Mob, perplexed. "You okay?"

Mob nods shortly, looking down. The bottle rolls under Reigen's seat.

"It's alright," Hanazawa calls from Mob's other side. "I'll get it."

Hanazawa leans out and extends a hand. Once again, a familiar pose. The bottle rolls out from under
the counter in a haze of yellow light. Reigen watches the display and tries not to think too hard about
Mob's reaction. Or lack thereof. Maybe he should say something.

"Mob," he says, and then stops. No… no. It's probably still too early. Too soon. He changes course.
"Hey listen, Mob. I'm taking time off work."

Mob blinks up at him. Hanazawa leans into view, wiping the recently acquired bottle with his
napkin.

"Really?" says Hanazawa. "How long?"

"Until the end of the month," he answers honestly. "Maybe a little longer, if I need it." He's pretty
sure it won't be but-- "It will be good to have some down time, after-- you know."

"Yes," Hanazawa says. "I'm familiar with needing time post… hm, post-change. How is it going, by
the way? I don't think you ever mentioned – I'm rather curious."

Hanazawa pins Reigen with a stare. It's not exactly the direction Reigen had wanted the conversation
to go. But – well, it's not like Reigen doesn't know what Hanazawa is referencing. The fact he even
brought it up at all means there must be some sign. Some feeling. Dimple had picked up on it, back
in the hospital. And if Hanazawa can tell, then Mob… Mob must feel it too.

Mob's not looking at either of them, though. He's staring down at his bowl, seemingly interested with
the conversation.

"It's been fine," Reigen says, just to say something. "Nothing too exciting. It's actually been quite
boring, all things considered."

"Is that so?" Hanazawa asks. It sounds like he's about to ask something else, too, but Reigen cuts in
before that happens.

"Yep. That's right. Mob, I– listen, work. I wanted to talk to you about work."

Mob's gaze flicks up towards him and Hanazawa is blessedly silent.

Reigen nods, mostly to himself. "I'm taking time off. And that means you're taking time too. But
listen Mob, if– if you need more time, it's yours. As much time as you need."

Mob nods his head, slowly. Still not much to work with.

"I know things got a little… tense." Reigen looks away for a moment, remembering. "A little uh, dangerous. So I just wanted you to know… it's okay if– if things aren't okay. I get it."

"Okay," Mob says. "I understand."

His words are rock solid. Reigen struggles a bit under their certainty. It reminds him of the sudden, fierce way Mob made his decisions when they were sharing the same mental space. He wonders exactly what kind of decision had been made.

"Good," he says instead. He tries to offer a smile, something encouraging. "Good, that's good. I mean, it's just a job. You don't have to come back at all, if you don't want to."

Mob looks him straight on. "Is that what you want?"

Whoops.

"No! No, of course not!" Reigen waves his hand, almost upsetting his near-empty bowl. "What I mean is, uh, your safety and comfort is more important, y'know. Of course I'd want you to continue working, but only when you're ready. Got it?"

"Got it," Mob says. His tone is even, but there's a tightness to his shoulders. Sometimes Reigen finds it's best to put trust in Mob's behavior rather than his words. This feels a bit like ones of those times.

"Okay," he says, making a mental note. "Good, I'm glad."

The meal continues in silence. At some point Hanazawa starts chatting politely about club activities. He draws Mob into the conversation rather effortlessly, and Reigen's relieved to see Mob open up some when the topic turns to Body Improvement. As they prepare to leave, Reigen thanks the shop owner and retrieves his umbrella. It's still raining outside, and Hanazawa flick a barrier above his head the moment he steps out from the awning. Reigen watches carefully as Mob hesitates, and makes yet another note when instead of forming his own barrier, Mob steps out underneath Hanazawa's.

"I'm heading this way," Reigen says, pointing over his shoulder. "So I'll see you guys around. Don't stay out in the rain too long."

"We won't," Hanazawa says.

"Thank you for the meal," Mob says, with a small bow.

"Anytime," Reigen says. His savings account says differently, but no one needs to know that. "Rest up, and tell Ritsu I say hi."

Mob and Hanazawa walk away from the shop, and Reigen heads out in his own direction. There's a list, not too long, in his mind. It's too early to tell, really, but that doesn't stop him from considering what he'd seen. It's not a lot. It's surprisingly little, actually. A bit of avoidance. A hint of denial. The usual repression, dialed up a few notches, but nothing so much as to be alarming. He wonders what it might have all felt like, if they'd still been co-driving a brain.

He hopes, like before, that Mob just needs time.
But, if time's not enough. If something more's needed. Then, Reigen thinks, then he'll need to decide what exactly he'll do.

***

Reigen's phone buzzes, a muted noise against his desk.

He ignores it. So does the client across from him. It's been a few months since he'd seen her last, but she's one of his few regulars. A friendly older woman with a penchant for superstition. This time she'd arrived with a broken lamp. Haunted, of course. But mostly broken.

"As you can see," Reigen says, twisting the switch on the lamp. "The spirit has been exorcised and the light works. Nothing too difficult for a professional like me." He twists the switch again, light off. "You've already paid, so everything should be in order. Will that be it for today?"

"Oh yes," the client replies. "Thank you so much dear. That darned thing wasn't working all month, can you believe?"

Reigen's phone buzzes again. He regrets its location. Too far to grab without being obvious.

"All month?" Reigen echoes absentmindedly. "Yes, well, the curse was strong."

"I didn't know what to do," the woman says, her hands clasped together. "I did try coming in earlier. But you were on leave, and I wouldn't dare go to another agency. I'm just so glad you're back."

"Me too," Reigen says, and when his phone buzzes a third time he stands up. The noise muffles the vibration, and Reigen pockets the phone as he strides around the desk. He then helps the client out of her seat and sends her on her way.

As soon as the door closes, Reigen checks his messages.

Each one is from Ritsu.

*Here's the deal.*

*I don't care what happens, or what stupid clients you get today for your "grand reopening", you will not let my brother get stressed out.*

*Understood?*

Reigen checks the clock. Nearly 3pm. Makes sense. He texts back.

*My grand reopening was earlier this week didn't you see the posters*

Hi phone buzzes several seconds later and when Reigen sees the reply he can't help but grin.

*I swear to god I will use one of my three daily rehab sessions to walk myself over to your stupid office and set your stupid posters on fire.*

Another message quickly follows, and this one has Reigen less entertained.

*My parents were trying to decide at what time to call the police if my brother doesn't make it home*
tonight.

Reigen rubs his eyes, then starts to type out, *Is this a threat?*, before erasing it all and starting again.

*I'm closing up early today. He'll be back by 730 latest*

Also, he adds in other text, *mob's a responsible kid and doesn't need a curfew, so jot that down real quick*

He wonders if he's trying too hard, but by that point it's already too late and the messages have been sent. He puts his phone on his desk and stands up. It seems like a good time to go ruminate by the window.

The next time his phone buzzes, Reigen has since turned his attention to the people walking outside on the street below. In the past, he'd occasionally catch sight of Mob right before work. He had been trying to do so now, but gives up quickly in favor of the new message.

*Of course my brother is responsible. But he's been stressed lately, and this is his first time back at "work" since we all nearly got murdered. You better not let anything happen to him.*

Reigen sighs, reads the message again, and then goes to put on some tea. In transit, he sends back:

*No danger only boredom got it*

His phone buzzes the instant he hits send, and Reigen looks down at Ritsu’s message.

*And tell me if does anything weird while he's there.*

Kettle on, cups out. Reigen rummages around and managed to find an old box of chamomile. He sends his reply after a couple rewrites and a few beats of hesitation.

*It's bad practice to gossip, and I'm not really sure what you mean by weird. But if you tell me whether hes used his powers at home I'll let you know if anything noteworthy happens here*

Reigen puts his phone down, screen up, and waits. It takes longer than he expects. But when Ritsu finally replies the messages blinks to view on screen. First:

*…Deal.*

And then a few second later:

*I don't think he's used them.*

It doesn't come as a surprise. In fact, it's just about what he was expecting. It's been over a month – nearly two, now. And Reigen doesn't want to worry over nothing. But Mob's recent show of restraint has become less and less subtle. The articles Reigen's read on "dealing with trauma" and "signs of stress" have been informative, sure. But unfortunately nothing out there delves specifically into a certain brand of emotional repression, psychic powers, and teenagers.

*Thanks*, Reigen texts back. And then, *I'll keep you posted*

He's just putting the box of chamomile away when Mob arrives. Reigen hands him the cup of tea, grabs his phone, and goes back to his desk. He doesn't want to make all of this too big of a deal. Mob is quiet, but that's normal. He sips his tea, he does his homework, he stretches his shoulder. Reigen asks him about school, about his brother, and about the exercises he's doing for his arm.
A client comes in, hefting a large bag on his back.

Reigen smiles his practiced smile and directs the man to Mob's desk. Mob already has the exorcism package papers spread out. Reigen stands up.

It's all quite normal. Strangely normal. As if there hadn't been anything to cause a month-long break at all.

"I'm sorry," the client says. He sits in the chair in front of Mob's desk. "You guys do drop-ins, right? I don't mean to impose."

"No problem at all," Reigen says. "Tell us what's bothering you."

"Oh, well, okay. So I bought this vase." The client glances down at his bag, resting by his feet. "It was probably a few months ago. But, ever since then, I've been having these nightmares. Is that something you can help with?"

"Of course," Reigen says. "That's one of our special deals, actually. My disciple can show you the package."

Mob is already sifting through the papers, pushing two of them closer to the client. "The cursed item," Mob says. "Do you have it with you?"

"Oh, yes," the client says, reaching for the satchel.

Mob pulls one of the papers back. The one closest to the client must now be the item-on-hand-exorcism, available for a mere 4,500 yen. A steal, really. Reigen steps out from around his desk, ready to play his part.

"Here," the client says, and places a glass vase on the table.

Mob immediately recoils.

Reigen feels it too. As soon as the vase is out in the open, the malevolent aura is nearly tangible. The man seems to sense nothing, but his expression speaks of annoyance and poorly concealed unease. Mob looks at the vase, and then looks at Reigen. This is Reigen's cue, of course. He approaches with a flourish.

"You were right to bring that here," he says, voiced pitched carefully into something ominous. "This vase– it clearly contains the remnants of… a resentful spirit, yes. Nothing too difficult for me, but of course you would have felt the ill effects at home. What do you think, Mob?"

And this is Mob's cue. The one where he's supposed to look at whatever was in front of him and tell Reigen whether it was actually haunted. Not that Reigen really needs that affirmation. Not anymore. He's pretty sure he can see the sickly aura oozing from the vase. But routine is routine.

Only this time Mob seems to forget his lines. He sits there, staring down at his knees. It's only after Reigen calls his name again that Mob nods his head.

"Right, exactly," Reigen says stiffly. "There you have it, even my student can feel the curse. That should give you an idea how strong it is."

The man takes a step away from the vase. "Okay. Okay, so, you're going to… fix it?"

"Of course. That's what we do here. Now I'd suggest you stand back even further– yes, there you
Because you see, I don't only perform exorcisms. I also train apprentice psychics." Reigen pauses for the usual dramatic effect, and then, "So Mob, this is a tough one, but why don't you give it try first?"

Mob looks up at that. First at the vase, and then at the client. Finally, his gaze flicks to Reigen and with the most emotion Reigen has seen in weeks, Mob shakes his head no.

"Oh?" Reigen looks at Mob – the way he holds himself, the roundness of his eyes, the tremble in his hands. "No worries, then. I'll handle it."

Mob’s eyes, if anything, get even wider.

This isn't restraint.

Reigen realizes that now. This is fear. Mob is terrified of using his powers.

"Thank goodness," the client says, and Reigen wants to kick him out, exorcism be damned. But Mob is right there, and he doesn't want to cause a scene. It's just a curse, and Dimple's has him absorbing spectral energy for weeks now. How different can this be?

Reigen steps up to the table and picks up the vase.

"Hm," Reigen says, hands buzzing painfully. "Well that doesn't feel good."

He has just enough sense to tilt the vase away before black mist pours from the top. Even the client stumbles back from the display. The mist twists, and curls, and starts to form something that looks suspiciously like claws.

"Oh god," the client mumbles.

"This is fine," Reigen hears himself say, false confidence coating his words. "I've got this perfectly under control." He's seen Mob exorcise spirits before, he knows how it's supposed to go. There's hand waving involved, usually. A bit of a light-show. But Reigen stares at the oily smoke taking shape in front of him and the only thing he can think to do is reach out and grab it.

Reigen's hand goes ice-numb.

It's a familiar sensation. Refusing to be deterred, he forms a fist with deadened fingers and pulls. He meets resistance, and then reluctance, and then nothing. The mist slips clear of the vase and swells around Reigen's hand, his wrist, his arm. It's sharp and cold and buzzing with energy. There's a sense of vulnerability, in the center of Reigen's clenched fist. Reigen stares at it, and with distant curiosity he turns his hand over. The mist curls with it. He turns his hand back, face up, and uncurls his fingers.

Mine, he thinks.

The mist seeps into his open palm, and Reigen's ears pop.

The office is quiet.

Reigen blinks down at his hand. It looks perfectly normal, and when he turns it over there seems to be no remnants of the oily smoke. There's a jittery sort of feeling in his fingers though, something that extends through his arm and into his chest. Like a burst of adrenaline. Reigen rubs his fingers together and takes a deep breath.
"M-Master Reigen?"

Reigen blinks, and looks up at Mob. Mob stares back, standing behind his desk like it's one of his barriers, wide-eyed and perfectly still. The terror is still there, hard to miss. Only now it's directed at Reigen.

Before Reigen has a chance to say anything in return, the client speaks up.

"Is… is that it?"

"That's it," Reigen says, "the spirit is gone." Mob hasn't moved, hasn't even blinked, and so Reigen makes a split-second decision. He stands up straight, turns to the client and hands over the vase. "It was nothing, honestly. Probably could have been exorcized with some spit and polish, so this one's on the house. No need to pay."

"Wha– really? Are you sure?"

"Yes, perfectly sure. The door is behind you, by the way. Don't forget your bag."

The man looks grateful, if a little unsure as Reigen ushers him out. As soon as the door is closed, Reigen turns back to Mob.

"Mob," Reigen says. "Are you okay?"

Mob sits down heavily, chair scraping against the floor. He doesn't answer. Reigen lingers several feet away.

"I'm coming closer, alright?" Reigen tries.

It almost seems like Mob isn't going to acknowledge that one either, but then he nods – a barely-there movement. Reigen moves to Mob's side and then kneels down level with him. Mob doesn't look at him, but Reigen can feel twist of something in the air around them. He remembers the pressure, the weight bearing down on his mind. He remembers the absolutely overwhelming flare of emotions, and the power that burst forth from it.

Reigen knows now, what it means. What emotions mean to Mob.

"You're not hurt, are you?" Reigen asks evenly.

Mob takes a deep breath. And then another. "No," he says at last.

"Good," Reigen says. "Listen, I'm going to grab my stuff, and then we're going to head out. Sound good?"

Mob looks up at that, and that careful blankness is back. But the expression does nothing to hide the tremor in Mob's voice when he asks, "Are… are you okay?"

"Me?" Reigen sits back on his heels. "I'm fine. Really. Nothing happened, see~" Reigen shows Mob his hands, flipping them over as if for inspection. "Spirit's gone. It's just me, nothing to worry about."

Mob doesn't say anything to that, but his face goes through several half-aborted expressions before settling once more to nothingness.

Reigen grabs his jacket and his keys, helps Mob gather his stuff, and they head outside. It smells like rain, and the setting sun casts long shadows along the pavement. Reigen glances up past the dim streetlights, wondering if the weather will turn.
"I'm sorry," says Mob.

"Sorry?" Reigen says. "For what happened in the office?"

Mob hums.

"I told you, it was nothing. It was my fault, actually. I should be the one apologizing." Reigen shoves his hands in his pockets. "I shouldn't have tried exorcizing that thing with you there. I'm sorry."

"No, it's..." Mob's voice gets quiet, nearly impossible to hear over the distant hum of traffic. "I didn't want to hurt you."

"Hurt me?" Reigen says, wondering if he'd misheard.

"You..." Mob looks at him, just for a second. "You feel like a spirit."

Oh, hm. He'd figured as much, but hearing the confirmation sure does hold a sense of finality.

"Well," Reigen says. "I am one. Kind of."

Mob doesn't say anything, and they walk in silence for a few minutes. Reigen keeps them well away from a certain alleyway shortcut, leading Mob towards a small park instead.

"I thought you were being possessed," Mob says suddenly. He's looking away, down the street they would have usually turned down. "Again. Like last time."

Reigen stops at a street crossing. "Possessed? By that vase-thing?"

"Yes," Mob says, voice hard. "I thought– But I couldn't tell, because you feel like a spirit."

A car rumbles past, and the road clears.

"Listen," Reigen says as they cross the street. "It's my fault. I was trying to rush you. I shouldn't have asked you to use your powers. I know you've been avoiding them."

"But I shouldn't be!" Mob says, and there's a little burst of static from that. A gust of wind, the scent of grass. "I should have used them! It would have made things easier. But– you feel like a spirit, and what if I– what if I–"

"Hey," Reigen cuts in, chest tight. "Hey, it's okay. Let's go sit down for a second."

He guides Mob to one of the benches in the park. There are still a few people out, but the setting sun and crisp chill of the evening has sent most folks home for the night. Lamp posts line the path on either side of them. The air is heavy with the promise of rain.

He definitely feels Mob's emotions. And that's new. He's been able to sense spirits and see psychic energy ever since waking in the hospital. But here and now, there's a buzz in the air, and the damper is threadbare and fraying. Mob sits next to him, hands gripping his knees, shoulders and gaze set forwards. Reigen pulls out his phone and cradles it in both hands.

"Hey," he says lightly. "Look."

And with immense concentration, Reigen makes the phone hover a few inches above his palms.

"I'm not very good," Reigen says, lightheaded and cold. He gives a mental push and centers the phone above one hand. "It's a bit scary, actually. And I definitely don't have good control." As if to prove his point, his fingers cramp from the chill and his phone tumbles onto his lap. Reigen rubs his
hands together to help warm them. "But I'm trying. I figure, the more I understand, the less scary it'll be, right?"

Reigen looks up, finally. Mob's staring at him.

"Also," Reigen says. "I was hoping, the more I understand, the less scary it will be for you too."

Mob's knuckles are white, fingers clawing into the material at his knees. His voice shakes. "It doesn't matter. I've already hurt people. I hurt you."

"Lots of people have hurt me," Reigen says. "And it's usually my fault. I don't plan things through very well, as you might have noticed." He sits back, legs stretched out on the path. Rain drops speckle his pants. "Also, you aren't responsible for things outside of your control. What other people do, that's on them. You've barely hurt anyone, ever. Okay? Least of all me."

Mob breathes slowly, deliberately. Reigen sighs.

"You can let it go," he says. "You won't hurt anyone. I promise."

Mob doesn't do anything for a long moment. Then he takes a breath, quick and stuttered. In the next moment, Mob is shaking his head, even as tears well up in his eyes.

"No," Mob says. His hair floats ever so slightly. "No, it's dangerous."

"It isn't," Reigen replies.

"But I can't control them, I've been trying, but I just--" Mob blinks and wipes his eyes. "I wanted it to stop."

"Is that why you haven't used your powers all month? You wanted them to stop?"

Rain starts to fall around them. Reigen's feet get wet, the cuffs of his pants too. But that's where it stops. Reigen sits up straight, curling his legs into the bubble of protection Mob's emotions have created.

"I thought--" Mob says, hair drifting about as if underwater. "I thought if I just, didn't use them. It would be okay."

"Mob," Reigen says. "You can't ignore part of yourself and think it's okay. They're your powers, your emotions. I know how much they're connected. You can't just turn them off."

Mob lifts his arms to his face, tucking his head down. Reigen hears him cry. Not quite sobbing, but close to. The bubble of protection ripples, raindrops further away stuttering in the air. They catch the light of the streetlamps, glittering like stung-up diamonds.

"I hate it," Mob says. His voice is wet and twisted with emotion. "That I have to be so careful. I tried to be careful, using your body. But you kept telling me you were fine. And now you're dead."

"I'm not dead, Mob."

Mob sniffs, rubbing at his face. "It feels like it."

"Well," says Reigen. "Even if it does, it's not your fault. And it's not your job to be careful around people. You know that, right?"

Mob just shakes his head, still curled over his knees. It seems like the whole park is sparkling with
frozen rain. Reigen watches the display. It's unbelievably beautiful.

"Hey Mob," Reigen says. "You should look up."

"I don't want to."

"Okay, but you're missing out."

Eventually, Mob rubs his eyes and raises his head. Reigen doesn't so much as see his reaction as he feels it. A shudder-buzz in the inaudible hum around them. The raindrops closest to their bench flicker and break apart. The street light reflects off the mist like shimmering dust. It's a bit like being among stars.

"Oh," says Mob.

Reigen hums softly. They sit in silence for what feels like a long time, but is probably only a few minutes. Mob sniffs, and wipes his face, and then eventually gets silent. Reigen looks over. There's still tears in his eyes, and his face is red, but there's a calmness there now. Something that wasn't there before.

Reigen looks back at the rain. Some of it is falling now, further away. But the air around them is still humming with suspended raindrops.

"You have incredible control over your powers, Mob." Reigen's words feel inadequate. "You really do."

Mob nods his head, and it's a shaky thing. His eyes seem to fill with tears again, and when he blinks the droplets flick free to drift among the rain. Reigen looks away, in case Mob still needs another few moments.

"I'm sorry," Mob says. His voice is heavy, but in a different way than before. "I didn't mean for any of this to happen. Sorry."

This time, there's no guilt. The remorse is gone. Instead, it feels like more like sympathy. A condolence. About everything, about the decisions made, about the outcomes.

"It's okay," Reigen says. "I'm sorry too."

After another long few minutes, when the chill of the rainy afternoon really starts to settle in, Reigen stands up. He turns to Mob, still curled on the bench, but looking more relaxed than he's been in weeks.

"Hey," Reigen says. "You good?"

"Yeah," Mob says. He blinks, rubs his eyes, and breathes in slowly. "I'm good."

Reigen reaches out a hand. "Okay, let's get you up then. It's starting to get cold."

Once Mob is standing, Reigen gives him a look over. There's a redness to his eyes, but otherwise everything else's in place. His hair's sitting flat, his posture is steady, his expression bland. The rain, however, continues to glisten in a frozen display all around them. A wide sphere, under Mob's careful influence.

"I like how it looks," Mob says, when he notices Reigen gaze.

They walk the rest of the way in silence. The rain falls through the city, a soft hush along the streets.
The bubble of protection condenses, the width of a sidewalk, the breadth of a few paces. But it doesn't disappear, and neither do the several dozen suspended droplets around them. Reigen pokes one, just see what would happen, and watches the water break apart around his finger, barely getting him wet. When they arrive at Mob's house, Reigen stops at the gate.

Mob looks back, a small frown on his face.

"You're going to get wet." The bubble expands, encompassing the front yard and adjacent sidewalk.

"Hm, yes. I didn't think to bring an umbrella." Reigen waves a hand. "But that's alright. Don't worry about me. I'll make do."

Mob's expression smooths. "Wait here a moment, please."

Reigen waits. Mob opens the front door, his greeting barely audible from outside. The rain bubble holds steady even as Mob disappears from view. Reigen figures he'll be handed an umbrella – maybe luck out with an old rain jacket – and then be sent on his way. So it comes as a surprise when both Mob and his father step back out on the front landing.

"Oh yeah," Mr. Kageyama is saying. "It really is coming down." He puts a hand on Mob's back, and calls out to Reigen. "So do you want to stay for dinner? It's still a bit early, but if you don't mind waiting, it should at least get you out of this rain."


Mob nods. "It's my idea. You should." And it's hard to tell in the low light and with the distance, but Reigen think he sees Mob's lips upturn, just a bit. "Also I think Ritsu would like it, too."

Reigen can't help but laugh. "Okay," he says. "Okay, yeah. Sure. I'd love too."

And if the rain stops well before dinner and Reigen makes no move to excuse himself, well. That's alright, isn't it? A warm meal, friendly chatter, a measure of peace. Even after everything.

If this is where it's all ended up, then it can't all have been bad.

It's just a new normal.

Chapter End Notes

i'm actually screeching – real actual pterodactyl noises – as i post this. it has been a journey. in more ways than one. and here i am, at the end of it all, pretty much at a loss for words. i'm all word'ed out. fresh out of words. word machine broke.

but. there are things to say. so i'll do my best.

1. big whoops on how long this one took folks
2. this chapter has been rewritten at least 7 times. there's not a single bit that's in the stuff above that was in the first three drafts. i have. whole scenes that didn't make the cut. the only hold-over was the concept of our boys in a ramen-shop. that's it.
3. i'm physically incapable of anything but a happy, hopeful end. i don't consider it a flaw. but it sure does make wrapping things up a chore. i hope this ending suffices.
4. you guys so unbelievably nice. stunningly supportive. the reviews. the kudos. the
ones who found me on tumblr. i may be crying. (i am crying.) i would like to think i could have done this on my own, but that probably wouldn't have been the case. so i'm really, really glad i had you all here with your wonderful words of motivation.
5. this has been one hell of a learning experience, and i intend to take these lessons to heart in all future works i attempt.
6. i'm @comeonblub on tumblr. do what you will with that info. i leave it in your hands.

that's all folks. see you around, hopefully :)

**edit:** art dump, old n new, because some amazing people did real some neat-o stuff for this fic. (i'm literally grabbing all links i've ever saved ever so if you're part of this n don't wanna be pls let me know. same vice-versa if i've somehow missed you – my link saving is iffy at best.)

- ch3 art by silvensei
- fic art by clori-eden
- fic art by miisty
- ch8 comic by clori-eden
- ch8 art by moonphanter

Please **drop by the archive and comment** to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!