Everyday, things change.

Often times, people change over a period of six years. Some more than others. The well-known info broker Izaya Orihara thought that the changes those years brought about couldn't be topped. After the...disappearances, making and losing a friend, his life coming to have different meaning, his work expanding internationally, how could there be anything else?

Well, when you get thrown into a world even Izaya didn't know about, things will change. Which may be putting it lightly.

Notes

This should be obvious, but I don't own Drrr! or VTMB. I still feel the need to state that anyway.

Hello hello, thanks for clicking! This is actually my first fic ever, so...be wary of that. In case the tags were too much of a mess to look at (because they are), this will contain plenty of potential triggers. If you have played VTMB or know about it, then you know why. It's mainly due to backstories and that the game itself is definitely for a mature audience.
You DON'T need to have played the game or anything to read this, it'll basically be following how you play it with changes and differences obviously. I do recommend playing it anyway, simply because for all its bugs and being an incomplete work, it is so so good.

~
Also, I am a full-time worker with a class on the side and once I'm home, I become pretty lazy. My intention is to write a chapter ahead of time, but who freaking knows.

That said, with any luck, this won't be too much of a fantastic experimental mess and my writing style is not as boring as watching grass grow. My goal is that it's only as boring as watching paint dry.

Thanks for visiting, I hope you stay~!
The Fledgling

Chapter Summary

A pawn is moved.

In an instant, the world changed.

Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that a hidden world had made itself known and changed his world. There was a sort of irony, he supposed, that the famous (or infamous, depending on who you asked) information broker Izaya Orihara never knew about it. He didn’t even have an inkling. Sure, it was Tokyo that was his main playground as opposed to Los Angeles which was in another country altogether but he had been in this new city for long enough that he should have latched onto even a small trail leading to the realization of this fantastical existence.

He felt his wrists being bound behind him as he was forced to kneel on an old wooden floor.

“My apologies……interfering with prior………………………the affair………………a troubling one.”

His senses began returning to him as his quick mind worked to calm down and bring back clarity. An unknown voice was speaking.

As events progressed, he managed to gather this much within the shock and confusion:

Vampires are real. They have structured societies and rules. And he was now an unwitting participant.

~

*Two months earlier*

~

Izaya had expected something like this in his line of work to crop up eventually. Especially once the Awakusu-kai had gained enough power to spread some of its people and power to another city. They now had decent control and territory in a few other large and not-so-large cities in Japan. He had been sent here and there and around the country on Shiki’s request several times over the last two years at this point. But now, this year, they had begun to gain some ground in Los Angeles, California. It was decided Izaya would help increase their information, contacts and territory there where the group had established itself to an extent already.

The now 29-year-old informant was eager to expand his own network of contacts as he began to see a bigger picture of his own. However, this was not such cut and dry agenda. No. After all that had happened, the raven-haired man gathered contacts, maintained old ones, and used information in different ways from he had previously.

Over the past few years, he had elected to limit his associations with the underground. Still assisting Shiki and the Awakusu-kai, he cut back on many previous endeavors of his own, and took great care
in the sort of information he gave and to whom he gave it to. He didn’t withdraw from online chatting altogether, but he frequented certain things less often. Why? Well…certain things he found interesting and exciting in the past, goals and vision he strived for had lost their luster, so to speak. The reason?

‘No, not now. No more.’ The raven shifted in his seat, eyes roaming around the relatively small private jet he was sitting in, not really looking at anything.

Now, preparations had been made for his temporary…..transfer, but it was nothing too harrowing. He did know English as well as he knew Japanese and Russian after all. A valuable, though fairly common asset one in the higher-echelons of power in Tokyo obtains as it would be in their best interest to do.

Moreover, it meant his work and subsequently his life would become more interesting, he had to admit. He had become more withdrawn from his once precious humans so there was something of an anticipation he felt from establishing a temporary base abroad. Though he had lost his previously unyielding universal love for all humans, these humans were bound to be very similar, yet inevitably different as well. Certainly, they might hold enough intrigue to pay attention to. Additionally, since he hadn’t seen Ikebukuro’s “monster” in years, things had become especially boring in Tokyo. Granted, that had nothing to do with the increase in Izaya’s workload, his change of style in this work, the much more frequent travels, or even to personal changes. No.

In fact, Kasuka Heiwajima had disappeared. He had disappeared in the United States six years ago. Ten months after that, so did the older brother, Shizuo Heiwajima. And even Izaya couldn’t find them.

For a few months, international news would still bring up the movie star’s disappearance until the coverage piddled out. Police suspected the possibility of human trafficking involvement. But when even Interpol’s assistance into the matter came up with nothing, reports crawled to a halt.

The monster had become despondent during the time that Kasuka was missing which was a predictable reaction for humans. Somewhat less so for the beast though. Izaya would have presumed a reaction more resembling rage, he even would have thought Shizuo would blame him for it, but no, nothing. He barely saw the blond at all over those months and Shizuo would seem to be out of it enough so as to hardly respond to anyone on the street, even the ‘flea’ himself. In fact, whenever they saw each other, the protozoan acted in a way that would suggest he'd gone deaf. He had acted particularly strangely the last time Izaya saw him. It was such an unpredictable interaction, he was surprised he didn't consider further the implications. It made him suspicious to the point that Shizuo might have been aware that he, too, would disappear. At it was a strange lack of self-preservation on the beast's part. If he knew something might happen to him too, why did he at least ask for help? If not from him, the top info broker, then at from his friends like Celty? Well...he did always defy logic.

When he first found out about the younger Heiwajima's disappearance, he had to admit that it caught him off guard. Something like this, and he didn't know about it before it happened? Even if it was abroad, it bothered him that he knew nothing regarding something happening to the monster's brother. But it was around the time of Shizuo’s disappearance that in his spare time when he wasn't doing his own work, he’d be working from his home in Shinjuku to find the brothers. He amassed a fair amount of files and information, yet always ended up with no substantial leads. Nothing to be found in Japan aside from some evidence that Shizuo had gotten on an international flight ten months after Kasuka had disappeared.
Even so, Izaya had even flown over to the US a few times and went to the cities Kasuka had gone to while filming for a new movie so as to better obtain more information with any luck. His pride as a renowned broker of information was at stake, after all. Yet any promising leads ultimately became dead ends. It’s not like he was hoping to have a flying vending machine or similar heading his way or spotting that familiar blond head. No.

No one had asked him to do this. It was a…curiosity after the protozoan continued to fail to appear over an extended period of time. Plus, back then, he had begun to find himself bored without the beast around. Really, that’s all.

And that was the only reason. Naturally. What else would there be? Although Shinra would check in on it from time to time being that both he and Celty had been friends with the protozoan as well, he also had his own cute little ideas for Izaya’s efforts which he could keep to himself, thank you very much. It’s not like his inability to find them had initiate any sort of affect over him at all whatsoever.

Izaya owned his flat in Shinjuku so he would not need to concern himself with rent or other such payments of the sort. Namie could continue to assist him from there as well. She was vocally glad for the extended period of time of his absence. It was decided he would stay in L.A. for three months. He wasn’t looking forward to this for any reason aside from work, however. The fact that this was one of the cities Kasuka had been filming in was completely unrelated, and he gave no thought to it at all. Not at all.

He looked out of the window of the private jet. Still eight more hours before landing.

‘That damn Shinra’.

*Goodbye...Izaya.*

…He did not miss the protozoan.

~

“*Mister*?” *He felt something prod into his left shoulder from the front. A voice seemed fairly close by. “Mister, are you feeling bad?”*

Izaya picked his head up, and his dark auburn eyes stared into blue. They blinked back at him behind glass.

“Were you sleeping because you’re sick? Because you should go to the doctor if you’re sick.”

The girl was small, had straight black hair which did not quite reach her shoulders, and held curious blue eyes behind a simple pair of glasses. Since she was not wearing a school uniform on a weekday, she was quite likely in elementary school. She carried a single plastic bag with her.

*Before he could respond, the girl continued again.*

“Hey mister, your eyes are cool! Did you know that?” *she was smiling enough to show her teeth now, her eyes were dancing with enthusiasm.*

“Well so are yours. Did you know that?” *he responded, a smirk crossing his face. It was not malicious, however. Made more out of pure amusement than anything else. He sat up a bit on the
bench he was on. The park’s streetlights were turning on as it got a little darker outside. He felt a little sore. Had he ended up napping for that long? Not that anyone would dare attack him of all people in public. Well, there was someone who used to.

The girl laughed, swinging her bag a little. “Well I think so too, but sometimes the other kids pick on me, you know?” Her demeanor calmed, and she looked off to the side. “It’s sort of hard and I don’t have very many friends.”

Perhaps it was because he had just woken up. Or maybe it was due to some of the fairly recent events going on, but Izaya just smiled at the girl simply. “Sometimes humans can be cruel so easily,” he stated, softer than he realized.

“Yeah…I know.” She smiled once more, and held out her hand to him. “Mister, can we be friends? You’re nice.”

The informant stared at her hand for a moment. “I’m afraid I’m not really very nice, actually.” What was he doing? There was plenty of possibility here, why was he acting like this?

The girl seemed to think about this and tilted her head to the side. “Well, maybe you just need a chance! What’s your name, mister?”

It was hard for this man to be taken aback. Damn near impossible, really. And yet, here he was. Just staring at her, his eyes wider than was usual. His hand met hers, and he found a smile on his face. “That may be so. I’m Orihara. Izaya Orihara.”

The girl shook his hand gleefully. “I’m glad we’re friends, Iza-san!”

That was a new one.

“Oh, I have to get this bag home. I do errands at home a lot, so I’ll see you here again, ok, Iza-san?” She didn’t wait for a response before she started running off. But suddenly she stopped, seemingly forgetting something. She looked back at him for a quick moment, her body partially turned.

“I almost forgot to introduce myself, Iza-san! I’m sorry, I know that’s bad manners,” she grinned a little sheepishly.

Izaya exhaled through his nose a little with amusement, smiling. “It’s alright, I can see you’re excited.”

She relaxed a bit, and smiled. “I’m Sanada. Shizuka Sanada.”

The informant blinked.

“Since we’re friends, you can call me Shizu-chan, ok?”

~

The informant gasped as he woke suddenly. He didn’t realize he had fallen asleep during his flight.

‘Damned stupid dreams,’ he shook his head a little as if to clear it.
Izaya swallowed as he felt the pressure making his ears pop. He could tell they seemed to be descending ever so slowly. Some land was visible outside of the window, and it looked like the sun would be setting shortly along the coast of California. He was about to land in L.A.

Now he could focus on work again. And maybe with the slightest chance, he could get some kind of clue to find the Heiwajima brothers. Not that he was anxious about that of course. It had been years, sure, but if there was a person who could find them or...their bodies, it would be him. He frowned slightly, determined.

It was still too early to give up.

~

*Present Night*

~

He had been set up with at least fifteen members of the Awakusu-kai by the border of Little Tokyo and the Arts District near the downtown area. Over a period of two months, operations were going fairly smoothly. There were some hiccups now and again that seemed to occur during the night, but there was not otherwise anything substantial to impede their progress in setting up territory. Shiki appeared to be pleased when he received updates on their progress. Once the final month of Izaya’s work there was up, he would return and be replaced by a good number of additional members to retain their territory before they worked expansion again.

But on this night, even this informant had no way of knowing that his fate would change drastically. He was in the middle of scouting an area closer to the heart of Downtown LA. He weaved into and out of alleyways here and there.

An observant man by nature, it wasn’t too hard for him to notice a figure standing in a corner of one such alleyway. The man looked to be about his own age, and was dressed quite well. Impeccably, really. Everything he wore was in dark shades and appeared to be in expensive taste. He had dark red hair and sharp blue eyes over-shadowed only by his seductive smirk.

During his observing, Izaya had stopped to look at the man. He wasn't even sure why, but it changed everything.

"I've been waiting for you, Mr. Orihara," he stated with that smirk, a silky smooth voice emanating from him.

Tip off number one, this man knew Izaya's name but Izaya had never seen or heard of this man before. Tip off number two, Izaya did not generally feel attration to human for the most part, but this strange feeling had come from out of nowhere. He was aware of enough to know that this was suspicious. The final tip off, he felt his own body tense up as if from nerves, not a typical reaction from him.

That voice chuckled. "Feeling wary, are we?" He smiled. "That's just one reason why I've chosen you. You're absolutely perfect," his teeth shown. Izaya would have to be blind at this point to not see two obvious fangs.

Grabbing for his knife, he pulled it out but not nearly fast enough. Before he knew it, this man had him against the wall.
"Don't worry, everything will be fine. You'll be great," a calm came over Izaya as he felt those fangs sink into his neck. It didn't take much time before he passed out.

~

Upon waking, something slammed into his chest. If Izaya thought he was paralyzed before, he had been quite wrong. He could not move at all now. Had he now been shot? That would freaking figure.

He could barely see the back of a stranger who seemed to have picked him up and slung the smaller raven over his shoulder. He couldn’t speak anyway, but even if he could, Izaya had learned the value of listening instead of speaking sometimes. This would be a chance to get as much information about what was happening to him as possible.

They went through a few alleys, darted down some streets and as he became more oriented, he realized he had now been placed on an old wooden floor, hands now bound as he kneeled there. He could tell there were some faces sitting in chairs faces him, many scattered about. He seemed to be on some kind of stage, with a good number of people up there with him.

The room itself was large, though it seemed to be in some disrepair. There were men and women of varying ages sitting and standing around in the room, though he couldn’t see them all. The theme seemed to be traditional red for the fabric on the seats and curtains. Lights came from the stage where he was kneeling, but otherwise the place was dark. From his time in LA, Izaya managed to recall that this seemed to be the inside of the abandoned Nocturne Theatre.

So he had been attacked, passed out, and now carried somewhere. Something was pulled out of his chest cavity. His mind reeled as he tried to absorb the fact that there had been a wooden stake driven into his heart until just now. He regained movement again, but he wasn’t about to be allowed to go anywhere.

This all had to be some kind of elaborate set up. Some kind of branch gang of L.A. that had gone under their radar, trying to intimidate him or confuse him to reach some sort of nonsensical goal. Perhaps they were taping this and sending it back to Shiki and Awakusu-kai, trying to make some kind of statement? Pathetic, this display. They have to have attacked and drugged him. Once he felt a little more mobile and had a chance, he’d escape and have a very interesting report to give. Though he had long since stopped watching humans as a hobby and had even become almost altruistic by his standards anyway, these particular humans were most definitely intriguing. He had certainly thought that his international travels might provide fascination and fun of some kind, but this was taking the cake.

‘It’s still hard to move, let alone speak yet,’ he thought to himself, trying to see into the audience area and around the large hall more clearly. ‘I have to take the first chance possible to run.’

He stared at the floor for the time being, trying to regain his senses and catching up to just what was happening. He swallowed hard, trying to keep calm. A voice, somewhat accented, polished, and authoritative voice was speaking. The man seemed to be referring to the matter at hand. As his hearing came more under his control, he heard what he thought were whisperings in the small crowd. The man standing nearby began to speak again.

“We are here because the law that bind our society- the laws that are the fabric of our existence- have been broken,” the man wore an almost all-black suit complemented with gray, complete with black shoes and looked to be in his thirties or so. He was quite pale like most of the faces sitting in the
audience area were, and had dark blonde hair, cut conservatively. The man stood just to his left as he continued to speak to the small gathering, his aristocratic voice echoing in the theatre slightly.

To his right, he saw the guy from the alleyway he had stopped right in front of back then. The guy who had attacked him. He too was on the ground in the same position with someone behind him keeping him in place by the neck. A huge beastly man well over 6 feet tall stood next to him. He seemed to have a darker complexion, and wore an enormous sword on his back overtop a trench coat. He had dark glasses on and his long dark hair was worn tied back.

Among some whispering, the man in the black suit continued speaking.

“As Prince, I am within my rights to grant or deny the kindred of this city the privilege of siring,“ the man began to walk forward a bit.

Izaya looked around in the crowd. He could see eyes that seemed to shine a little in the darkness. Faces were mainly bored or irritated. Impatient, even. There were a few people that seemed to be standing in the back and off to the side, but he couldn’t seem to see them very well as they seemed to be standing in the shadows.

“Many of you have come to me seeking permission, and I have endorsed some of these requests,” the man, or ‘Prince’ apparently, walked back toward Izaya.

Said informant shrank into himself a little. Something made him particularly tense. It took more effort than he’d like to admit to keep from shaking at this point. His senses remained somewhat unbalanced and somehow difficult to control. He had to try his damndest not to show vulnerability. As little as possible, anyway.

“However,” this Prince stopped suddenly, facing audience. “The accused that sits before you tonight was not refused permission. Indeed…my permission was never sought at all,” here his voice took on a noticeably sharp tone.

“He was caught shortly after the embrace of this childe,” the man pulled away for a moment, escaping the grip that held his neck briefly, before he was grabbed again.

“It pains me to announce the sentence, as…up to tonight I considered the accused a loyal and upstanding member of our organization,” the Prince walked to stand next to the man on the floor. “But as some of you may know, the penalty for this transgression is death,” he paused briefly, clasping his hands together, tone serious.

The gathered seemed to shift at the heavy words as well. Izaya was keeping up, but they were not about to kill someone- even him. Not a chance.

“Know that I am no more a judicator than I am a servant to the law that governs us all,” from here, the people’s full attention was focused on the stage.

“Izaya looked over to his right to see the man with the large sword step toward the guy that had attacked him and took out the sword. The other man pushed the guy down so that the back of his
neck was exposed upward.

Wait. They weren’t really going to…

The guy looked back at Izaya for the first time since they’d met in the alleyway. He smiled at him. And...was that a wink?

The Prince straightened up and walked away back over near Izaya. “Let the penalty commence.”

Before Izaya knew it, the large sword had come up, and swung down quickly. All he could do was stare as the guy’s head clearly became detached. There was some movement and an atmosphere of unsettled energy in the seats. As the now corpse of the guy on the floor along with the head disintegrated into what seemed to be bright yellowish-orange dust and disappear before his eyes, the Prince was already speaking again.

This was not possible. How could it be? And some of these words- English wasn’t Izaya’s first language, but he was certain some of them were not generally used in the way that they were being used by this Prince.

“Which leads to the fate of the ill-begotten progeny,” the Prince walked forward toward the edge of the stage, and his voice took on a sympathetic and regretful tone.

“Without a sire, most childer are doomed to walk the Earth never knowing their place, their responsibility, and most importantly, the laws they must obey,” he paused here, looking out from one side to the other where much of the gathering was sitting.

Although he wasn’t feeling 100%, Izaya was an intelligent man; he knew what was being implied. Would he actually be murdered here? He felt a panic rise up in him.

“Therefore, I have decided that.“

“THIS IS BULLSHIT!”

Izaya’s head shot up, and he looked into the sea of seats where the voice had come from. A man who seemed to be maybe thirty had stood up, obvious rage emanating from him. A couple of others with him worked to hold him back from the stage. The man had very short, dark hair and was wearing a blue jacket.

This woke something within many of the others there. There were murmurs, clear voices, and even some jeering coming up to the stage. Several of them had also stood up, staring at the Prince now, many looking at least uncertain and doubtful.

The Prince looked out over them all, then down to the floor for a moment, his expression tightening just a bit. A pregnant pause took over the hall.

“If Mr. Rodriguez would let me finish,” he stated calmly, yet firmly. “I have decided to let this kindred live.”

Izaya felt a debilitating relief. He visibly relaxed, and felt the bonds tying his hands be cut from behind him. Would they really let him go? It seemed too simple. His mind felt quite clear by now but the raven was still in a bit of shock. His best guess was that he and apparently all of these other people were…vampires? If this insanity was the truth, then just what the hell would he do now?
The Prince walked back to Izaya as he spoke again, and many of the crowd began to leave. The man who had shouted, Rodriguez, stared challengingly at the Prince before a wave of light satisfaction seemed to flow through the room. He also made his way out of the theater with his own group.

“He shall be instructed in the ways of our kind and be granted the same rights,” the extra hands on stage, even the huge man began to leave as well. “Let no one say I am unsympathetic to the plights and causes of this community.”

Izaya finally felt like he could have proper control of himself more or less. Everything was still completely surreal, but at this rate he should be perfectly calm soon. He had to be. Such a thing is often key to survival, especially for his line of work.

“I thank you all for attending these proceedings, and I hope their significance is not lost,” the Prince announced this as the majority of the people had gathered by the back exit and now starting to leave the building proper.

After another moment, everyone had left the area and Izaya was alone with this Prince. He stood up, and was feeling fine to walk. The Prince led Izaya to the backstage area of the theater. He could see a connecting hallway nearby.

“Your sire- tragic, my apologies, but you see…there is a strict code of conduct that all of us must… must…,” the Prince seemed to be searching for the proper word to use here before deciding on something. “-adhere to if we wish to survive,” the Prince walked to the hallway and proceeded down it. Izaya considered trying to exit another way but it neither seemed feasible, nor smart. He needed information. So, he trailed behind as they proceeded down the hallway.

“When someone, anyone, breaks these laws, they undermine the well-worn fabric of our centuries-old society. Understand my predicament,” this Prince certainly appeared to enjoy the sound of his own voice. Speaking of voices, Izaya felt like he could probably gather himself enough to speak, but being that this was still a precarious situation, he thought it better to not trying talking to the Prince. He didn’t seem to be the type who was very accustomed to listening to questions, anyway.

“Allowing you to live makes me directly responsible for your subsequent behavior,” they were approaching the end of the hallway, where there was a door with an exit sign over it.

“So…what I am offering is not generosity, but the opportunity to transcend the fate woven by your sire,” he stopped right next to the door and faced Izaya. “This is your trial: You will be brought to Santa Monica. There, you will meet an agent by the name of Mercurio. He will provide the details of your labor,” his voice started to sound more impatient at this point.

Izaya took in this information in a bit of a daze. He couldn’t go back to the headquarters? Could he reach Shiki? …Could he even go back to Tokyo?

“I’ve shown you great clemency. Prove it was more than a wasted gesture, Fledgling.”

Fledgling?

“Don’t come back until you do. Good evening.”

And with that, the Prince gestured at the door, and walked away back into the theatre.

Izaya took some breaths (Did he even need to?). Fine. He would reach Santa Monica, complete whatever work was apparently in store for him and figure it out from there. It was obvious he could
be killed easily if he wasn’t extremely careful. But Izaya was nothing if not a survivor. He pushed open the door, and walked through it.

~

*Moments before*

~

There was an exhale of smoke, and a voice that spoke softly in near unaccented English.

“I think I’ll cash in a favor if you don’t mind, Jack.”

~

*Fledgling:*

*A newly created vampire.*
The Embrace

Chapter Summary

Shizuo learns of and deals with Kasuka's disappearance. He changes a bit and slowly begins to come to terms with the thought that he might not see his brother ever again. Until one day, he is given a life-changing decision to make. Interestingly, this decision involves interacting with the flea willingly and perhaps for the final time.

~

*Six Years Ago*
~

It’s not that Shizuo was dead.

No, he just felt as though he was. He had gotten the news in quite possibly the worst way possible. Shinra called. How was he doing? Fine, should he not be? Shinra did not generally call just to say hello. Didn’t he see the news? What news?

…Kasuka was gone.

He hung up his phone as he watched the screen on the small tv in his tiny apartment. Which never felt quite as cold and lonesome as it did right then.

It was a report with a lot of footage obtained from international news. Shizuo knew his brother had gone overseas to the US for one of his new movies. He was happy for Kasuka, his fame was increasing to the point that he was not offered roles in American movies. This one was being filmed in multiple locations across that country. Shizuo knew all of this. What he hadn’t known was that Kasuka had disappeared from a filming site several days ago, and none of the cast or crew could find him anywhere. Production would be put on hold for the time being until his whereabouts could be confirmed.

Over the next several days, Shizuo scoured all news channels and constantly checked anything online pertaining to his Brother’s whereabouts on his phone. Initially, in those first moments he thought the flea had something to do with it. But the best possible proof of Izaya’s lack of involvement came from Shinra, who had called him back not 10 minutes later on that first day. It seemed he had been immediately suspicious of Izaya as well (a rational reaction) and called him out on it. He had even gone to Izaya’s place, thinking the flea was planning some sort of grand scheme to screw Shizuo over in some way and was a bit upset on about it on Shizuo’s behalf. Apparently, he had expected the blond to already be there making a mess of things but the timing didn’t work out that way. In any case, it seemed the flea listened to Shinra’s small rant at him, then silently led him to his computer and showed him all of the things he’d already done in trying to find Kasuka. This could have been a ruse, but Shinra insisted that there was something about Izaya’s face and tone of voice that convinced him otherwise. Shizuo still wasn’t fully confident he could trust this, but decided to wait instead of confronting the flea.

But after a couple weeks had passed and he heard nothing from the flea, he figured it must be true. After all, even in some subtle way the flea would have implicated his involvement one way or another by now. Besides, as much as he posed that he didn’t care for his sisters, there was a reason
after all these years that he didn’t go after Kasuka, or so Shizuo believed.

At the same time, there was something hopeless about Izaya not being behind it; at least then there would be some kind of clue, some sort of lead. Someone to blame.

Somehow, his usual rages just drained out of him. There wasn’t a lot that mattered anymore. He would sometimes imagine hearing breaking news that Kasuka had been found alive and well…but sometimes at night his nightmares would conjure images of his brother’s body being found instead. But worst of all, he feared never knowing or having a damned clue as to what happened to Kasuka at all. He would have to continue going through the motions every day until authorities found something and hope that they ever did at all.

It wasn’t too long into police investigation that he was contacted by authorities and was made aware about the current state of the investigation. Over time, he was told less and less. Apparently, Interpol had even gotten involved at the behest of several agencies.

Tom, Shinra, and Celty noticed all too clearly that Shizuo didn’t seem himself. It was pretty obvious, after all. It’s true that much of the time he was actually a rather reserved person. But he only left his house to work, barely even leaving to get groceries. Tom noticed his change in that Shizuo was incredibly restrained. As though he never heard anything clientele said, he simply knew when to intimidate so they could get the job done. They talked, sure, but much of it was on Tom’s part. He wished there was something he could do to cheer up his friend.

Shizuo had even come across Izaya plenty of times during his working days. But each time during the first few months, Shizuo paid him no mind. It’s just that all too often, most words simply did not reach him anymore. After six painful months, Shizuo began tuning in a bit more to his surroundings as before. But he had brought about a sense of calm within himself. If he or his friends (even Kadota’s gang) were threatened by anyone, he would go on one of his infamous rampages. Granted, this was a rarity and he knew his friends were well capable of taking care of themselves, but he still felt rather protective. Otherwise, he had been spending more time within himself instead of the outside chaotic world.

Besides, if Kasuka were here now, he would be proud of him. He hoped so, anyway.

It was strange, too. After those first months of not really recognizing Izaya’s presence, the times they ran into each other after that, Shizuo did start to acknowledge him. But this was just because he knew Izaya was observing. He didn’t usually come out, but just lingered in the area hidden from view. Yet now and again he would come out. Typically, he’d just be outright looking at Shizuo, who would give an acknowledging nod, and then leave the area.

~

It was nine months into his brother’s disappearance when he woke one morning to find he had a delivery. While not an unheard of thing for him to receive, he did not typically place any delivery orders. Someone had rang the doorbell, and there was the large envelope. It was a strange sort, the envelope wasn’t typical of usual Japanese packaging. It did seem to be an international delivery but the only indication of where it had really come from was a Japanese PO Box.

Inside was simply a piece of paper, and what looked to be a cheap, temporary sort of phone. The piece of paper said only:

*Turn on the phone, wait for my call. Please.*

Of course Shizuo could tell just how suspicious this was. For a moment, he went back to an old
reaction, blaming the flea. It did seem a lot like some of the weird shit he did. Actually the flea’s behavior as of late had been a bit strange whenever Shizuo would see him these days. Though in all fairness, that was probably because Shizuo’s own behavior had changed quite a bit, even he knew that. The pest, perhaps former-pest, had tried to antagonize him as usual over the last months but it just didn’t affect him. Granted, it would have helped that Shizuo had been tuning out most people anyway, but still.

In any case, ‘please’ is what really caught his interest here. It could imply damn near anything. He couldn’t think of anything harmful that would come of doing as the note said anyway.

It took a few hours of waiting, but the phone did ring.

The incoming number simply said ‘Restricted’.

Shizuo pursed his lips in hesitation, pushed the answer button, and held the phone to his face.

“Hello? Who is this?” Shizuo needed only wait for a moment for a response.

“Brother. It’s good to hear your voice.”

For an instant, Shizuo stopped breathing.

“Kasuka…is it really you?” he paused, calming his reeling mind. “Where…where are you? What HAPPENED?”

It was very quiet on the other side and Kasuka’s voice was the only thing that could be heard.

“I can only say so much even in this way. I need you to listen closely, brother. This might possibly be the last time we speak,” his voice sounded so melancholy right then.

Shizuo gripped the phone a little tighter. “Ok, I get it, Kasuka.”

“You’ll have a decision to make. I can give you a month to decide,” he paused here, as though he was trying to consider the best way to proceed. “I can tell you this much: You would have to give up your life as you know it. You would leave everything behind, and everyone behind. You could not contact them again. In exchange, we would be able to meet again, and live together as family here where I am.”

The proposition did seem heavy, but there had to be more.

“Should you choose to remain where you are, we could never speak again. You would have to forget we ever spoke again and think of me as dead for all intents and purposes.”

“But, Kasuka—“

“Please take your month to decide, brother. And of course, don’t tell anyone about this. Suffice to say, I have received…permission to offer you this but at the same time it’s risky. So I must impress upon you the importance of saying nothing about this to anyone.”

Shizuo closed his eyes. It was hard to believe what he was hearing.

“I know you might be inclined to make this decision immediately. But I want you to take this time to fully consider this as it is likely the most important decision you will ever make.”

Shizuo waited a moment, just cherishing the fact that he was talking to his brother at all.
“Kasuka…your disappearing…was it my fault?” Shizuo had to try harder not to start crying than he’d like to admit.

There was a light sigh, and a smile in Kasuka’s voice. “No, brother. I can say that you were not at all involved. You need not be concerned about that.”

Kasuka was not exactly the type to lie, least of all to his brother. Shizuo felt true relief.

“I will contact you again exactly a month from now. Whatever you should decide, I want you to fully enjoy you time, brother. And please remember that I love you.”

“I love you too, Kasuka, you know that.”

Kasuka seemed to laugh gently. “Of course, I know.”

“Then…I’ll talk to you again next month, right?”

“You will, brother. Take care, be well.”

The call disconnected.

~

Shizuo spent the next month outdoors quite often. He especially spent time in the park not too terribly far from his apartment in Ikebukuro. He felt like it was easier to think there. Not too quiet, not too loud. Some people about though not too many and a nice amount of nature and scenery. He would even spend plenty of time reading, and watching the city. Was this at all similar to how the flea spent his time, he wondered?

His days passed much faster now that he knew Kasuka was alive and seemingly safe. This place was where he had always lived and it as everything he knew. At the same time, this was Kasuka, his close family. A lot of his motivation was based on making Kasuka proud of him and hoping he was happy. It seemed he was indeed alright but at the same time Shizuo felt he could not leave it at that. It would hurt to give up everyone he knew, that was a certainty. How could it not be? But at the same time, he couldn’t do nothing. He knew his friends were all capable of protecting and taking care of themselves and that they would still be happy without him around.

He had spent other parts of his time just talking to some people he knew here and there. He would have to see and talk to certain people at least one more time. He even started to mention to Tom that they might want to add someone to their team. He couldn’t let him do all of this alone, leastways.

By the final week, he had made his decision will full certainty. In a couple of short days, he would be leaving his home and all of the people he knew here. He had made sure to at least talk with them all one more time though they wouldn’t know it. There was just one person really that he felt almost too much regret for. The flea, Izaya. Things seemed to change between them with permanence just a couple of days before Kasuka was set to call again. At least they did as far as the blond was concerned.

On the day Kasuka had said he’d call, he did. It was brief and simple. Shizuo confirmed in no uncertain terms that he would be leaving Tokyo to get to where Kasuka was. In return, Kasuka stated his relief and gave Shizuo precise instructions. Dye his hair black or brown. Leave absolutely everything that he owned there. Don’t clean up or even fold away the futon. Change into clothing that he wouldn’t mind destroying upon his arrival. Bring this phone with him, they would destroy it when he got there. This was to make it as clear as possible that there was a lack of intent. There were to be no hints or traces of where he would go and ultimately end up. Shizuo would get to Narita
International Airport and take a flight directly to the US, into Detroit. He would stay for a couple of
days before flying to Houston, Seattle, and then Los Angeles. Stay in each location for a couple of
days or even up to a week. All hotels were already booked and paid for in his name courtesy of
Kasuka. There had even been room service and various sets of clothing for him at the hotels. It was
quite surreal, especially since Shizuo’s English was subpar at best. But it was at LAX that he would
arrive one night and Kasuka would pick him up.

When that night came, the result of it was beyond his expectations. Kasuka brought him back to his
place. He told him everything he possibly could. And it wasn’t like Shizuo had to ask for much
proof, it was obvious. High secrecy, vampires, blood, societal laws. There was much to learn and
understand, and that would include English. But Shizuo wanted to face this new world with his
brother. They would explore and integrate into it together.

Then came the Embrace. And as was his choice, Shizuo never saw the sun again.

~
*Present Night*
~

Shizuo watched Jack sneak out of the theatre. He’d watch out for Izaya for now.

He took another drag of his cigarette. This was…unprecedented.

He wasn’t sure just how anything would proceed from here. He knew Izaya was in the city. Mitnik
had informed him that he was around again, though for much longer this time. And he couldn’t help
but think back on that night those years ago. It was the last time he’d seen the flea.

~

It was rather late on a weeknight in Shizuo’s usual park. In just a couple short days, he would be
forever gone from here. He sat on one of the benches, cigarette in his mouth. Some streetlights lit
here and there. A couple of people would walk through from time to time but they began to dwindle.
Today, the flea had appeared. Well, he had arrived hidden, and still hiding rather late that night.
After a couple of hours of the flea watching him, it was after midnight.

“Oi, flea. Come out.”

And there he was in just a moment, walking over to stand several feet away from the blond.

As he approached and then stopped in front of Ikebukuro’s beast, he had a strangely blank
expression on. But after looking at him briefly, the flea’s expression morphed into his trademark
smirk.

“Well, Shizu-chan. It’s not every day one has the…opportunity to see the Monster of Ikebukuro out
and about these days,” the informant had pulled out his usual knife, and was flipping it in the air.
His voice was the same as always, but it just didn’t have the same effect one Shizuo that it used to.

Like most other things, even the presence of the flea and his unchanging voice did not manage to
piss him off anymore.

Shizuo exhaled a puff of smoke upwards, tilting his back just slightly.

“That’s true,” he said. It was a simple phrase of two words, but it brought out something in the flea.

He wouldn’t have guessed the flea would say these next words, though he probably should have.
Izaya was quite bored these days. So, even if it tuned into an hour-long chase filled with what used to be the usual chaos and destruction left in their wake, it would be oh-so worth it to tease torment the brute until he popped and gave in to his violent nature. After all this time of the beast behaving so much like human, the raven had enough of it. He’d bring out that monster no matter what it took. The best way at this point would certainly be with words.

The beast had called him out of hiding, but just sat there, smoking away.

“Well…I suppose it only makes sense, after all. Even monsters might be upset if it were their fault that their sibling had disappeared,” he chuckled here, and did a little twirl, just for show. “The only thing that would make it worse is if it were your fault your brother was dead, Shizu-chan.”

The protozoan’s now sharp eyes made contact with his own. Perfect, he must be close now. Just one more nudge.

“After all…it’s true,” his eyes narrowed, intent on luring his prey into the trap he’d set.

As expected, the blond did get up from the bench. He dropped the cigarette onto the ground and stomped it out.

‘Here we go, come get it,’ Izaya tensed up, and pointed his knife at the blond. He’d have to run shortly, he knew.

What was unexpected is what the ex-bartender actually did.

He walked very slowly toward Izaya. Very small strides, very slowly. He did not break eye contact, his arms were still down by his sides. No rage apparent on his face.

Izaya furrowed his brows, losing his smirk.

‘What is this?’

He took a step back, wielding his knife more threateningly at the beast’s face. But in an instant, he was disarmed. This was because the arm holding the knife had been grabbed much faster than Izaya had expected. It seemed he had managed to forget that this monster was so unpredictable. Though the blond didn’t appear angry, there was no way he wasn’t about to beat him up.

But before he even decide on his next move, the knife was forced out of his hand and he heard it drop onto the pavement.

The sounds barely registered, however. He was too busy trying to come to terms with being in the midst of being embraced by the monster.

There were no explanations for this that Izaya could possibly think of at all. This made absolutely no sense, even for this hopelessly stupid protozoan!

…Even if it was warm…and comfy…and smelled nice—

No! What the hell was the monster’s game? He struggled a bit, and the brute relinquished his hold.

Izaya looked up at him, about to demand an explanation. Even for the beast, this was too unpredictatable.
And Shizu-chan was smiling. At him. Hell must have frozen over, truly. It froze him in place.

“I wanted to thank you, flea,” the ex-bartender spoke at last. “I know you’ve been trying to find Kasuka. Whatever your motivations for it are, I wanted to let you know I appreciate it, though I know it wasn’t for me.”

Sensations with which Izaya was entirely unfamiliar came upon him:

Speechless. Helpless.

“So…thank you.”

Izaya let out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding. “You…why..?”

There it was again! How was he smiling? At him, his long-time enemy?

“Well,” the blonde closed his eyes for a moment, then looked back at Izaya once more.

“Goodbye…Izaya.”

Izaya couldn’t stop him from leaving. This was because all he could do was stand there and stare at Shizu-chan…Shizuo’s retreating back.

Izaya would deny it if asked, but he always did regret not going after him. After all, even he could not have known that Shizuo would be gone all too soon.

~

After passing through the door, Izaya stood on the porch on the other side and gotten lost in the sudden memory. He was outside in an alleyway and there were brick walls on both sides of him and just a few stairs leading down to the ground. There were certainly bigger things to focus on now, of course, so the question there was why the hell he was thinking of that time now? As he proceeded down those stairs, a voice startled him out of his memory.

The voice belonged to a man left of the stairs, leaning against the building’s brick wall. Beyond him was a wooden fence. A few lights from the back sides of businesses were lit, and it was easy to heat the sounds of passing cars and buses not far away. There must have been bars nearby as well because the sounds of people chattering and clicking dishware seamed oddly close by.

The man seemed toward his forties in appearance, and was slim built. He had brown hair which he wore long, and his beard was in a similar fashion. His clothing was grey and he wore a thin grey vest without a shirt underneath it.

The man was laughing in his gruff voice as though he were quite entertained, and it seemed he definitely was.

“What a scene, man! Hoo-wee! Then they just plop ya out here like a naked baby in the woods- how ‘bout that?” the man calmed down a bit and seemed to get more serious. Maybe “man” wasn’t the right weird now; Izaya could see the fangs, though only just.

“Ah…look, kiddo, this probably a lot for you to take in, so uh, why don’t you let me show you the ropes. Whaddya say?”

Izaya hesitated for just a second. “Who are you?”

“I’m Jack. What’s important is I’m offering help,” his head tilted just a little, and he gestured toward
himself with a hand slightly. “You make it back from Santa Monica alive and we’ll trade life stories, m’kay? ‘Til then, I got about…this much time,” he held up his hand to show his thumb and index finger a couple inches apart. “You in or out?”

It was true that the (ex?) informant was actually out of his league. This entire situation was incredibly uncomfortable to say the least. He didn’t want to, but he’d need the assistance. But first.

“What was all of that back in there? I think I got the idea for the most part, but more going on there, right?”

“Don’t worry, kiddo, you’ll adjust. I’d love to explain it all but time’s a-wastin’ – you want some help or what?” Jack sounded slightly more impatient. Well, there was nothing for it.

“Alright. I could use the help,” he stated, just somewhat reluctantly.

“Alright~” there he was, sounding a little excited again. “Uhh… why don’t we, uh, step out back here.”

They moved a bit toward the other side of the alley, there was a door nearby and they were closer to a light.

“Well, it’s not that theatre, anyway,” Izaya stated, a little bit snide.

“Christ, it’s stuffy in there, huh? This is much better,” he seemed relieved himself.

Izaya hadn’t seen Jack inside. Was he one of the ones who had been more off into the shadows?

“Now, we ain’t got much time, but I figure somebody should fill you in on the bare bones stuff at least, ya know. Could save your hide.”

That was pretty much what Izaya was hoping for. As far as he knew otherwise, he’d just be… dragged off somewhere to figure out how to survive, how to handle his new body, and how to ensure he didn’t break some kind of law he doesn’t know about. After thinking about it, this might be a pretty good deal.

“You look wobbly; you even had a drink yet?”

It just hit him. Wait a second.

“You don’t mean….?”

“Oh man, we’re poppin’ a cherry here!” Jack was once more amused and laughing a bit. Izaya found it less so. “Alright check it out. Blood: it’s your new rack o’ lamb, your new champagne – blood’s your new fuckin’ heroin, kid! Ha ha! Get ready though, cuz, hey, it’s never as sweet as the first time.”

This was really the deal. He was truly blood-bound. It’s true he felt a certain kind of hunger, but it was unfamiliar. He didn’t know how to place it.

Judging from the situation, and the look on Jack’s face, this truly was going to be the rest of his unlife.

If there was any more doubt, it was gone now. This would be his existence.
The Embrace:

The act of transforming a mortal into a vampire.

Prince:

The Prince is, to put simply, the vampire who has enough power to hold domain over a city, codify the laws for that city and keep the peace. Such a position is typically held by an elder, for who but an elder has the necessary personal charisma and power to take and hold domain in a metropolis?
Chapter Summary

It's a fine line.

Chapter Notes

I am overwhelmed by the kind response I've received. It means a lot, thank you everyone! I hope this one satisfies. It is a bit info heavy, but there should be enough action in it for you too.

I'm finding writing to be helping me personally, so I appreciate the support I've been given. Thank you! Your kind words overwhelm me :3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Around 5 years ago*

In the beginning, it was hard to adjust. When Shizuo woke up after his Embrace, Kasuka handed him a transparent bag that contained a dark red liquid with a couple of sealed clear tubes protruding out of the top. Shizuo looked at it dubiously.

“We talked about this brother. Don’t worry, you’ll like it.”

He wasn’t wrong. Shizuo had torn off the seal to the tubes and before he knew it, the blood was gone. More than that, he felt satisfied and strangely healthy, in a way. As though he had all the energy he could need.

Kasuka had decorated this window-less apartment quite nicely. It was a three-bedroom place, and was fairly spacious. There were stairs inside of the apartment itself. On the first floor was a living room area complete with sofas, a table, and television. The dining room contained only a large kotatsu, or heated table. There was also the kitchen and a small bathroom. There was even a tiny closet as well that contained a small washing and drying unit for clothes. Upstairs were the three bedrooms and one full bathroom. There was a small space that could be an office which overlooked the first floor. Kasuka had gone out of his way to fully furnish the place. Apparently, they also had a fake potted plant called Tiberius. He lived in the living room, naturally. Why not? This apartment building was just along one of the main streets of Hollywood. Shizuo resolved that he would pay his brother some kind of rent when he was able.

The two of them sat at the kotatsu.

Kasuka himself looked no different from the last time Shizuo had seen him. The main difference was
that he had become a bit paler, and his clothing was mostly dark purples with black and grey accents here and there. He had added some red to his hair as well and could be seen wearing fake glasses. Though not terribly well-known in the US, he did not want to be accidentally recognized if at all possible.

“We’ll spend a while inside for now. You can rest and recover, and I can explain more things about our world before we go out.

“One thing I must tell you of are the clans,” Kasuka thought for a moment before beginning. “There are 13 known clans at this time. Here in L.A., we generally only come across the bigger 7 clans. There others are much smaller for the most part, so we can save that for another time,” Kasuka looked at him and Shizuo nodded in understanding.

“Every clan has some defining traits and characteristics unique to its own members. We are a part of the Toreador.”

“That’s a weird name.”

“There are much weirder to be sure,” Kasuka smiled with amusement. “Our clan is actually most known for its artisans, and for our strong ability blend in with the mortal world. We are most typically the closest to the mortals compared to the other clans, and social abilities tend to be our strength. We make excellent manipulators,” at Shizuo’s expression, he continued quickly. “We are the clan most responsible for the romanticism found in human ideas of vampires. The attractiveness, seduction and the like.”

He put his hand on Shizuo’s shoulder; it was obvious his brother was beginning to feel somewhat upset.

“You might find some irony in that and I know that isn’t really something you would be wanting to indulge in. However, those aren’t the only skills we possess. Every clan has these abilities to different extents. We also share enhanced physical and fighting abilities; your normal strength, brother, is the norm here.”

If that were true… a sense of belonging filled him. This would mean that he would not be an outlier in the society he belonged to unlike the way he had been almost his entire life.

“Besides, think of it this way. Say you find out a local gang of humans is planning some kind major move somewhere in the city. A territory fight or something like that. If you see any humans in that area, for you, it would take little if any effort to convince them to go elsewhere,” Shizuo looked up at him. Though he seemed to be quite relieved at this information, Kasuka could see Shizuo would need some rest shortly.

“Just remember that we have the option to use who we are and what we do to do both good and bad in the world. This is not unique to the humans. We live out our nights surviving. Some of push their own complicated agendas. But many of us just live and mind our own business. Still others actively work to make things better for us all too. Don’t worry, you’ll get used to it, brother. I didn’t choose to bring you here for the sole reason that we’re family. You’ll do well.”

That night (well, day), Shizuo found himself sleeping surprisingly well.

~

*Present Night*

~
Izaya braced himself.

“Alright, so what do I do?”

“Well, down around the corner there, I saw this human. Poor S.O.B. can’t find his car...hehehehe,” Jack was chuckling conspiratorially.

“So...do I hold him up or just tackle him or something? I do have skill with knives~” he smirked. The image was a bit amusing, he had to admit.

“No worries, kiddo, it’s real simple. Here’s what you do: You go down there – casual like – ya creep up on him, then bare those little fangs and feed. You don’t need to worry if you weren’t exactly captain of the wrestling team or anything cuz it’ll come so naturally you’d think you’d done it a thousand times already.”

‘I’ll just assume it’ll simply work out that way...’

“So he won’t become a vampire like that, right? I don’t presume it’s that simple?”

“Yep, forget that comic book crap kiddo, it don’t work that way,” was this why some people would just charge at Izaya whenever he had been entirely too amused in the past? It was now easy for him to sympathize.

“Now go for it. Be sure though – and this is important so listen up – be sure not to drain ‘em dry, okay? It might be hard to resist, but don’t kill ‘em.”

Made enough sense. “Alright.”

Izaya turned around and made his way down the opposite end of the alley. There was an opening to the right, where a man stood by a chain link fence, scratching his head with apparent confusion. There was a car there, but it was not his it seemed. Moreover, he wasn’t standing anywhere near the nearest source of light. Now he was lighting up a cigarette. He was certainly quick to give up searching.

Avoiding some of the light from a post nearby him, Izaya walked very quietly toward the man. He was slow, but not to the point that he would be suspicious. He watched the man closely who either did not care about his presence at all or simply hadn’t noticed him. Once he turned back toward the fence again, Izaya picked up his pace quickly.

It was as though his body was under the control of someone else. He had basically hopped onto the guy, forced his neck to the side, and sunk his fangs into the skin. The man didn’t otherwise move or make a sound. Izaya had figured this would be disgusting but that he would have to just bear with it. But no, if anything, blood was now delicious. He also realized he could somehow sense when the amount of blood in the man’s body was reaching a dangerous level. He stopped drinking and pulled away, jumping off of the guy. He was ready to potentially have to fight - he did, after all, pretty much assault the guy – but no, he was so dazed, Izaya would otherwise swear he was sleeping standing up. He took this opportunity to run back over to Jack and to try not to think about what he’d done too much. Though he knew that in truth he would have to get used to it. But at the same time, he began to feel a degree of satisfaction. He didn’t feel hungry anymore. Odd, that.

Jack looked at him as though he were sizing him up.

“Yeah. Hell yeah, you’re feelin’ it. I can see it in your eyes – you’re a born-again predator. Feelin’
that blood bubblin’ inside you, liftin’ you up. That’s it, kid, that’s what it’s all about right there.”

He wasn’t wrong. Izaya had managed to calm down by now and he was feeling a bit more like his usual self. In fact, he was feeling better than ever, physically. Feeling sardonic, he allowed a little smirk to make its way across his face.

“So, when do I pick up my cape? Can I choose the color?”

Jack let out one of his chuckles. “Not bad, kiddo.” Izaya felt satisfied.

“Alright, now you got the blood, you’re feelin’ all kickass, feelin’ better than your best day livin’ – but wait! It gets better! Kindred, that’s uh, our word for vampire… all Kindred have a few things in common, things that set them right square above humans on the food chain.”

Izaya crossed his arms and raised a brow curiously. “What might that be?”

“Well, like sharper senses, a body that can take a beating, and, if you play your cards right, eternal life,” he gestured with a hand passing in front of himself as if to illustrate it. “That’s no sure bet, but still, a chance at immortality’s not a bad deal. And that’s just for starters; fringe benefits for joinin’ the club.”

The irony was palpable. A chance like this was what he wanted for a good chunk of his mortal life. But now that he had given up the idea of it, here it was given to him just like that. He had to keep himself from bursting out laughing; it was just too funny at this point. If Jack noticed, he said nothing.

“So we live forever? You said a ‘chance’, right?” Izaya considered this for a moment. “Then how long have you been around?”

Jack laughed openly. “Not every Kindred is going to be so open about that, kiddo, remember that. As for me, I’m just about 400 years old give or take a few.”

Jack ignored his shocked look. How else could he react? He knew the possibility that these Kindred would be much older than him, but hearing numbers like that was another story.

“And anyway, we can still be destroyed but forget the books and the movies. Garlic? It’s worthless. A cross? Pfft… shove it up their ass. A stake? Only if catches you in the heart, then it just paralyzes you as I believe you found out earlier. Runnin’ water? Ah, that’s no problem. I bathe…eh, occasionally.”

That much was obvious. Especially to Izaya’s newly enhanced sense of smell. But even he wasn’t about to just say so.

Jack was a talker who tended to gesticulate quite a bit as he spoke and this did not fade as he continued.

“Now a shotgun blast to the head: oh, that’s trouble, boy. Fire? That’s real trouble. Sunlight? Well, you catch a sunrise and it’s all over, kiddo – got it?”

“Seems pretty straightforward.”

“Okay, now~”

Loud sounds of rapid gunfire and howling came from not too far away. Jack looked over toward the sounds, bared his fangs just a bit and growled lightly. “What the fuck is this”? He had lowered his
voice a good amount.

“Look, you get inside and head upstairs,” he moved to side, and gestured to the door right beside them. “We’ll meet up in a bit, I’m just gonna go see what the ruckus is.”

Nodding in agreement, Izaya made his way into the building. The space was large and clearly abandoned. It seemed to be what had previously been a car repair shop. There were crates and boxes stacked at the far side. If he jumped up on those, it would be simple to get onto the metal catwalk just above him and to the right- it seemed to lead somewhere. He made his way up, still hearing gunshots coming from outside. Were they getting closer?

There seemed to be an office that the catwalk surrounded from what he could tell. Along the way, he easily spotted what looked like a slim red stick. Picking it up, it was clear what it was- a set of lockpicks. Now that was bound to come in handy sooner or later.

Just ahead, he could go right and continue up some stairs that didn’t really seem to lead anywhere, or left which led down a hall, passed a few windows, which overlooked the alley he had just been standing in with Jack. Speaking of Jack, he was there at the other end, waving him over.

“Come down here and stay away from the windows!” It was an interesting blend of whispering and shouting. Izaya moved against the wall, not seeing anything in the alley yet.

“Ah…it’s a Sabbat raid. The Sabbat, well…eh, Christ, I was hopin’ to spare you this shit ‘til later. They’re mostly mindless bloodthirsty assholes and that’ all you need to know for now, alright?”

Interesting. “So then what’s going on?”

“Well, they got wind of the little gathering here and thought they’d put some heat on the new ’prince’,” the distain was not hidden from Jack’s tone.

Here was one of the many things Izaya wanted to know. “Just what is the prince a prince of?”

“No time for a political rundown,” Jack grimaced a little. “Job one? Get outta here alive. Sabbat might be mindless but they hit like a Mack truck, like raging savages – nothing a Fledgling like you wants to mess with.”

That annoyed Izaya a little, but it’s not as though he could compare whatever his abilities were to anyone else at this point anyway so whatever imagined pride he had in this arena hardly mattered.

“Alright, then what am I supposed to do?”

There was some motion down in the alleyway now.


From one end came three vampires. They had dark hair that was disheveled and kept on the long side, and bright red eyes. They were both holding automatic rifles. The third had only short pants on, and looked truly like a monster at best. He seemed to walk more hunched over than anything else, and then howled in a way similar to a wolf, of all things.

From the other side, someone came through the wooden fence. It was the huge man with the large sword from the theatre. The three Sabbat shot at him, and the creature-like one charged forward. The large Kindred simply held up a fist, which Izaya saw began to crackle with a blue-looking electricity around it. Behind the two Sabbat with guns, it seemed he had conjured what looked like glowing white wolves that attacked and ripped into the two. The gunshots stopped very quickly, along with
their screams. Before the third charging Sabbat could reach him, the man opened that hand and strangely blew across it. Which disintegrated that final Sabbat, showing a black skeleton for an instant before disappearing in those yellowish-orange particles and left no trace of his existence. As quickly as he’d arrived, he turned around and walked right back through the fence and out of sight.

“Dumb frenzied Sabbat bastards. Alright we gotta vamoose out the back, quick. I’ll stay and keep a watch out; you get us into that office. The door is around the corner here.”

“Hm. Alright, I’m on it.”

Sure enough, there was a lone wooden door at the end of the hall. And naturally, it was locked. Well, lucky for lockpicks. He pulled out his set and set to work. It took no longer than perhaps half a minute.

‘Naturally, I still got it.’

Opening the door, he heard glass shattering the deep voiced chuckle of Jack. He went through, and saw him standing there next to an obvious broken indoor window which had previously looked out onto the catwalk.

“Ah…shortcut,” Yep, no kidding. “Nicely done, though. Not exactly an angel in life, were you?”

Tonight was just filled with hilarity, wasn’t it?

“You could say that.”

“Cool. Now if you want a lesson on how really not to act, take notes from those Sabbat assholes. You’re a big bad vampire… yeah, great, congrats… now keep it to yourself. You go roar and you beat your chest and that’s what you can expect.”

He certainly got the idea of secrecy from the…gathering earlier. Not drawing attention to himself did seem like he would be far more liable to benefit as opposed to showing off, fooling mortals and such. But there seemed to be something specific implied here.

“Any specific reason?” he crossed his arms, ready for more talk.

“It’s the same reason you are not to let humans see you feeding. It’s the reason the wolf doesn’t want the sheep to know he’s there.”

Ah, that made some considerable amount of sense.

“It’s also why you don’t go jugglin’ dumpsters or outrun the 8:15 from Sacramento and it’s…it’s why you didn’t know any of this when you woke up this morning,” he gestured with a shrug as if to drive the point home.

Even still, for all of this to have been hidden from even him, Kindred had to be more impressive than he’d already thought. Moreover, it was still hard to believe he now possessed the capabilities of lifting things like dumpsters or running that fast. The abilities existing at all were not such an impossibility, though. Shizuo always would be an exception to everything it seemed.

Jack was still talking; he shook the thoughts from his head.

“You keep our secret a secret and you make things easier on all of us. We’re livin’ in the age of things like cell phone cameras; fuck ups ain’t tolerated. Makes sense though, right? Well, it ain’t a casual thing for a Fledgling like you.”
Izaya’s brows furrowed. “Just what do you mean by that?”

Jack looked both grim and pissed off.

“That party back there with the guy in the suit and the Magilla Gorilla – the assholes that put your sire to death? That’s the Camarilla,” he scoffed with disgust. “They make a tidy business out of enforcing ‘vampire laws’ like this one.”

So the Sabbat and the Camarilla appeared to be on opposite ends of Kindred society from what he could gather. However, almost nothing was as simple as it appeared to be. He would have to find out more - that was for certain.

“Alright now, don’t worry, cuz I know the area a bit – and you know what? I’m glad we’re in this situation you and I; it illustrates a point… you gotta utilize your surroundings.”

Finally, a concept he was well familiar with! He couldn’t help but smile now.

“I see you see what I’m sayin’. We do what we gotta do. Stealing, breaking and entering, destruction of property. This’ll be standard for ya before the nights out. So, have a look around here. On the back wall is a magnetically sealed door. Need to find a key card to get through.”

Nearby, there was a crappy desk with a computer sitting on top of it. Next to it, he saw a rather large safe built into the wall. That might be the ticket.

Strangely, the computer’s system seemed quite old. It had only a black background with green lettering that displayed a couple options for menus. He chose “safe”, and it wanted a password. Izaya being who he was, he could likely hack it. But he wondered if there was some other clue. Now why this computer would be using an ancient operating system like DOS, even Izaya couldn’t be sure. Strange.

On the wall, a post-it note read “chopshop”. Well why not. And there it was, that was the password. He heard the safe unlock itself. One of the basics of protecting something on a computer with a password was not writing it down and then especially not just leaving it around somewhere like that. What kind of moron was running this place?

Opening the safe, he found only one item, a magnetic keycard. One would think something more valuable would be in there. Once would also think a magnetic keycard wouldn’t be in a safe, but go figure.

“There we go. Take that card and head out the back. I’ll meet you down in the alley there. I’m gonna check out things from the topside.”

Fair enough. “Alright, then.”

Simple enough. The mechanism next to the door read the card easily and he went through. All that was there was a set of stairs going down. The only thing left was a door. Opening it up, the loud sound of more gunfire rang in his ears. He exited into the alley, but gunshots were whizzing by. He could see a couple more of these Sabbat shooting from down to his left. He moved to get against the brick wall, but felt a few somethings go through his arm and stomach. Not the best sensation but he would expect being shot multiple times to be far worse than this. Behind the tow Sabbat he saw Jack drop down, break the neck and back of one of them, whose corpse then disintegrated. The other noticed quickly, but Jack then moved forward at an astonishing speed, blue lightning crackling around his fists, he punched the guy who flew down the alley toward Izaya, but he too was done for before he even landed.
Now Jack was waiting for him. It was weirdly simple to walk down to him despite multiple bullet wounds.

“Fuckin’ waste o’ unlife, these Sabbat vatos. D’ya get winged?”

Izaya lifted his arms as if to display the obvious.

“Hey hey look at those potholes!” Why was he so thrilled about this?

“No worries kiddo, those will close up soon enough. So long as you don’t get hurt so much as to be destroyed, or get a ‘final death’ as we call it, you’ll heal back up to your 100% on your own. Now some things can damage you worse. If you get caught in some fire, that’ll take much longer to heal,” he winced a bit as if he were recalling something. “Now all Kindred have a couple of the same abilities, or disciplines, if you will. We can all use heal and buff. If you’re hurt, using any blood you got stored in you, or feeding will heal you much faster.”

That sounded incredibly convenient. Sure would have made his work as an informant less difficult on many an occasion.

“When you have some blood to use, you can buff yourself for a few minutes. It makes you stronger, and helps you out in other ways too. Say you’re having trouble breaking in somewhere or hacking something – that might be enough to get you in.”

It was lucky Izaya was accustomed to gaining and retaining high volumes of information. This might overwhelm most other people. Although the night had been surreal to say the least, his new unlife just might be a new lease on ‘living’ for him.

“Like I said, you heal faster when you feed, and you always want to have enough blood in you when you can so be sure to feed often enough,” he paused here, and sniffed the air. Sniffing? Then Izaya smelled it too. It was...not horrendously appetizing.

“There’s someone down those few steps right over that way. He’s not exactly the freshest catch, but he’ll do.”

It made sense enough. “So there’s a difference in blood quality.”

“Yeah. Its quality blood you want whenever possible, not quantity. Bums and lowlife don’t pack the same punch that a healthy, well-bred human will. Juicebags with a pedigree: That’s the good stuff. Just wait ‘til you have one with a Ph.D., kid. Still, you gotta take what you can get sometimes,” here he almost looked apologetic. Just what sort of options was he referring to?

“Remember what I said though, don’t kill them – not the innocent ones, at least. You’re a monster now – make no mistake. One of the damned and the fallen; you need to hold on to every last shred of Humanity you have.”

Here was a statement he mulled over for a few moments.

‘It’s funny, isn’t it, Shizuo? It was me who was always the monster, not you. And now even after everything, I have truly become one in every sense of the word.’

Truly, wherever the blond was, if he could see Izaya’s predicament now, he’d doubtless be having a hysterical fit.

“And if I should accidentally kill someone, then what?”
“An innocent’s an innocent. Even if you kill a bum – even by accident – that’ll cost you a piece of your own Humanity and it brings you close to the Beast that you have wellin’ up inside of you.”

It was here that Izaya could now sympathize with Shizuo. With all of these apparent powers and strength at his fingertips it wasn’t hard to imagine various accidents happening, especially while he wasn’t used to any of this.

“Beast?”

“The Beast – it’s always there, waitin’ to take over. When it does, it’s like a wild animal wearin’ your skin…raging, desperate, scared, reckless. He’ll do anything to survive and it’s you that has to deal with the consequences.”

It was as though his younger self was being dragged out of the past and being mercilessly beaten for all to see. These words ‘Monster’ and ‘Beast’…his past self had always assigned these descriptors to Shizuo, or at least to anyone aside from himself. It was something of a cruel irony. Yet at the same time, his past self would also revel in this newfound power lack of mortality. Ultimately, he expected this would not be easy to internally reconcile.

He must have been making some sort of expression during his internal musings as he continued to process all of this because Jack continued on as though Izaya had spoken.

“Ah ah ah! I said innocent humans. If some asshole levels a twelve-gauge your way, you drain him, skin him and bash in his skull. Self-preservation is a vital part of Humanity after all. My favorite part, in fact,” he finished with a wholly-amused chuckle.

So he wasn’t restricted to being beaten if he were attacked and caught.

“The only way to fight the Beast is to keep in touch with your Humanity, and don’t go hungry. It’s a real fine line.”

Izaya felt a bit cynical. “Sounds like one hell of a time.”

“That’s one way to put it, kiddo,” Jack smiled. “Now go feed. Careful, though…he’s gonna drain fast.”

Izaya crept down the cement steps to see a man bundled up in a coat, swaying in place. Not only did the man drain quickly, but there was a clear difference between the quality of his blood and the last guy. But like the last guy, he just stood there in a complete daze when the raven finished.

Making his way back to Jack, the Kindred already knew what he was thinking.

“Not quite as good, huh? Well, you could do worse; there’s some rats down the way,” he gestured the other way down the alley with his head. “You think I’m kiddin’? You can survive feedin’ on animals if you can stomach that kind of thing. Blech.”

Though the thought of having to feed on anything worse than this last guy turned his stomach, he decided he’d take Jack’s word for it.

“I think I’ve had my fill for the time being.”

“Can’t quite stomach it, huh?” Jack’s expression was understanding. “I don’t blame ya kiddo. We do what we gotta do to survive, but – just so you know – polite vampire society looks down on that kind of thing.”
He stopped, and looked to the side.

“Got someone around the way here.”

Izaya looked over as well, though he didn’t see anything beyond the metal fencing aside from some random garbage and some large construction equipment. Seemed a little out of place, but he couldn’t tell that there was a Sabbat or anything.

“Just one?”

“Not much of a threat by himself, but you never know if there’s more in shoutin’ range. You’ll need to sneak past him.”

“Fine, but where am I sneaking to?”

“The building across from us past this fence with the garage door. There’s some double doors on the far side. I’ll meet you inside. You just need to stay low and stick to the shadows so he doesn’t see you. Mind you, that’s usually more than enough to get passed humans but you gotta be more careful when sneaking by a Kindred.”

This seemed to be another important thing he should be able to do. He didn’t care much for having to do everything Jack said, but he did agree to the help which was proving to be…helpful, thus far.

There were a couple of streetlamps to avoid, but otherwise he kept crouched down, and moved around a few crates, stopping behind a big stack of them. He saw the guy who was just standing around a bit, oddly enough. He seemed confused. But because of that, he kept looking around which did make this a little harder.

‘Look away again, dammit.’

Finally the Sabbat Kindred walked back away from Izaya’s direction and he proceeded toward the far side of the building. He felt a strange sensation, like a prickling on the back of his neck, and he look back over the guy. He had put himself in his line of sight. However, the raven was avoiding direct light of the streetlight and the guy didn’t seem to see him. He turned again, and Izaya turned the corner under the streetlight, which led up some steps and through the mentioned double doors.

Going inside, he straightened up as he saw Jack waiting. He decided it wasn’t worth asking how he’d beaten him there.

“Alright. Keep it quiet, they’re inside here. Seems that shovelhead outside just got separated from his pack. He’s wounded too. Go take care of him.”

Izaya was a bit surprised by this. He wasn’t even armed; could he manage to do that?

“Don’t worry…he’s probably greener than you.”

Izaya blinked. “That’s pretty green,” he let the surprise creep into his voice.

“The Sabbat, you see, they don’t exactly have the most rigorous training program. In fact, that poor sod is lucky if he knows he’s a vampire.”

Izaya frowned. Just how could that be the case?

“Most likely he was turned and beaten over the head. They like to do that, see. Make shock troops, cannon fodder. Put him out of his misery. He is a vampire though, so be ready.”
Izaya looked down at his hands. He’d get used to this. It seemed like he’d have to.

“Well, if I don’t make it back, call the President.”

Jack smirked. “Go get ‘im.”

This time Izaya went straight out those doors right in the open. This apparent Fledging was carrying a tire iron, which Izaya had noticed only at the last minute. The guy swung at him, and missed. Izaya took a page out of his favorite ex-bartender’s book and charged in. He was aware of his body’s majorly increase speed and strength, after all. He took a hit, but it didn’t stop him too much. With a connecting kick to the side, the Sabbat stumbled. Izaya took the chance to finish him with a few blows. In a few short moments he already felt himself healing from that blow. Not the tire iron was laying there on the ground. May as well take it.

He got back inside, Jack was standing by another door in there. “Nice work. We got the rest of that pack moving about inside. We’ll get around ‘em by going underground a bit. In this room there’s a floor grate. Go down through it and I’ll meet you.”

Just how many Sabbat were still hanging around the area?

“After this next group we should be clear to get out of here,” Jack said. “But be mindful. There might be some Kine – humans that is – hanging about.”

“Why do I need to be careful of them?” He wasn’t under the impression they could really hurt him.

“Well, we don’t want them seeing too much. Wouldn’t be good for the Masquerade, so to speak. Plus they can easily get caught up in the crossfire. Might just be more of an annoyance than anything else but watch for ‘em,” Jack paused here and considered something. “Actually, this is a specialty of your clan, kiddo. I’d wager your sire might’ve picked you for these kinds of abilities. About the clans- it’s not important for now, you’ll learn later. For now, just know that we Kindred are more than fightin’ machines. Most all of us have the ability to use effective intimidation, persuasion, and even seduction one Kine and even other Kindred when we talk to them. It threads around our words, impacting the person we’re talkin’ to. This is another way aside from fightin’ all the time to get what we need.

“Your clan, they’re called ‘Toreador’ who specialize in this sort of thing. You also have the ability to use what we call ‘Presence’ when you speak. It projects your personality onto the target, which makes it even easier for you to get what you want out of a person.”

Now here was something he could hop right on board for. Was it this his apparent sire was talking about in the alley? Didn’t seem likely but maybe it was related?

“I didn’t exactly struggle with my words in life,” he admitted.

“Then it sounds like you’ll be alright, kiddo. It might be a few before we meet up again so I’ll tell you somethin’ else before we split just in case. As a Toreador, you got three other disciplines at your disposal. Like heal and buff, they take some amount of blood that you’ve had, so watch out.”

Izaya nodded. “So what would these be?”

“That thing I mentioned before, Presence. When talking to someone or fighting, mostly, you can use it. Like I said, it projects your personality on them, and gives them a sense of… fear and awe. Number two, a discipline we call Auspex. It gives you a sort of second sight. You can see auras, basically. The better developed it is, the easier you can do things like see people through walls, for example. Helps you notice things that you might otherwise not too. And lastly, there’s Celerity. Now
your clan and mine happen to share this one. You use it and gain temporary super speed.”

To say that these abilities sounded useful would be an understatement. He’d be an idiot not to learn and master these skills. And Izaya was not an idiot.

“If you do get into some fights down there, you can try them out. Generally speaking, you don’t use Celerity out in the open. That would be what we’d call a Masquerade violation being that it’s obviously supernatural in nature. The other two are fine though.”

Izaya followed easily enough. He waited another moment, took a breath, and nodded to Jack.

“Alright, I’ll meet you down there, get goin’.”

Izaya went through the door on his own. The room itself was strange in that it had not only a grate but also a toilet and sink and even huge pipelines running through the ground. This didn’t make any sense. Did someone use this room to trap people in there? He decided not to think about it too hard and climbed down the ladder under the grate. This did indeed lead to an underground passage. He turned a corner, and there was a security guard standing at the end of the hall.

“Hey, you, stop! Stay back, just keep your distance!” The man was shouting, he already seemed a bit fearful what with everything going on above ground. This would be cake.

Words were his forte, after all. Izaya smirked, and walked forward fluidly.

~

The Kindred once called Shizuo stood atop of the building across the way. He’d been watching Jack and the informant. He was relieved; Izaya seemed to be doing alright so far. Jack really was going all out with this. It was definitely loads of info, but if anyone could handle it, it would be that info broker.

Shizuo exhaled a puff of smoke, and put out the cigarette under his shoe. He could see down under the building with Auspex. It seemed Izaya had encountered a Kine security guard and was already waltzing smoothly right up to the guy.

Shizuo smirked. A Fledgling Izaya may be, but this Fledgling was never even an ordinary Kine. This should be good.

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**Humanity:**

Humanity is a moral code that allows Kindred to retain their mortal sensibilities in the face of their transformation into parasitic monsters. In essence, it is what keeps a vampire from becoming a mindless animal, enslaved by their thirst for blood.

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**Clan Toreador:**

Of all the clans, Toreador are the vampires most connected to the mortal world. While other vampires view the Kine as pawns or simple sustenance, Toreador glide gracefully and effortlessly through the society of mortals, sampling the delights of each age as a gourmand savors rare delicacies. They are
a clan of vampires known for being some of the most beautiful, sensual, seductive, emotional and glamorous of the Kindred. Also famous and infamous as a clan of artists and innovators, they are largely given seen as responsible for the legends among Kine of vampires who seduce and entice their prey with beauty, love and sensuality.

Chapter End Notes

The next one is in the works already, but it'll likely take a bit longer than this one, k~?
Chapter Summary

The Fledgling completes his 'training', makes it to Santa Monica, and has a lovely couple of nights in his...lovely apartment.

Chapter Notes

I don't know if Kindred sleep, but that's what I'm going with. Additionally, the sun never makes an appearance in the game at all. Essentially, the whole game is supposed to span over less than a week's time. There are some fan theories as to how they make it work with the main character's huge increase in power just like that, but I'm....trying for a little more realism here - if that's not a joke in itself~ Suffice to say, I'm taking some liberties here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The man tried to back up more upon Izaya’s approach, but there was no more space. He was a guard or maybe an officer dressed in a standard light blue uniform with some kind badge and a black tie, but he was also unarmed. He stopped a few feet away from the guy.

“Now who the hell are you? You involved in all this? Cuz I’m gonna radio this in and I’ll have SWAT all over this place!”

Cute. This guy couldn’t possibly be trying to lie, right? The strain in his voice was a dead giveaway though it was obvious enough without that. He’d give these abilities a shot.

“No, I’m certainly not involved, my good sir. But if SWAT were to come they’d surely drive the gunmen down here. You want that?”

The man looked to the side and just lightly bit his lip. “No. Well, I, uh – I left my radio in the car anyway.”

A bad liar and a bad mind. It was already far too easy.

He smiled, being sure not to show his teeth. Time for a dose of honesty. “I’m merely looking for a way out. Do you know of one?” There was a door right next to them, but may as well get any additional information if possible.

The Kine had relaxed exponentially by now. “Yeah...ok, alright – it’s through there. This’ll lead us up to the warehouse, we can maybe sneak out that way.”

Perfect. But even as a Fledgling, Izaya could feel there was at least one person in the indicated direction. He couldn’t tell if it was Kindred or Kine, but one thing was certain, this man here was not capable of protecting himself, at least not right now. And though Izaya was confident he could keep himself safe, he didn’t think he could also protect someone else.
He was not the type to leave it to chance and watch someone get hurt or die on purpose. Not anymore, leastways. This Kine had to stay here at least for a while longer. Time to try another technique. This could be amusing.

“You’re unarmed, right? Better stay here for now. Wait for me to return, and perhaps we could relieve some of this stress together, hm~?" He had brought his hand up to lightly trace patterns on the black tie. He stopped, made eye contact, and smirked. Lowering his hand again, he dealt the final blow. “I’d love very much to see your skill with those handcuffs…Officer.”

The man blinked a couple of times and visibly swallowed. “Ah…um…s-sure. I’ll wait here for a bit, of course.”

Izaya opened the door next to him and threw a wink back at the Kine before going through it alone. Now that was almost exhilarating. But he’d also no doubt saved a life, and felt better for it.

There were several more rooms to get through from there. In one instance, Izaya could tell there was someone on the other side of a barrier that he hid against. But if he were to sneak by or even get the drop on this guy, he’d need to know where he was. Auspex came in handy here. He could see the guy staring at some meters and knobs on the wall’s machinery. The moment he turned away, Izaya snuck right by him to the next room. Unfortunately, he could see that this room had three Sabbat in it who would notice him the moment he went in. Time to try the other two. With speed, it wasn’t too hard to take down the first and the crowbar came in handy. The other two were a little slow when he used Presence, and that made it easier to maneuver around them. It was an odd feeling. He had become an actual killer yet it didn’t feel that way.

The last room had several people in it. They seemed generally distracted so he could probably sneak by. The only problem was there was one standing a bit too close and he might present a problem. He was turned away, however. There was really just one option here. He crept up behind this guy, remaining unnoticed. Crowbar in hand, he forced it against the neck and broke it quickly. The guy fell quickly, and the others in the room managed to not notice. Were they deaf, blind or both? That being the case, it was easy to get by the others and he smiled at his job well done.

Getting through one more door, there was no one but Jack waiting for him. The man looked more relaxed by far, and had begun laughing.

“Fuckin’ humans. Ganbangers ‘protectin’ their turf’. Ah man, I’m here thinkin’ it’s Sabbat movin’ up in here…it’s the fuckin’ locals about to take one for the hood.”

Now that Jack had said that, it was true some of those bodies hadn’t magically disintegrated the he’d seen other Kindred do.

“So I don’t imagine we can leave them be at this point,” there was no way, really. The Sabbat had actually been in the area, and then there was the two of them.

“Yeah, they probably seen way too much. Here… take this thirty-eight. Fuckin’ peashooter, but a few shots and it’ll take down a human.”

It was a small revolver that got handed to him. Izaya had little experience with guns on the whole. He may have run with the black market and other unsavory business in Japan, but that didn’t mean he’d around many guns especially since they were quite outlawed there.

“Thanks, I’m not very good with these though.”

“Well, I’m gonna want it back so don’t go die and lose it. I don’t use guns much; they’re noisy,
clumsy, and practically useless against vampires. Still, a Kindred’s gotta keep up with the times, and in modern day Los Angeles, that means comin’ strapped.”

It was a fair point. Izaya felt little need to obtain one himself, but it might end up useful later. He was not the type to dismiss things too easily.

“Useless against us?”

“Well, sure, some are more lethal than others, of course. I said this already but watch out for those shotguns – those things can smart, I tell ya.”

“Makes sense.”

“Alright, head up that elevator and clear out what’s left of ‘em. I’m gonna make sure there’s no stragglers back that way and outside. Can’t have them runnin’ their mouths about any o’ this.”

The elevator was close, and it only had two selections, one or two. For a decrepit building like this, it ran strangely well. He could see three Kine on this floor which was more like one big room that seemed to be for storage. Crouching down, he crept along a wall until one of the Kine was in sight. It was interesting that even though he was just a bit in the shadows, he wasn’t seen at all. He used his speed to get the jump on this first one; it had worked well before, so why not. The next guy charged in on him with a bat. Izaya tried out the gun. It did hit the guy a couple of times and he was down. Though it worked, he found himself really missing his usual knife. The last guy had a shotgun but was managing to miss the Fledgling the whole time. Izaya ran up to him quickly, though he did then get shot in the shoulder. Jack wasn’t kidding, there was a clear difference here. This time, he fed until the man dropped dead – this would doubtless be an exception of the Humanity rule.

The elevator came up again, and Izaya crouched down.

‘Ah, it’s only Jack.’

Izaya stretched a little as he made his way over. He was feeling the urge to rest.

“That it, kiddo. Just like that and it’s all over. Everyone slinks back to their corners of the city for the night and day.”

“So it’s all over?” It seemed like a strangely high amount of activity to him.

“Until the next night, when the Camrilla finds some way to strike back. Parry, dodge, spin and all that. And so on, and so on…”

“Sounds like a pain in the ass to me,” he didn’t like the idea of being made to do this kind of thing all the damn time.

“Well, to be honest, you’ve come at a, well, an interesting time, let’s say. The Camarilla, the Sabbat… well, in LA these are the new kids on the block. There’s already plenty o’ Kindred had stakes down in California long before them,” Jack seemed to shake his head with annoyance.

“Now, we got every ancient Kindred rivalry playin’ out all over the city. Lotta tension out there. Lotta fear. Lotta jittery, high-strung predators clingin’ to their little pieces of eternity.”

For one thing, the situation was sounding uncomfortably precarious. For another, he still couldn’t believe he didn’t have a hint to something bigger going on before this night. He knew gang activity was high, sure, and that there seemed to be a good deal of turf wars taking place, but this was another story completely.
There was a car horn sounding just loudly enough for them to hear. It was a bit out of place.

“Oh, boy. Well I think they’re lookin’ for you outside; guess you got a cab to catch. Was hopin’ to fill you in on a little more but… ah hell, you’ll figure it out.”

If there was something he wasn’t worried about, it was figuring things out. Meeting with Jack had been incredibly helpful but Izaya knew he’d be alright from there. Giving the gun back to Jack, it occurred to him that dawn couldn’t be terribly far away now.

“If you make it back, stop in at The Last Round – it’s this bar here Downtown – I’ll fill you in on the politics. Now that’s the stuff that’ll kill ya,” with one more laugh, Jack led them to the way outside. And there it was, the yellow cab waiting. Izaya got into the back, though he didn’t know exactly where to tell the driver to go. It seemed he knew already, because he’d handed Izaya a keyring with a single key on it. I also noticed this guy seemed to be Kindred.

“Good luck kiddo,” Jack said through the open window before he took off into a close by alleyway.

And they were off, driving the distance to Santa Monica.

~

“Got a light?”

“Yeah.”

Jack took the lighter from the outstretched hand. The two of them were standing on a rooftop Downtown, not far from the theatre. Next to Jack stood a Japanese man who was a bit taller than him, already smoking his own cigarette.

“Thanks for doing that, Jack.”

“Ah, it’s nothin’, I did owe you,” he took a drag. “Besides, that Fledgling’s interesting one.”

“I’d be surprised if he were anything less,” he chuckled.

“So you knew ‘im before, then? Back in Japan, right?”

He hesitated.

“You could say that. We were…acquaintances for several years.”

Jack looked over at him, a brow raised.

“Acquaintances, huh?” he smirked just a little.

“That’s really the best way to put it. And no, it wasn’t anything like what you’re implying, alright?” He raised a hand and ran it through his short black and red hair.

Jack laughed outright. “Kid, you might be a Toreador but I been around long enough to know you’re full o’ shit,” he kept chuckling. “Even if you’re not lyin’ about that, there’s more to it, Zen.”

The other Kindred shifted uncomfortably and rubbed his forehead as though he were developing a headache.

“You and your clan with all those human emotions swimming around in there. It must be rough, kid.”
“It’s a gift and a curse, they say.”

Jack let it go from there.

“We haven’t seen you or the other Hollywood Kindred in a while, Zen. How’s your Brother been?”

He took another drag before stomping it out.

“Kaz? Yeah, he’s doing pretty well as usual. We’re still running that club,” Zen smiled, thinking about it. “We just introduced karaoke night which has been good amusement from Kindred and Kine both,” snuffing out his own cigarette, Zen stuck his hands into his jean’s pockets. “Both of us have been indulging in singing as a hobby lately. Thought we’d give everyone their own shot at it if they should want to try it.”

“Ha, that oughta be hilarious – nice goin’ kid.”

“So glad you approve, Jack,” Zen smiled a bit mockingly, and opened his arms as if to make a grand announcement. “Truly, my unlife’s purpose has been fulfilled.”

Jack crossed his arms, unable to stop himself from laughing again. “You’re always a riot, kid. But it’s lookin’ like we better get a move on; night’s almost up.”

“Right. Come out to Hollywood sometime, yeah?”

“We’ll see, kid. See ya ‘round.”

Zen nodded, and waved goodbye. He had a bit of a ways to go and not a lot of time to get there.

Kaz had left the gathering very quickly; they were busy owners after all.

Zen didn’t like leaving Kaz to do close up the club on his own but these were…extenuating circumstances.

~

Izaya stepped out of the cab and found himself in front of a pawn shop. Trips, Pawnshop, apparently. He was told to walk around it, and down the alley where there would be a door leading inside and up above the shop where there were a few apartments including his.

‘508, huh?’

On the other side of the door were a few mailboxes on the left, and then just stairs headed upward. After a couple of turns, his was the final apartment on the right. What lay beyond the 508 door was not exactly what anyone would consider the height of luxury, to put it nicely.

It was a one-room place, though fairly spacious. The entire left side was a bedroom and living space. To the right was an area that was quite obviously the kitchen. Though why there was an open box of pizza of all things on the counter, he couldn’t be sure. Then beyond the kitchen was a door already open to show a tiny bathroom. There would be time the next night, he felt, to look at everything more closely. Meanwhile, he had a couple of more immediate concerns.

Though the windows had blinds that looked to be adequate and decently functioning, they were not pulled down at all. Izaya quickly remedied this. Even so, it didn’t seem like it would be enough to block out the sun. Izaya frowned.

‘Maybe I can find something in here.’
The kitchen cupboards proved to have various items which included towels and bed sheets. Still this wouldn’t be enough. He’d gone through all of this insanity just to be trapped into sunlight by his own so-called haven?

He took some towels and sheets and spread them along the bathtub in the bathroom. It was clean enough on its own but just not comfortable.

Even if the sun weren’t a threat, he had seen the bed. Rickety frame which included two thin mattresses that were a strewn carelessly onto it. Moreover, these mattresses looked as though someone had died on them, urinated on them, burned them, or more likely, all of the above. The pillow did not look better.

Not only was he missing his phone and wallet but he couldn’t go anywhere very soon to fix this.

It seemed he’d have to resign himself to sleeping in here for maybe a couple of days…hopefully.

~

*5 Years Ago*

~

“Rumor has it there’s been some activity from a sect called the Sabbat. Right now, California is under no official rule.”

It was several nights after his embrace, and Kasuka, no, ‘Kaz’, was giving him a rundown of their government workings. Shizuo felt it was much simpler than most any mortal governing systems. Kasuka had told him he went by Kaz now and to try to get used to using it; another way of maintaining his anonymity. Besides, the local Kindred sometimes had some difficulty with his proper Japanese name.

“We all follow the obvious guidelines especially in our modern times. Usually a Childer’s Sire teaches them how to survive, ways of the clan, and anything else they need to know. This does differ between clans, however. Many of the other’s think Toreador’s baby their Childer too much. We believe them to be unreasonable or even cruel in their methods.

“In any case, there are no official laws here in this state unlike in the others. We survive and we don’t go around telling Kine what we are nor do we make any such displays so that we may continue to survive. Now regarding the Sabbat, they are primarily composed of minor clans who tend to hold the opposite sort of ideology. They embrace the Beast inside, act violently and wish to rise up and subjugate humanity. The Camarilla, on the other hand, was established to promote our connection to Humanity and emphasizes keeping out existence a secret. Sounds fine, however, I am told that they are…over-bearing, so to speak. It seems there is a bit too much corruption in the ranks and such.”

It was straight-forward enough.

“So you’re saying these groups are starting to build up around here, right?”

“I’m saying there have been a few members of theirs spotted in the state. In the next few years they might come into the city and try establishing some territory and dominance,” Kaz was didn’t sound altogether thrilled at the idea.

“I can see the Sabbat being an issue for us but we can just not deal with the Camarilla if they come here, right?”

“I thought so too, but apparently that sect just automatically claims any vampire as a member wherever they are which happens to be pretty much everywhere. Except here.”
That would explain what sounded like a lot of potential upcoming conflicts. Shizuo frowned. The situation did not exactly sound like something he wanted to deal with.

“In any case, I have been made to understand that it shouldn’t be a concern for at least a few years, so with any luck circumstances might change and perhaps they’ll back off,” Kaz smiled, trying to instill some confidence in the atmosphere.

“Ready for some more English, brother? You’ve been doing well.”

~

*Present Day*

~

Izaya closed his flip cell phone. He had obtained some new clients very recently. The three men seemed to be of the nervous sort – clearly, they were unaccustomed to this sort of business. He had just finished speaking with one of them, having established their initial meeting for next week. It seemed their purpose was the destruction of a certain place. The fallout of which was bound to be most interesting.

Leaning back on the park bench, Izaya sighed. It had now been months and month since Shizuo had disappeared and it was simply unthinkable that he could evade even the best of the best. Though he didn’t suspect foul play in Shizuo’s disappearance, there wasn’t any evidence he could find that would suggest otherwise. He had found out easily enough that Shizuo had flown across the ocean to the city of Detroit, apparently. But after that, he couldn’t find a single trace of him at all. Not that he hadn’t tried; he had already gone there himself in order to get whatever information possible, or any clues he could find. He had stayed for two weeks but could find nothing. He resolved to go again and head to other cities in the country where he knew Kasuka had filmed in. There had to be a connection. Also, he was not upset over the disappearance. Nor did he miss that beast and he most certainly didn’t remember anything about any hug.

“Iza-san!” he had his arms suddenly full of his recently made friend.

It had taken a good number of months of them meeting up and talking most days of the week, but the girl had firmly attached herself in his mind as an actual, real friend. Interestingly, he even tried to scare her off at one point being since most humans reacted in such a manner to him or at least similarly. But Shizu-chan was quite the exception in that no matter what he said, she did not shy away. If anything, she just would tell him what she thought and would smile. Maybe he did just… need a chance. The irony wasn’t lost on him either; Shizu-chan was Shizu-chan now as had been dictated by her. If he ever saw Shizuo again, it would either be by that name, or he would have to think of something else.

She let go of him and took her usual spot on the bench.

“I see you’ve been painting your nails black. Any reason?”

“Nope, I saw somebody on the train with their fingernails like that, and it looked so cool, so I got some too during my errands! Aren’t they pretty?”

“No doubt about it, Shizu-chan!” This girl had embraced her individuality; a trait many people, particularly in their country, often did not tend to do. Izaya had found himself impressed by it. “How was school today?”

“It was ok, but Hiro-kun was making fun of me again and it’s really weird because sometimes he’s nice to me but then other times he isn’t. Does it make sense, Iza-san?” The girl was pouting with
both irritation and confusion.

He smiled. “There are times when people do and say many things we don’t understand. Everybody does it sometimes.”

Shizuka looked at the ground. “Well I dunno what his problem is but I really don’t like it.”

“Well, you know how you just tell me what you think and feel about what I say sometimes? You have to do that with people who hurt your feelings too. It’s important to tell them how it makes you feel and you can ask why they said or did the thing that upset you,” he gave her a pat on the head in reassurance.

“If that doesn’t work out, then it’s better to avoid the person. If he really wants to be your friend, then he would listen to you and apologize. You never need to take bad treatment from anyone, got it~?”

Shizuka’s feet didn’t touch the ground when she sat on that bench, so she swung them happily.

“Thanks, Iza-san. You know how to give good advice, sometimes,” a cheeky grin spread across her face.

“Only sometimes?” he laughed. If anyone else saw, it would be assumed to be a sign of an upcoming apocalypse, surly. “Well thank you, Shizu-chan.”

“Hey, have you found your friend yet?”

“Ah…no, not yet.” He’d sobered up rather quickly.

She grabbed his hand; it was obvious from his face he was upset. But did he even know that?

“When you find him, you hafta tell him how you feel.”

Shizu-chan, like her…predecessor, had a knack for catching him off guard now and again. How was it that there some humans that managed to do this?

“How I feel?” If anything, he held nothing but annoyance and hatred. Where was she getting some weird idea like this from?

“Yeah. You miss him, don’t you? So when you meet again, you need to tell him. It’s important, isn’t it?”

He scratched the back of his head with a sheepish grin. He supposed he couldn’t really argue her point. Besides, he was starting to wonder if he would see Shizuo again.

“It’s ok, Iza-san,” he blinked at her. “You’ll definitely see him again – you’re the best, after all!”

“Well, that is true~” he said, grinning.

Shizuka grinned too. “Then, you’ll find him and tell him that you really missed him, ok?”

“…Well, we’ll see.”

~

His eyes snapped open. His mind certainly had a knack for choosing very exacting memories that he’d rather not dream about. He suppose it was deserved though. He sat up in the bathtub where he had taken shelter from daylight. He saw his own fingers, the nails black in color. He had noticed last
night, but in all fairness it was a bit of an eventful time. He’d have to think of it as nail polish until he could get used to it. Otherwise, he’d rather not think about it anyway.

He decided to crack open the bathroom door just a little – he didn’t know what time it was, just that it felt as though a good amount had passed. He couldn’t see any light passed the blinds, so it was safe to come out.

There had been an old radial clock on the kitchen wall. He seemed to recall it being accurate at a glance last night. If it were still accurate, then it was apparently 11pm. It seemed that despite the… elegant comfort lacking from sleeping in a bathtub, he must have been exhausted enough to sleep that long.

The floor of the place was actually rather disgusting and even had plywood sitting on top of what was apparently a hole in it. He found a few packs of what seemed to be blood in the refrigerator, and spotted a radio on the dirty counter. Why not? He turned it on. It seemed there was a late night show on. The announcer’s voice was nice enough to listen to, so he thought he’d leave it on for a while.

By the windows was a small TV and also a desk with a laptop and what appeared to be a few notes on it. As the radio played, he turned on the laptop, which seemed to be password protected. So first, he looked at the notes.

A simple legal pad sat with writing on its first page.

*Hey. The password for your computer is “sunrise”. Keep the cash in the drawer – it’s yours. I’ll drop you an e-mail with my address. Come on over once you get settled.*

-Mercurio

This Mercurio had to know there was no way he would have made it last night. But here was something quite welcome – money. Indeed, there was $100 in an envelope in the top desk drawer. Nothing in any of the other drawers though. Apparently he wouldn’t be able to have any contact with Shiki and Awakusu-kai any longer. In fact, that included Namie, Shinra…and what about his sisters? He had woken into his unlife with nothing on him; everything was taken. His money and assets were traceable…the last thing he wanted was to be killed over something like this. He essentially had to completely re-build everything.

This would be a hardship, certainly. But at the same time, it would a true, fresh start for him. He could see clear pros and cons here. But above all, this should be a most interesting and unpredictable existence.

Now it was time to check the computer. He entered the password Sunrise.

‘Very funny.’

Lacroix Foundation Secure Intranet

This computer also seemed to run on a very old operating system. Was it part of making the system harder to hack? He had 5 e-mails already, it seemed.

E-mail for suckhead

Someone had a real funny sense of humor.

[1] A reminder
This was from LaCroix.

*Mercurio will contact you when you arrive in Santa Monica. Waste no time in meeting with him. –SL*

Considering what he’d seen of this guy in Downtown, this was not all too surprising to see.

[2] **DANG! It’s big you know!!!111**

*PENIS ENLARGEMENT! Watch the girls come running! Call today!*

Naturally, it took zero time to receive disgusting spam mail. He neither required their services nor did he require girls to come running. Even if he wanted women, he was perfectly capable of getting them on his own, thank you.

[3] **Kilpatrick’s Krime-puter!**

The long and short of this one was that there is apparently a bail bonds shop in Santa Monica. What Izaya made note of, however, was that this computer of theirs apparently had information on a multitude of people. It sounded like a weird version of how he had done his work. For whatever lay ahead of him, this might actually be useful to remember.

[4] **Welcome**

This one was dated for a couple of hours ago.

*Hey. Welcome to town. Come on over to my place once you’ve gotten situated, and we’ll talk about what you’ll need to get the job done. I’m going to pick up explosives right now, some Astrolite… I should be back by the time you come over. I’m at 24 Main Street, in number 4. Walk to the end of the alley and my building in the next one on the right. – M*

[5] **The Opening**

*The game begins. A pawn is moved.*

This was apparently from “A Friend”.

He could certainly tell on his own that he was a pawn at this point. A sort of role reversal he wasn’t very used to. Still, this gave him the impression that he was being watched. ‘A Friend’ huh?

He closed the laptop. The radio had moved on to commercial messages.

*“That’s some good fuckin’ chicken – I mean…friggin’ chicken!”*

*Friggin’ Chicken – you’ll swear it’s the best you’ve ever had!*

Ok, that was enough of that. Maybe there would be something more useful on the radio later. Perhaps if LaCroix sent an e-mail telling him to find out where to get good chicken, he could gladly inform him of this new information.

Before he left, he checked the TV. The news was on. Hopefully it would give him something useful.

Apparently, there was a ship come to port that had its entire crew was missing. The coast guard was searching and they didn’t have any more information.

There was news of someone called the Southland Slasher, an apparent serial murderer leaving butchered bodies around. This time, there was apparently one at the pier. Izaya had heard of the
previous two attacks. With his new knowledge of Kindred, he had some new suspicions about this.

Finally, apparently a massive, gelatinous creature had washed up on shore in Rhode Island which scientists couldn’t identify. Izaya theorized it may be Namie’s personality.

Well, time to go. Apparently this Mercurio would have explosives for him. Not really things he liked to say the least, but it seemed he would have to get used to things he didn’t like. He didn’t used to have any particular issue with them, but…well.

He exited his room, then his building. Here was the same alleyway he had come down last night.

It was raining, and he could hear sounds of cars and sirens in the distance, though this Main Street was devoid of drivers. Some pedestrians though. To his right was indeed a building that could be anything but was most likely a groups of apartments. Better looking than his from what he could tell.

There was a man on all fours right in front of the entrance. He was coughing – no, spitting up some blood. There was a clear trail of it leading to the building and the man crawled through the door. With the way Izaya’s luck had been as of late, this would be Mercurio.

Well, this should be fun.

Making his way over, he was stopped by a voice. It came from in front of what was apparently a hospital or clinic, just across from his own apartment building.

~

Izaya had left his building. Zen stood just in front of the pawnshop now, watching him walk the other way. He held quite a number of bags with him, including a couple of large duffels. Nothing he couldn’t handle as a human, so it was certainly nothing now. He saw Izaya get called over by someone. Hm, a ghoul. Now just what else was in store for him? Among those of them who had…discovered what LaCroix wanted from him, it would be reasonable to assume that the entire thing would be a suicide mission. But Zen knew Izaya would doubtless surprise them all and make it through. But it was liable to take a while. And now did this ghoul want something from him too?

Zen made his way down they pawnshop alley and into the building. It wouldn’t be hard to get into Izaya’s impartment and do what he needed to do by the time the Fledgling would return. After all, there were still a few hours until sunrise and there was little doubt in his mind that Izaya would be quite busy for some time to come.

Zen smiled. It sounded just like him. Despite the hardship, Izaya would pull through. But that didn’t mean he could give him a hand here and there. It would be best not to reveal himself for a while longer. Izaya would need more time to adjust and learn. Besides, would he even want to see his old enemy Shizuo after all this time?

With his own alias suggested by Kasuka, he knew they had made it harder for Izaya or anyone to find them. Now that a few years had passed, he knew that Izaya was the only one still looking for him. That didn’t mean the flea would want to see him, but even so…it was nice. With some help from the Hollywood Nosferatu (they were on friendly terms, which was unusual for their clans), he had been able to keep track of what Izaya was doing back in Tokyo. Things had truly turned out in a most interesting fashion over time.

Just where would all of this lead them?

~
The Sabbat:

The Sabbat has recently increased its activity, actively vying for Chicago, Atlanta, Washington DC, and other elder-controlled cities. Animalistic monstrous, the sect has swarmed like locusts over the East Coast and southern borders of the United States. Its influence in Canada has also increased, and it appears as if the Sabbat is realizing a grand enfilade, surrounding the United States and cutting off all access except that which it grants. Fanatics to the Last, Sabbat vampires gladly throw themselves into the fire for their sect, falling on their foes in legions, tearing their enemies apart just as a pack of wolves brings down its prey.

Rumored to have its origins in a medieval death cult, the Sabbat is greatly feared by Kindred who do not belong to it. The sect is monstrous and violent, and no longer clings to any trappings of human philosophy or morality. Members instead revel in their vampiric unlives. Sometimes referred to as the Black Hand, the Sabbat actively seeks the overthrow of the traditions, the destruction of the Camarilla, and the subjugation of humankind.

~

The Camarilla:

The largest sect of vampires in existence, the Camarilla concerns itself with the Masquerade, thereby hoping to maintain a place for Kindred in the modern nights. The Camarilla is an open society; it claims all vampires as members (whether they want to belong or not), and any vampire may claim membership, regardless of lineage. A coalition of vampires formed in the late 1400s to protect all Vampires from detection by the mortal population. The Camarilla is the dominate sect in the vampire world, and controls most cities. They are very rigid and feudal, and though many Kindred agree that the Camarilla is generally a good idea, many others believe the organization is far too seriously flawed. Most Sabbat express bilious contempt for the vampires of the Camarilla, whom they see as cowardly wretches unable to accept their predatory natures.

Chapter End Notes

A real long one for you guys! Thanks as always for reading, the next one will be out within a week, that's the goal~ ^^/
The Note

Chapter Summary

Morphine, blackmail, seduction - just a typical night.

Chapter Notes

Japanese will appear now and again. I'm no native, but I won't be needing a translator either. Still, I am also out of practice. If you see something a bit off in the Japanese, let me know~ :3
I'll always put the English in the end notes~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This was the absolute worst. As far as Izaya’s sensitive ears were concerned, there was no way it could possibly be worse than this.

He was standing in front of the guy who had beckoned him over in front of the clinic. This ordinary looking human beckoning him over. Considering his fairly precarious situation he’d found himself in, Izaya didn’t really want attention drawn to him, so he made his way over to the human quickly. The rather unremarkable human wasted no time in talking.

“Hey, how’s it goin’, pal?”

It was often the case that Americans were more…gregarious, but it was possible he had crossed paths with this guy before.

“I’m afraid I don’t recall us meeting,” Izaya opened his arms casually as if in a slight state of confusion. “Why don’t you give me the dubious honor of reminding me?”

Strangely, the guy’s face lit up. “Aw man, say that again!”

This Kine had to be off his rocker. Or just simply lacking in any meaningful intellect. Both were likely.

“So sorry, but I’m not fond of repeating myself.”

If possible, the Kine grew even more excited. “There! You – oh man, you’re a vampire, aren’t you?”

These were the exact words Izaya least wanted to hear. Was he giving off some kind of signal? A weird scent? A sign on his back that said ‘Ask me about being a vampire?’

Looking around, he didn’t see anyone too close by. All the same, this was not an ideal situation.

‘I’ll have to get serious,’ he crossed his arms, frowning. “And just how would you have come across such information?”
Now the human was about ready to combust.

“Hell yeah! Oh man, I knew it! I just- Oh geez, I just knew you were! I just could tell. I – oh man, this is great! And th-then I saw your teeth an-and I was, like, damn! It was like I could just sense you,” the human did calm down here a bit. Izaya’s ears were pleased with the break. “The name’s Knox Harrington. Pleasure to meet you! Aw man!”

This Kine was not only uncomfortably loud but also didn’t seem to grasp any proper social compliances. Luckily, the nearest other person was still decently far and did not seem to notice them.

“A pleasure. Now, if we must converse…Knox…do us a favor and keep your voice down, yes?”

He had literally just left his building and already he was dealing with something bizarre and a bit confusing.

“I would assume you’re Kindred?”

“Naw, I’m a ghoul. I didn’t know any of this stuff until a couple months ago, this guy just appeared and, all of a sudden – bam! – vampires are real and right in front of my eyes. Blew. My. Goddamn. Mind.”

Knox had calmed down a bit and luckily his voice was now resembling more of a whisper.

“Quite understandable,” Izaya put his hands in his pockets. It seemed he could relax a little more and get more information at the same time. Just how he liked it. “So, a ghoul, huh? You seem like a regular Human; what would be the difference?”

Smiling, the ghoul explained. “Well, the way it was explained to me, whenever a vampire lets a human drink some of their vampire blood, the human gains a little vampire power, can heal up quick and that kinda stuff. Geez, oh man! It makes me feel like I’m just better at everything!”

This Knox had a way of speaking, he’d give him that.

“The guy ‘appeared’, you said. Who is he?”

“Aw man! I really wish I could tell ya, but I don’t think I’m supposed to. But it’s so cool to be talkin’ to you, just cuz I don’t get a lot of chance to talk to vampires except for my master so I just…wanted to say, ya know, what’s up, ya know?”

This ghoul might possibly be good to keep in contact with.

“I’m Izaya. You live around here?”

“In Santa Monica? Yeah, I work and do my missions here and everything.”

So, this master of Knox’s gave him missions. Just how many plots and complexities might be going on?

“Then I’m sure we’ll meet again. We can chat some more, but at the moment there is somewhere I’ll need to be shortly.”

Knox almost began shouting again. “Yeah, man, that would be awesome!”

“Then we’ll meet again another night. Take care, Knox.”

“Later, man!”
Izaya got the impression Knox wasn’t sure about how to say his name. He tended to get that a lot here. The ghoul himself left the area as well, going down the nearest alley. As for Izaya, just across the way was the building he was to go into. He was feeling confident that Mercurio had been the bleeding man. Suffice to say, whatever the situation was, it couldn’t be good. Good thing he had gotten some semblance of rest.

Inside was a short hallway containing four doors, presumably leading to different apartments. It was ornate; a lot of marble used in the decoration. Izaya needed only to follow what was a rather obvious blood trail to the right door. It was open slightly so no issues there. The front room he entered was a simple enough living room, a traditional kind of decor. The man from before was laying on the couch, more blood leaking out of him.

"Those motha’s…ripped me off. I’m dyin’ here!” His slightly long hair had begun to stick to his face which was contorted in pain. The blood had easily soaked through his collared shirt and jacket, soaking into the couch now.

"You’re Mercurio, right? Ah…any way I can help you out?” Clearly the man would need some kind of assistance.

"Uhh…yeah. You’re lookin’ for the Astrolite? I’m…oh…I can feel a draft on my fuckin’ insides! Bastards shanked me and the bloods not workin’ too fast. Ugh, I think my eye’s popped."

A ghoul, then. Made sense. Must be LaCroix’s, he did say this guy was an agent of his.

"No doctors or anything; I got a record back east. I’m heat bait,” he looked as though he were trying not to scream from the pain. “Just…if you can find something for the pain.”

"Yeah, I can do that.” Somehow. “So, what happened and what am I supposed to be doing?”

"I got…I went…uh…what the hell is this lump? Is this my rib? Oh, holy shit, my rib is pokin’ through my side?!? I’m all numb…you gotta look and tell me!"

In all fairness, it would be easy to be a bit horrified in this situation. Izaya helped him out.

"It’s a broken bottle, try not to go into shock or something.”

"Ah…right, thanks.” He seemed to relax a little bit and closed his eyes before continuing. “Goddamn chemist! Can’t trust any operators in LA. I verified him, organization seemed reliable. Guy mixes up speed, his crew sells it. Occasionally does explosives so I set up a drop.”

Izaya nodded, he saw where this was going.

"I show up at the beach with the money, right? Four of these guys, they come out of nowhere. Junkie pricks – hit me with a bat! Head feels like I got a friggin’ horse kickin’ it.” He took a breath and seemed upset with himself.

“I never shoulda gone alone…amateur move. I shoulda handled those pricks. Goddamn dirty Cali rat bastards…. beat me rotten, left me for a stiff. Had to crawl to my car, crawl my ass up here. The vamp blood’s all that’s holdin’ me together. But shit, they got the money, they got the Astrolite…”

"They down at the beach and I need to get it back from them?”

“Yeah. Those small-time sons of bitches live out in a dump there. Four or five of ‘em. The one with the explosives is Dennis. Got my money too, that prick!”

“I’ll get it and try to find the money too. How much was it?”

“It was $250. And uh, one more thing: about the deal, I mean it – you tell anyone about this, I’m dead. I’m beggin’ ya. I got a way o’ getting’ people what they need. You don’t say anything, I can help you out.”

Izaya wasn’t sure if Mercurio would actually be dead over this, but apparently, they shared similarities in what they did for a living. For him, it was information but still. He could relate to some extent, and Mercurio would likely be worthwhile of keeping in touch with. He’d really need to get himself a phone whenever he could.

“I hear you. Just get some rest.”

With that, Mercurio seemed to pass out there on the couch.

Leaving the apartment and the building, Izaya went over his options. Though getting the Astrolite seemed to be the major first step he would need in finishing all of this thus being on the urgent side, if he didn’t get it done that night it would work out fine. Apparently, these people didn’t move around, selling and operating in a stationary place. That being the case, he decided he’d try to find painkillers.

There was the pawn shop, but the clinic itself was more likely to have something. It didn’t seem to be a proper hospital but they would still have painkillers on hand for any emergency patients and such most likely. He’d try the pawn shop if this didn’t work out.

Entering the clinic, he found himself in a waiting room. A shitty one; there were a few people just standing there, as there were maybe two chairs that looked like they’d break if sat upon. There seemed to be a taped off elevator in disrepair in the corner, the walls and floors were dingy, and the nurse behind the front desk counter immediately looked at him with disdain. Great. What a place to be.

He approached the desk. “Wait your turn, and you’ll be seen.” If possible, she seemed even pissier. He nasally voice was not helpful.

Now…how best to handle this. There were a variety of things he could come up with. The only decision to make was which would be the most advantageous.

“I’m here to work on the network upstairs.”

“Nobody told me to expect any technicians.”

“You can feel free to call whoever’s in charge – I get paid by the minute so I couldn’t care less,” he smirked just slightly and shrugged in a casual way.

“Fine, whatever. Here’s the key to second floor, stairs are down the hall.”

He would be more concerned at how easy that was if the place didn’t already look like it should be in the to-be-condemned line.

“My thanks, have a lovely night, miss.” If anything, she seemed even madder.

‘An interesting amount of concealed rage.’ Then again, he didn’t want to be here any longer than he
Making his way down the hall, he saw an exit opposite of him – not needed yet. Down the hall to his left, one of the doors seemed to have a lot of activity going on behind it. Using his abilities, he saw a doctor and a couple of nurses doing what appeared to be an emergency procedure.

He crept by, and moved to the end of the hall. One door had a couple of people behind it, sitting at computers and typing away. He could just hear them from beyond the door, they seemed to be talking about insurances and authorizations, whatever that was. There was one door that caught his interest the most – a desk with a computer and a few things scattered around. No one was in it and the plate on the door said Dr. Malcom. This just might do it.

Only problem here was the door was locked. He gave it a shot, but it wasn’t budging. He would have to take his time with it. No one coming for now, but he’d have to be attentive.

After quite some time working at it, Izaya nearly had it. Just another minute, maybe. But in his concentration, he was just slightly late in noticing a guard coming from a lower level and entering the hallway through double glass doors right near him. The main problem was that his lockpick was still clearly in the door and he didn’t have anywhere to hide quickly enough. But it was then that he appeared, walking down the hallway from where Izaya had come from earlier.

As the guard walked through the glass doors, this man faced him, his back now turned to Izaya, blocking the guards view. Izaya remained crouched at the lock and could scarcely believe his luck.

‘This can’t be coincidence.’

This was confirmed when he received a signal. The man who was, it seemed, helping him, used the hand that was down at his side to discreetly wave at him as if to say ‘hurry and go’.

He couldn’t pass up such a chance. He turned back to his lockpicking as he heard the two of them talking.

“Ah, guard, I’ve been looking for some help.”

Caught unawares, the guard took a moment to catch up to the fact that some guy had suddenly gotten up in his face and was talking to him.

“Ah...yes, what is the problem?”

“Well the front desk said the blood bank downstairs is reporting some strange activity. Someone might be trying to break in down there and they’re asking for someone to watch over the area for the rest of the night.”

Not only did the man have an accent similar to Izaya’s, but he could hear it, feel it: This guy was Kindred too.

Izaya heard the lock finally click. As he eased the door open and crept through it, he chanced a look at the man helping him. He could only see him from behind, but he was fairly tall with very dark blue jeans. In contrast, the black shoes looked nicely polished. He wore a nice long sleeved shirt that was a blend of black and some red, which matched the guy’s short hair.

He closed the door and looked through it to see their shapes through it. The guard had taken the bait very easily, and went down the hallway and out of sight. This Kindred who had helped him for who knew what reasons, turned to look at the room he was in. Izaya’s Auspex was not very developed so he could only tell that the man and turned and was presumably looking this way. Whether he could
see into the room or not, Izaya did not know. Still, nodded to the man as a show of thanks. Izaya watched incredulously as the man nodded back.

He moved to open the door again and see this guy, but in doing the so, the Kindred almost ran down that same hallway that he had come from. He had gotten out of Izaya’s Auspex range before he could touch the doorknob.

So much for that. He didn’t desire to be in the guy’s debt, but he’d probably turn up again if he wanted something.

‘I could have gotten out of that mess myself, though it would have been more of a pain if not for him,’ He sighed aloud, and wondered if Kindred got headaches. ‘I’m going to have to be a lot more careful than that.’ Was his new…condition making him overconfident? He’d need to keep that in check.

He made his way to the desk to see three bottles of morphine and a syringe and needle that was wrapped up and not used. Slipping these away, he noticed the computer was on. Well, what better way to get information about anything than digging around on someone’s computer?

It was not even hard to hack, the password ended up being the name of a local sports team. Ah, now here was something a bit interesting.

You do make house calls, don’t you doctor?

A woman called Paige, apparently trying to have the doctor over at her place…and she was a nurse here on top of that. But then there was an email from a Trina. Ah…this was clearly the doctor’s wife. And in some follow up emails, the doctor did agree to go ‘see’ Paige. This could be useful later.

Regardless, he had the painkillers, now it was time to get out of there.

He headed back down the hallway, but there appeared the doctor from the operating room from before. He was headed toward his office, apparently.

“Ah, Doctor Malcom, is it?” This just might be a lucrative opportunity.

“Yes? I’m sorry sir, but you’ll need to wait your turn like everyone else. I am the only physician on call tonight and we are over capacity.” The man was in dirty scrubs, and still had a medical mask on.

“Oh, I simply wondered if you might be the doctor who plays with his nurses~? I know you are married to someone else, Sir.”

The Doctor froze. Then there was the defensiveness.

“Are you trying to blackmail me? You don’t even know who my wife is, now get lost,” Malcom practically growled out the last statement.

‘Hmph. You’d have to try much harder to intimidate me – that pales to anything comparing to Shizuo.’

“Oh? Then I’m sure Paige and Trina would love to share…medical histories. Perhaps over a lovely Sunday brunch?”

The Doctor couldn’t be more off guard. He raised his hands in a defensive way. “Now hold on…what do you want?”
“Divorce is expensive, you know. All I’m asking for is $500.”

The man grit his teeth. “Deal.” They proceeded to his office, where Malcom pulled out a wallet from a cabinet. A basically shoved the money at Izaya. “Here, now go away and there will be no words about this to anyone.”

Izaya smirked as he walked away. “But of course, Doctor, I now understand the importance of patient confidentiality quite well. Bye~”

Stepping back out onto the street, Izaya stretched a little. That had been fun, lucrative, and quite interesting. As for the Doctor, he deserved it. Back in Tokyo, Izaya had done similar things many times before. He had started to…go after those who were hurting others. A strange, Japanese Robin Hood in a way, he’d admit. But most didn’t even have a clue it was him doing it. His reputation in Tokyo took a turn in that it was more…unnoticed. He had ceased in causing trouble for people and instead endeavored to help those who needed it and impeded the ones who did hurt others.

Maybe Shizuo and Shizu-chan would be happy or even proud of him for it. Maybe he’d meet them both again someday. Maybe Shizuo was still alive somehow.

Now wasn’t the time for this. He had done his damndest to keep his past where it belonged – in the past. Even so, it was hard not to think of them. When he was able, he’d keep trying to find Shizuo. He wasn’t even sure why anymore except that he had to see him one more time.

He shook his head – it was time to get back to Mercurio.

*

That had been a close call. Of course, Izaya of all people could have handled a sticky situation like that. Even so, he couldn’t help but step in to help. This would probably be a reoccurring theme. He watched from above as Izaya blackmailed the doctor. Well if all of that was true, then Zen agreed with what what he did. Thanks to help from the Hollywood Nosferatu Mitnick, Zen eventually managed to have his own set up at home with a couple of computers and kept track of events in Ikebukuro and that included Izaya. He had been able to follow what Izaya was doing. For a time, the flea was the same as ever. But then something happened. Something that even affected Izaya to the point that he seemed to have had some kind of change in philosophy. He wished he could somehow ask him.

Over the years, it was a skill he had time to build up and learn about. In a way, it made him feel a little closer to the once-flea. Once he and Kaz obtained and took on their club, there was a little less time to follow up on news and the underground workings. But he did know whenever the flea came to the US and especially LA.

It pained him more than he’d admit to be forced to hide from the skilled tracker.

Still, times were easier before the Sabbat and the Camarilla had come into town.

~

*3 years ago*

~

“Kaz…can we really never go back to Tokyo?” Not that Zen was unhappy, per se. He was just still not so used to California or English. Granted he knew it would be hard to travel between continents but it was hard not to feel homesick.

“I’m afraid not, brother. The both of us are just…we’re too well-known, even in disguise. There’s
too much chance we’d be recognized.”

Zen knew this was true. Still, it was a pent up hope he had kept inside for a little while.

“I know. Just homesick lately and then with Izaya coming around into the country and LA now and again, I just...”.

Kaz nodded his understanding.

“On the bright side brother, your English has already improved dramatically.”

“あ～そうか？どうもな、カズ！”

Kaz smiled. “Very funny.”

“Well, it’s gotten easier the more we talk. And then talking with all the others too.”

“Well, I do tend to leave the TV and radio on just for you,” Kaz sat down at the kotatsu with Zen. “We’ll have to start with reading and writing as well though. I know they taught plenty in high school but it’s just not quite the same.

“We’ll need to go see Isaac later. Says he has some news for us.”

“Huh, we usually just drop in on him – gotta wonder what that means.”

Kaz propped himself over the kotatsu with an elbow and thought about that.

“True, the last time he said that was when he came up with your new name.”

Zen laughed, the memory still fresh in his mind. “Yeah, I still think it’s funny you told him the meaning of my old name.”

“Well both of your names are fitting, brother.”

And that wasn’t wrong; Zen had been able to live quietly here and he did feel more at peace with himself, as odd as that seemed. The chaos of Tokyo had been a part of his life and home, but despite now living as a Kindred, he felt a greater sense of belonging in general. Upon being given the name “Zen”, it felt not only suitable, but it was a clever call out to his previous name Shizuo.

~

*Present night*

~

Now that Izaya was a Kindred too, it was a strange feeling. At this rate, they’d inevitably meet again. Zen vowed he would do his damnedest not to actually interact with Izaya for a while. The Fledgling was still tight on LaCroix’s leash, after all. If the prince knew the two of them were not only interacting, but also that they were acquaintances (of a sort), it would only cause even more trouble for Izaya, to say the least. Zen was not the prince’s favorite.

Well, hopefully the stuff he’d left in Izaya’s apartment would help him. No reason it wouldn’t.

He sighed. It would be just about time to get back home. There was still some time until sunrise, but one did not take undue chances with the sun when one was Kindred.
Izaya opened the door to Mercurio’s apartment. The man was still on the couch, and didn’t seem to have awakened while he was gone.

“Hey, wake up.” No movement.

“Mercurio, I have morphine,” he poked him in the shoulder a bit. Finally, Mercurio stirred.

“Eh…?”

Izaya pulled out the bottles and syringe. He stuck one of the bottles with the needle, and pulled to fill it with the medicine.

In a quick moment, he injected it into Mercurio’s upper arm. He left the syringe and the other bottles on the side table.

“Ah…Christ, I needed that.”

True enough, the ghoul’s body was already far less tense.

“I’ll be going for the Astrolite tomorrow night. From what I can tell, it’s already getting toward sunrise.” Mercurio’s watch indicated it was getting close to 5 in the morning. From what Izaya knew, sunrise wasn’t very far off at this latitude and for this time of year.

“Yeah, that should be fine. Just do it first thing, yeah?”

“Agreed, I don’t take the prince to be a patient type.”

Mercurio actually chuckled a little at that.

“Well, you just come back here after you get it, alright?”

Izaya nodded, and waved to him as he left. Mercurio went straight back to sleep.

There was a change to the environment in between Mercurio’s apartment building and his own. There was a car that seemed to have rammed into a couple of the palm trees that stood tall out of the grass. Nearby stood a man who was dressed impeccably, looking impatient.

Izaya was getting a bit hungry. This could be a chance. At the very least, he should try this out.

He sauntered up to the Kine.

“Excuse me, sir. Are you alright?”

The man took in Izaya’s appearance and seemed to relax. Apparently, Izaya seemed safe to him. Ha.

“I’m waiting for that blasted tow truck, should have been here an hour ago. I don’t exactly desire to be out in area of town this time of night.”

Izaya tilted his head, smiling. “Oh, I fully understand. Such undesirable characters running around here, wouldn’t you say?” He slowly got just a little closer to the Kine.

“Exactly! I should have listened to my mechanic, ‘Buy German,’ he said.”

Izaya put his fingers under his own chin, crossing his arms in a show of thinking about something. Slowly, he traced his fingers over his own lips just slightly.
He lowered his voice to a whisper. “You know…since we have some time…perhaps you wouldn’t be adverse if I assisted you with your own…engine,” he poked his tongue out just slightly. “What do you say?”

At first, the human was struck silent. However, his eyes soon glazed over. “I…I suddenly have this urge to go down that dark, foreboding alley over there. Care to join me?”

“Oh…no need to go that far.”

Izaya raised a hand to the man’s face, who seemed to have gone into a sort of trance. He brought his face to man’s neck, and fed. To all appearances, it would simply look like an extreme public display of affection…sort of. Point being, no one could tell what he was really doing even if they were looking.

Once he finished, the Kine stood there, his head dropped forward as he slept while standing.

Now that had been good. The guy seemed a little odd, but he was clearly a well-raised ‘juicebag’. All the better. Perhaps this would help him sleep better that day.

He entered his building, and upon going inside his own apartment, he was rendered shocked. Someone had been in the apartment. Granted, it wasn’t exactly high security so that fact on its own wouldn’t be too terribly shocking.

The real surprise was that someone had changed several things.

On the windows were not only improved blinds, and sunlight blinders were pulled down behind them. Over top were heavy black curtains.

Looking over to his bed, it had been changed completely. Even the frame was different. It was not extravagant, but it was a basic full-sized frame with two new mattresses on it which would work nicely. Covered in black sheets and a comforter, he could see that there was a nice new black pillow as well. What caught his eye the most was a note and a knife on the bed.

The knife was somewhat large, and functioned like a switch blade. It looked eerily similar to the ones he’d always had before. It fit well in his hand. Like an old friend, he felt comforted.

He picked up the note.

This should come in handy for you. Keep it, it’s yours.

Your place left some things to be desired. Hope you don’t mind, but I took the liberty of…adjusting some things in your stead.

I imagine this will help you out in your endeavors.

Good luck, and I am certain we’ll meet in the not-so-distant future.

Take care,

Z

Now just who might this be? Truth be told, Izaya was both relieved and grateful for the fact that he could sleep in a proper bed without worrying about the sun, and he had a very familiar and useful weapon again.

It had only been a couple of days since his Embrace. He had hardly done anything but things were
already taking a turn for the interesting.

As he got into the bed and began to fall asleep, he wished in his own mind that he wouldn’t have yet another dream that night. It only brought back unnecessary feelings.

It was not to be so.

~

Izaya had concluded his meeting with three men who were after some proper explosives almost a month ago. Now he was starting to wonder if they were actually going to go ahead with their plot or not. Perhaps it was just taking them a while to realize the rest of their plans.

Izaya waited in his usual park. It had been a few days since he had last seen Shizu-chan. Dare he say it, he missed the kid.

Last they spoke, she had been on her bike, in the middle of deliveries. She had taken to volunteering with an organization that would deliver meals to the elderly and disabled. She had met many people in that time it seemed, and had gained some more confidence. It was true that some humans were interesting to talk to.

But seeing the girl so happy had made him happy too. Still, Izaya did wonder about her motivations. She had explained it to him. Apparently, her Grandmother had passed not long ago.

“After Grandma died, Mom told me that a lot of things had been hard for her. She said she couldn’t really cook anymore and sometimes it was hard for her to move. When I told my teacher about it, she told me about this group of people who help people like my Grandma.”

Izaya had countered with one of his philosophical ideals of his. What was the point of doing such a thing? Typical, normal humans didn’t contribute anything ultimately worthwhile to the world. Not unless they could ascend to God status as he would. What else could matter?

Shizu-chan just smiled at him.

“They told us in science class that someday, the sun will grow big enough to swallow up Earth. Some kids got really sad to hear that. I did too. But our teacher, she told us that even though that will happen in a very very very long time, we are still here now, so we should find the things that we live for. We should find our own way.”

Izaya raised a brow. An interesting approach, but for once, he didn’t see the connection.

“Then…what did you think?”

“I think it doesn’t matter what’s going to happen someday. The only thing that lasts are how we affect other people and the planet. You can tell how people are feeling without talking to them sometimes. I think the best thing we can do to make something last is to help people and make them happy. If we do that, those good feelings stick around. I think that maybe, even after Earth is gone, that feeling might stay in the universe. And if it does, it can only help even after everything is gone. So, since we are here, I think that’s what we should do as much as we can while we live.”

How did she do it? This young girl managed to floor him every now and then. This was no exception. He knew she was top of her class, that she read books like they were going out of style, that the two of them talked about all kinds of subject matter, including deeper ideas like this. Even so, he couldn’t help but laugh at the feeling it brought him.
“Maybe you can help people more someday too, Iza-san. I know you’re really a good person.”

He smiled at her.

“This is why you’re top of your class, Shizu-chan,” he patted her on the head. He felt that familiar surge of pride when talked to her. “Your parents are very lucky to have a good kid like you.”

She had hugged him that day.

It had been some time since then, and now it was a few days since he’d last seen her. It wasn’t unheard of, but it was rare for them to go this long without meeting.

Where was she?

A couple of hours later came an incredible explosion from a district in the distance, but it was big enough to feel even from there.

Could it be?

~

Izaya woke suddenly, a gasp escaping him. His body had seized up as if under a great deal of stress. He calmed himself down and his body relaxed again. He put his hands over his face, only to pull them away and look at them.

Apparently, he could still cry.

~

Jyhad:

The civilization of the undead is a manipulative and poisonous dance, and few vampires are left entirely untouched. Since the nights of antiquity, the Kindred have struggled for supremacy, in an ancient and many-layered struggle known as the Jyhad. Leaders, cultures, nations and armies have all been pawns in the secret war, and vampiric conspiracies have influenced much of human history.

Chapter End Notes

"Ah~ is that so? Thanks, Kaz!"

Thanks again for reading! We have looong way to go. Still, thanks for the support! Happy New Year!
Chapter Summary

A bloody beach house and a soaked monster.

Chapter Notes

Just so it's out there, I am not a clinician.

A quote from the light novel 13 is used.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was a funny thing, needing to wait on the sun to go outside. The sun set late in the day so 7pm was too early. He had no phone yet, nor could he do much on the provided laptop. All Izaya could do was stare at his new knife while he let the radio play in the background. Of course, that wasn’t even close to being enough to distract his mind from contemplation and reflection.

‘Shizu-chan.’

~

*4 years ago*

~

On that day, Izaya had returned home and plugged into his virtual playground. He went on chats and reviewed files on clients. He would see her tomorrow, surely. Shizu-chan had probably gotten herself quite busy these days; it was a certainly a good thing for her.

By the time that night had grown late, reports from various sources poured into media outlets.

Nothing was surprising about it, really. In fact, he already knew what it was – he had been a part of the reason this event had occurred. Furukawa Central Hospital was located right on the edge of the Minato District within Tokyo. It wasn’t a huge hospital but still big enough to have full functioning facilities. The three clients he’d gained were furious for their own individual reasons with a few doctors at the hospital. Apparently, they claimed malpractice but nothing went through. Over the years, each of them became more and more distraught over what had happened to them and now resorted to desperate measures. The three doctors they were after still worked at that hospital. The men indicated that they didn’t care that others would obviously be in the hospital too – they felt so hurt that if anything, that’s what they wanted as well.

They went to Izaya to find out where they could get explosives to get the job done. Then, after acquiring them, they only needed to know when all three would be working. Not only were these doctors on-call, but they did have scheduled 12-hour shifts as well. Finding out when all three would be working was simple…for Izaya. There were several days and times over the next few months following their final meeting that they could choose from. Today had been one of those days.
It was not until the next morning that he got a horrifying feeling…that he quickly shoved away.

Izaya was a human like any other. If anything, he was, in all actuality, more human and his heart more prone to fragility than anyone else. His love for humanity, most everything he did was to avoid that fact. Complete avoidance, and he was fine.

But that night after he didn’t see Shizu-chan yet again, he looked into it. Knowing her name and which school she attended made it quite easy to gain more information on her. She was a human he hadn’t previously dug for information himself on. He had been content not to, interestingly. Now, he had to see if there was something to find.

And there was. And as his buried thoughts and feelings on the matter had tried to warn him, it had to do with the blown-up hospital. An event that still had officials unable to find any suspects. An event which had shaken the nearby area and was easily seen, heard, or felt, from good distances away. An event which had people fearing mass attacks. An event which had killed an estimated number of no less than 1,200 people. An event that had resulted in confirmed victims including the three doctors. An event that confirmed the death of Shizuka Sanada and her Mother.

An event that, without Izaya, would not have occurred.

He had allowed himself to feel human, as he was. He had gained a kind of happiness, being able to see and talk with Shizu-chan. And then, unknowingly, he had annihilated it. If there was someone who should have lived forever, it was her. If there was someone who deserved and should have risen to status of a God, it was her.

But now, that was impossible. And it was his fault.

He had broken himself completely. He saw no possibility of repairing his mind or his heart.

Days later, Izaya would discover that Shizu-chan had been in the hospital for longer than he had originally thought. According to her patient files, the medical history report indicated that she was sick at home for a few days before the mother felt the fever had persisted for too long, so they went through the ER and Shizu-chan was admitted. It seemed the event had occurred before any official diagnosis was put into the file.

For weeks, Izaya didn’t work. He pushed Namie away, and did not answer any calls at all. Eventually, Shiki himself got into his apartment. When he saw Izaya laying on the floor of his bathroom, not really seeing much of anything, he forced Izaya to eat, bathe, and sit on the couch properly. After a few hours, Izaya explained the whole situation. Shiki allowed him more time, but told him in no uncertain terms that he was to return to work within a specified time frame. Even so, he acknowledged that he’d have to restrict certain jobs. It wouldn’t be much, though. Izaya’s personal clients and work had been darker. Izaya would end up giving up most of those clients and any future plans he had worked out entirely.

Shinra would tell him later that this was a logically inevitable thing, though he had personally thought that this would take years and years more.

Over the next several months, Izaya stuck to his work with the Awakusu-kai exclusively and couldn’t bring himself to do much else. But over time, his retained contacts and information became used for other purposes. He found the three men responsible for the hospital easily enough. He dug up and sent evidence to the authorities. He had considered previously doing this and even giving himself up as well. In the end, he couldn’t. There were various reasons, but chief among them was that he’d never find Shizuo. Another reason came about later – he wouldn’t be able to help anyone.
He remembered the many things Shizu-chan had talked about, the things she told him.

He knew he had the ability to change lives. He had been doing this for years. He had the capabilities to change numerous things. Now, he resolved that he would use these skills of his as Shizu-chan would have wanted. As time went on like this, he began to feel a sense of purpose for it himself. He was certainly not the man he was before. Was he a completely different person? Surely not. But there was much that had changed within him. Essentially, he used his people and information to ensure those who were deserving received their proper punishment. He’d make sure criminals were caught, that those responsible to heinous deeds were brought justice of a sort. And those who needed help, victims without restitution were brought fortune and whatever help he could bring to them.

He had anonymously assisted Shizu-chan’s Father with whatever he ended up needing. Even drug-rehabilitation when he could not recover from the deaths of his family.

News and gossip spread across the internet and on the streets of Tokyo about his deeds. No one knew it was him, save for a select few such as Shiki, Namie, and Shinra. Still, it was amusing to see what people had to say about what he was doing now. The overall presumption said that there was someone being a modern-day superhero who could somehow catch criminals and help people without being seen. Theories of an invisible snake even began to rise. The invisibility part, he could understand. The snake part made zero sense to him. There were even those who thought it was somehow the workings of Shizuo Heiwajima, back from the dead as a ghost. This one was both amusing and depressing. Namie seemed able to…tolerate him much more compared to before. They still didn’t exactly talk, but the working relationship had markedly improved.

Over time, some did begin to suspect him, he noticed. In this instance, he did nothing to help or hinder the rumor. Ultimately, he cared less and less about people finding out. He focused on this work of his own, his work for Awakusu-kai and to find Shizuo and Kasuka.

Life had improved for him. But there were some things missing.

~

*Present Night*

~

Finally, the sun had gone down and Izaya put his knife into his pocket. No more indulging in the past. He had come to terms with what had happened the best he could. Now if the dreams would be less frequent at the very least, that would be much preferred.

The radio was in the middle of advertising a movie. Apparently, it would have amazing cgi sequences, the hero in battles featuring explosions, the sidekick dying, and the hero getting the girl. How did these people keep making money on the very same thing recycled over and over…? He turned it off before it could get too far into advertising a dish detergent.

It was time to hit the beach.

~

Beyond Mercurio’s apartment eventually came the end of Main Street. To the left there was covered parking that connected to 2nd street. This was also the access point to the beach, however. Bus stop signs had a map of the general area, which was more helpful than he’d thought it’d be. He followed the signs. There was a stairwell in one of the corners of the parking area. Next to it was another entrance that seemed to go to the pier. However, it was gated off. Two officers stood on the other side, talking. From what he could gather, it seemed to involve the Southland Slasher serial murder case.
“-The kinda thing that makes you lose faith in humanity.”

“I’d have to say it’s the second-worst thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Poor bastard was torn in two! The hell’d you see that was worse?”

“It was a few years ago, up in Malibu. Found a guy on the beach, looked like…an animal attack.”

“What, a shark bite?”

“No, no. I’ve seen shark bites, this was something different – it was like… it was like whatever killed him knew what it was doing; the head was missing… the hands were missing…”

“And there were these huge slashes, but- “

“Bullshit!”

“No, no this guy was literally slashed to ribbons, and the worst part was while I was waiting for the heat wagon, I swore I could feel something watching me. I’d swear on my badge today that there had been something just out of sight. It made me think for a second about running back to my car and hiding in it. To this day, I wonder what’s really out there…”

“Ha! Maybe it was a werewolf – Whooooo~”

“Alright, alright!”

“Or a vampire – booooh!”

“Forget it! See, this is why you didn’t get invited to Hernandez’s wedding, Ted!”

Izaya smirked to himself as he walked silently past the area and headed down the stairs that said ‘Beach Access’. It was amusing, really. It was all too recently that he would have never believed the one cop’s story, let alone anything that had happened to him in the last few days. In fact, he never would have guessed any supernatural circumstances behind the Southland Slasher. Now, it was obvious the work of Kindred or if not, something else like them.

Continuing onward, he went down the stairs which led to a man-made tunnel made of stone. It was easy to see the beach at the other end of it, where there were a few people gathered around a bonfire. One of them ran up to him quickly. For a second, he braced for a fight. Instead, the dark-skinned woman pointed upward and to her left.

“Up there. Through that chain link gate and up those stairs,” she was pointing at wooden stairs that towered up the side of a rocky cliff. A fence surrounded the bottom of it.

“Well, this was quite sudden.

“What?”

“Those men you’re looking for."

She looked to be any normal Kindred as far as he could tell. As were the other three near the fire. Was she following his movements somehow?

“How did you know about that?”

“Never mind it. You would not understand.”
Well what the hell else was new. Weird things he didn’t understand.

“Well…thanks.”

She quickly returned to the bonfire.

Beyond them was the shoreline. The ocean’s tide was decently high and it wasn’t very far from them. Into the dark sky could be seen what looked like a ship. The lights could be seen illuminating the shape. It was raining again tonight and lightning could be seen on the horizon as well. This was probably the news about that Elizabeth Dane. This could wait, however.

It might be worth talking with the others around the fire, but for now, there was a job to be done.

Heading up the stairs, he came out onto the top of the ledge. There wasn’t a lot up there. Seemed to be just a small house – likely just a beach house with few rooms. It did have, interestingly, a white picket fence surrounding it, and beach towels hanging on the porch. At the gate, a man with no shirt was standing under a lit streetlight. It seemed weirdly out of place but so did everything anymore.

He seemed to be the…receptionist of sorts. Well, why not try the direct approach.

Izaya made no effort to hide himself as he approached the house and the man.

“Help ya?”

“My good man, I have traveled far to purchase the you-know-what from you-know-who,” Izaya clasped his hands together and winked at the guy.

The man paused before responding, almost annoyed. “Why do I get the weirdos…alright go ahead. If you really wanna make my night, go and start some shit in there, cuz I would love it.”

Smiling, Izaya responded with glee. “I would be remiss not to consider such a kind request.”

As he passed the man and entered the house it was easy enough to hear the guy continue mumbling about freaks. Behave in unexpected ways with certain types of people, and it can be easy to get what you want.

The entire house was a bit of a wreck. Crappy furniture, moldy carpet, and grungy walls.

‘It’s almost as bad as my apartment.’

There were a couple of guys scattered around the various rooms. One playing a video game, another couple laying cards in the kitchen. The bathroom and back rooms were empty. What was weird was that these people didn’t seem to give a damn that he had simply waltzed right in and was going through pretty much every room in the house. Who would structure an operation like this? Maybe they had some way of monitoring people this way. Regardless, once he reached the laundry room, he saw through the opposite door three men standing in there. This was probably what he wanted. But first…there was a suspiciously large air vent on the floor that was open. If that didn’t scream to be investigated, he didn’t know what would.

He only needed to crawl a little bit to see that the vent had a large space behind it, and there, wouldn’t you know, was a box which contained exactly $250.

‘It’s like they’re begging for people to take their stuff…this should be easy.’

Socking away the money, Izaya stood back up, and pasted his trademark smirk onto his face; ready
Opening the door, the three men looked at him. Two were in hoodies like several of the others. Then there was the man in a white suit, wearing gaudy gold jewelry and looking far too confident.

‘I’ll just have to fix that.’

The man scowled, a clear intimidation attempted.

“Uh-huh…yeah, you look real good at me. Before we do bu’ness – before anything changes hands – I want you to hear this: If you try to cross me, I will fuck you. If you tell the cops about me, I will find you, then I will fuck you. And if you are a cop…I will fuck you and your whole family, includin’ that squirrel in your front yard,” crossing his arms, Dennis paused as lightning flashed through the window behind him.

“Now that we know the terms, what can I do to make you walk out feeling like the world is your own bucket of fudge ripple with walnuts?”

It would be simple enough to take him and the others down through fighting or violence. Izaya was perfectly willing to do this, he just preferred other methods. In this particular case, he was dealing with a normal human. Izaya knew he was normal because he knew who this man was. You didn’t get involved in any sort of shady dealings in a city where Izaya worked at any point in time and not fall onto his radar. The Awakusu-kai, thanks to him, had all the information needed on ‘Dennis’.

“I’m after something quite specific, if you please. Astrolite.”

Izaya’s saccharine smile did not seem to amuse Dennis.

“Ain’t that a goddamn coincidence? You know you da second person to ask for that tonight? Considerin’ it ain’t a popular item, I have really got to wonder why you thought I might have some,” the frown was back but the man would soon have more to worry about.

Izaya’s smile only grew. This man did not know who he was dealing with.

“That’s the thing about business, you know. Your business has been running this little drug cartel,” Izaya gestured toward himself. “Mine, on the other hand, is information, you see.”

“Is that a fact, Jack?” Dennis wasn’t looking particularly impressed nor threatened.

“Certainly. In fact, I’d suggest we have a nice, private discussion on the matter. I’m well aware of the fact that your…associates are not familiar with Victor,” his eyes narrowed as he watched the blood drain out of the man’s face.

“Why don’t we have a nice chat regarding Victor, yes? Things will go far more smoothly for you.”

Dennis swallowed harshly and looked at the two others in the room. “Yo, go check my odometer,” at their hesitation, he nearly shouted.

“Move.” It didn’t take them long.

“Now how the fuck do you know about that?”

Izaya took on a more relaxed and casual stance. He spoke in an almost monotone voice as he rattled off his information.

“Harland Victor. Now goes by the name of Dennis Caro. Five foot, ten inches. Born in 1972 in
South Carolina, to a loving couple. Sibling to a younger sister. Shoe size 13, allergic to shellfish. Prefers smooth jazz over any other genre of music, and hates dogs. An above average student in school, he graduated before committing grand larceny at age 20. Bailed out several times from an on again, off again girlfriend, he only added to his list of crimes as time went on. Vandalism, fraud, possession and distribution of drugs and arms, arrested multiple times on these charges and more including running illegal animal fighting rings. Worst of all, however, were the charges of child pornography, arson, one count of involuntary manslaughter, and two counts of first degree murder.”

‘Dennis’ had backed up against the wall. The Astrolite was just next to him on a table.

“After your conviction for the murder of your family, you escaped right after your arraignment. Good show, very clever. You fled here to California and found yourself some new business. Your higher ups and partners don’t know your identity,” He took a few steps forward and pulled out his knife, a dark look on his face. “But you aren’t good enough to hide who you are from me.”

Harland clenched his teeth, and hissed out his question. “Who are you?” He would regret that question as he could have sworn he saw glowing red eyes for just a moment.

“I am the information broker for the Awakusu-kai, a yakuza group that has gained much territory and influence. Perhaps you’ve heard of us? I am one of the famed monsters of Tokyo, Izaya Orihara… and I ensure that humans like yourself get just what they…deserve.”

He pointed his knife straight at Harland’s face, his own lacking any emotional expression.

“H-hey look, whatever you want, you can have it! Yeah? We can be cool – whatever you say, s’long as you don’t tell anyone, anything goes, ok? W-we got a deal?” He attempted a shaky smile.

Izaya lowered his knife, and smiled at the now terrified man. He ran his other hand through his hair, as if tired.

“Well, I suppose we can work out a deal. Two things.”

Harland nodded as fast as possible in agreement.

“First, I’ll be taking this,” he picked up the containers of Astrolite. “Second,” he got in close to Harland, putting his face right up to the now shaking man’s neck.

“I’ll require your absolute, guaranteed silence.”

The knife entered his back, just next the spine and above the pelvic region. Izaya cut upward along the spine, succeeding in inducing severe nerve damage, puncturing a kidney, and piercing the diaphragm. Harland didn’t get the chance to scream. The pain would be excruciating but it would be increasingly difficult to breathe or move at all. He was liable to die via suffocation or perhaps even septic shock at this point.

Izaya backed up and Harland fell forward from the wall. Izaya caught him, and lowered him slowly so his body wouldn’t make a sound.

The man was still conscious, though it was starting to go. Izaya waited until the man was clearly on his way out. He had time. He would twitch slightly now and again, but didn’t make sound. His eyes would look around wildly most of the time. Eventually, he settled down, the lack of oxygen clearly overcoming him.

“You know… I did consider just draining you dry. I can tell your blood is on the better end of quality,” Harland managed to look at him. Izaya smiled to show his fangs, and ran his tongue over
them. “But I’m afraid you’re just a little too putrid for my liking. You don’t deserve it, anyway.”

If possible, the human on the floor seemed even more terror stricken. Ah, and there was the loss of bowel control.

“Oh, and the Awakusu-kai does of course know who you are. No idea if they’ll do anything with it…since you’re about dead it’s not likely they’ll use it. But I just thought I’d let the last portion of your working mind know,” Izaya sighed, and stretched a bit. He was starting to feel a little tired. “Well, not that it hasn’t been fun, but I’m rather busy enjoying my afterlife. I do hope you enjoy yours.”

He gave a little wave, and left the room. The other men were still in their previous spots despite a good amount of time passing. He saw the shirtless man and the two others from the room that Harland was in out front, talking. He decided to hop the fence and make his way through the shadows down the stairs along the Cliffside, avoiding their view easily. Back through the gate, the four kindred from earlier were standing around the bonfire still. He decided to have a seat next to them.

That beach house. What he did was not too much a stretch of the imagination that his old self would do. Then and now, he preferred to be in the background, pulling strings. Now being forced onto the front lines, was this an expression of the Beast that Jack had mentioned? Was this something of his own, pent up, trying to be released?

That man’s past, Harland’s – Izaya wasn’t lying. That was all true. He’d set his parent’s home on fire, intending to kill them for money. So often it was money. He was unaware his sister had been visiting them as well and she was also killed. But the man couldn’t even face what he did properly and ran. Once upon a time, Izaya might have even been that kind of coward. But not anymore. Despite the brutality, Izaya felt the punishment was deserved. Then again, it certainly wasn’t helpful in maintaining his Humanity. Here might just be another thing to shove out of his mind. This night had been a rough one for him. Perhaps he’d make it an early night.

Still, now might be the time to talk with some other Kindred first. He had learned the hard way that keeping away from others only made him worse. The one that looked the least nervous or scared in general was standing by the shoreline, his red hair and blue eyes stood out. As Izaya approached, the guy turned around and spoke.

“Listen, it’s like I’ve told you types ‘bout a thousand times now – we know we can’t hunt ‘round here, alright? We’re minding our own business, no reason to hassle the weaklings.”

So, they’d been harassed by other Kindred? He couldn’t sense anything wrong with them – what was the mystery of them being singled out?

“Well I’m perfectly fine with that. Mind if I hang around here a little while?”

“You mean you ain’t here to run us off?” the Kindred asked a bit softly. He seemed to be from Australia, from what Izaya could gather.

Izaya shook his head. “No, but from the sounds of it, that’s a common occurrence for you. What’s going on?”

“We’re getting pretty sick of it. Someone citing domain or in the worse cases, hunting us for sport.”

“Seems off. Any idea as to why?” If he could help this group out, it just might help him out too. Besides, their existence as Kindred already felt like a bit of a naturally lonesome one. This wouldn’t
“Don’t know. We all seem to have come down with the same disease – ah, hell, who am I kiddin’, we’re a bad horror show, alright? And we seem to be the runts – the mistakes. You types call us thin-bloods…I say we’re all equally screwed.”

“That’s a new one for me…I’m fairly fresh off the boat myself, so to speak. What’s a thin-blood?”

“Damned if I know,” he let out a self-deprecating laugh. “I know you don’t want to be one. You seem to be in the loop – you tell me.”

Izaya thought for a moment. “First, what happened to you?”

“I’d just came to town for the surf tourney – feels like years ago, but it’s been maybe six months now. Every night during the finals, I used to hit the local diner after the beach parties fizzled out in the A.M. That’s where I met her.”

Izaya nodded for him to continue.

“She had a natural beauty, not like all the plastic dolls littering the sand. Her name was Lily. I remember introducing meself – the way she seemed grateful for the company. Well, a few nights after our meeting, we were on the beach alone and…”

He paused, and his expression changed to pure sadness.

“She tried to tell me what she was, but I didn’t understand. And so, she showed me. I was furious with her when I took it all in. I cursed her and left, never really knowing what I was. I realize now how she must’ve felt. So, here I am, now, a mystery to meself.”

“Is Lily…dead?” Izaya steeled himself, that may not have been the best question, but it was important.

Pain was evident in his response. “Well…clinically, yes. But honestly, I don’t know. I suppose I’d have moved on by now if I didn’t think she’d show up one of these nights. There’s a lot I’ve got left to say to her.”

“And the others – they’re thin-bloods too?”

“Aye. Most of them just recently arrived in LA. Got chased off by the Sabbath or some such thing from their home cities. They’re more in the dark than I am. They’re a good bunch, but…well they’ve been through a lot. It’s affected them.”

“You do know you’re vampires, right?”

“That’s what Lily tried to tell me. But what I don’t understand are the rules and the terms and the reason some of ‘em are at our throats claiming we’re harbingers of the apocalypse – that’s what I want to know.”

Izaya crossed his arms. “Tell you what – I’ll look into this thin-blood thing for you.”

“Hope you have better luck than I did. No one’s been particularly friendly to me in this city. Only reason we’re in Santa Monica’s cuz we haven’t been chased out yet.”

“Well, in my previous life, information was a specialty of mine.”

“Oh, we’d appreciate it. Oh, ‘fore I forget, name’s E. The black-haired beauty is Rosa – sees the
future, so she says. The nervous bloke is Copper, and the one who can’t speak so well’s Julius. Kids’
gloves with them; they’re still in a bit of a state.”

“Alright, I’ll start digging around tomorrow, then.”

“Well, it sure seemed like no one would talk about it…you could try at the diner, this all started there
for me. Might help.”

“Will do,” he held out his hand for a handshake. Afterwards, E took a seat by the fire.

It was about time to get back to Mercurio. He was starting to feel hungry but maybe it could wait
until the next night. He really was getting tired.

He was grateful when he saw Mercurio looking tired, but more healed up than before. He
congratulated him on getting the Astrolite, and they agreed that the both of them should rest. Izaya
would come again the next night for further information on this mission.

He didn’t know that upon making it back up into his apartment there would be a blood pack just
lying there on his bed all too conveniently. He could not have known he’d dream of the Kindred
who had helped him the night previous.

~

Zen smoked one of his preferred cigarettes on the pier. It was a long shot from where the body had
been found, and close enough to the stairs that led to the beach where Izaya was right now. There
was no reason that even the flea would notice him.

“Stupid flea…couldn’t even feed himself properly as a Kine.”

He knew what happened at the beach house. He knew part of that had been the Beast welling up
inside the Fledgling, but he also knew that Izaya had truly been infuriated by the Kine.

Zen had been able to keep tabs on Izaya even from abroad. Making friends with the Nosferatu had a
lot of perks. At first, he was surprised by Izaya’s change in behavior, but not for too long. It took a
while, but he managed to gather that the hospital explosion was at the center of it. He still wasn’t
entirely sure why, but it’s not as though he didn’t have a lot of time to find out.

Still, one of the last times he’d seen Shinra before his departure from Japan, he’d asked him what he
knew about the real Izaya. He’d caught him completely off guard with the question, but it was not
random like the doctor was thinking. Eventually, Shinra told him something quite interesting that did
seem to line up with what he’d observed.

"He may seem cold-blooded, but he is more human, and his heart more brittle than anybody else,
so much so that if you filled it with human love or betrayal, it would break easily, which is why, I
think, he chose from the start to avoid it all, to love humanity, you understand? Not to accept, not to
face it, to avoid it."

That was what Shinra had told him. Something or maybe someone must’ve overwhelmed that side of
him. It must’ve broken him before he put himself back together in some semblance.

As time passed as Zen, he kept track to see how is friends were doing back in Tokyo. Izaya more
than the others. Though there were no outright reports on the many positive impacts that were
occurring within the city – especially Ikebukuro and to its citizens, Zen managed to line up the pieces
and figure out the reason, or person, really, behind it.
Izaya was behind the capture of a good number of criminals. He had provided aid to various organizations in the name of assisting the less fortunate including the homeless, elderly, and disabled. He destroyed corrupt groups, and revealed plots conducted by big names for nefarious deeds. He had even shut down an orphanage – the true purpose of it was human trafficking of children. He seemed especially inclined toward the rescue and helping of children and animals.

It had made Zen happy. He wished so much he could even just contact Izaya just to tell him that. He knew how much effort in between his work and projects that Izaya still put into looking for him. That might’ve been the most painful thing about it.

He knew by that time how deep in he actually was. He should have known from that day. It was during that final month he spent in Japan.

~

*Six years ago*
~

Izaya had been hanging around him more and more often. Shizuo figured he was probably trying to figure him out. Not in the open, but in the area where Shizuo was. It was characteristic of the flea, Shizuo was acting very different from how he used to so if he was being watched by the info broker, it made some amount of sense. Still, before he left, he wanted to talk to Izaya himself, just one more time. He was affording this to everyone else he knew, and it was true that he had known Izaya a long time…relatively speaking. Even if it all went straight to hell, he’d regret not talking to him one more time – for closure’s sake anyway. Besides, it was true that he was trying to look for Kasuka. Shizuo still didn’t know why, but…it meant something to him somehow.

So today, he went out of his way to find the flea himself. He was always able to do this pretty easily. Well, he never used it to find Izaya, it was just easy to tell when he was around. Today he had been hanging around the edge of Ikebukuro, just walking down the street. Luckily, he found him when he did; it was starting to rain. It was unexpected, as far as Shizuo knew it wasn’t supposed to that day. Many other people had thought the same, it would seem. They were running quickly, looking for shelter, while others had one with them and picked up their pace to get somewhere else faster.

As for the flea, he pulled the fur-lined hood of his coat over his head and just kept walking. Shizuo was slowly getting soaked but it didn’t really bother him. Now he had catch up to Izaya without him running away. Maybe he should’ve thought this through a little more. Shizuo grimaced, this would probably be harder than he thought.

His thoughts were cut short as Izaya stopped dead in his tracks. He was next to an alleyway, and he turned toward it. Shizuo hid himself behind a shop’s sign the best he could which was actually rather decently well. Izaya had bent down at the mouth of the alley, and straightened back up, holding, of all things…a black cat. Shizuo could only just hear him talking aloud.

“Well…what are you doing out here? Did some awful human just leave you?”

Of course, the cat didn’t respond. Shizuo was similarly speechless. Izaya brought the cat to his chest, cuddling with it.

“You’re all wet, little guy…don’t worry.” The cat mewed. “Yep, don’t worry, we’ll get you warm and fed, and then we’ll get you a nice home. I know a lot of people, after all~” a smile entered his voice. Shizuo could see Izaya’s face around his hood just enough to see it.

He was smiling. The flea had a real smile on his face and he was gently cuddling a stray cat that he had picked up off the street. He was talking to the unfortunate animal in a voice Shizuo had never
heard before. It was affectionate, caring…warm. Who was this really?

He watched as Izaya bought cat food and treats from a local grocer, as he made his way back to Shinjuku, still cuddling the cat in his coat now. Apparently, the cat was getting cold, so said the flea. He listened as Izaya made various phone calls, and waited for others. He listened to the happiness in his voice when he’d found someone to take the cat. He saw as Izaya went inside of his building with the cat, telling him about the owner he would be meeting tomorrow.

Shizuo, in his soaked state, stood there outside of the building for a long time. As it got dark, he finally turned around and went home. He’d see the flea…Izaya one more time before leaving. He would. He’d need to talk to Shinra too, and soon.

~
*Present Night*
~

Zen sighed. He dropped cigarette onto the wooden pier boardwalk, and stomped it out. At the moment, Izaya was still talking with a Kindred on the beach. He’d have to get moving if he wanted to leave the blood pack at Izaya’s place before heading home himself.

‘I should have known back then. How did I not see it? And it’s gotten worse over time.

But then, it was such an unthinkable thing. How was he to know he’d fallen? How should he have known how hard he fell for his once enemy, the one who had pissed him off so much? Who did and had done horrible things? To him, specifically?

It didn’t make sense, really. Kaz told him love rarely did. Especially for their kind. Technically, he supposed, his love had transcended death.

‘Fuck, I’ve got it bad…’.

Kaz did warn him against watching Izaya’s activities from abroad, but it just…he had to. He probably knew his feelings might become unbearable.

Somehow, it was decided the two of them would be able to be a part of the same world again. That they could meet.

He felt like ramming his head against a wall, as much good as it would do. The problem was, there was no way Izaya would return the feelings. What had already taken place in his own heart made no damn sense; the likelihood of requited feelings was ridiculously slim. Perhaps he’d tell him at some point. It had already taken him a few years to figure it out himself. He had time. They would have time, hopefully.

The Monster and his Flea.

Zen smiled as he got back to his place.

It sounded perfect.
Gehenna:

Gehenna, so the Kindred say, will presage the end of the world, as vampires and mortals alike are consumed in an inexorable tide of blood. Some Kindred believe that a Reckoning is at hand, that the powers of Heaven are preparing at last to judge the vampires and what they have made of the world. Others speak of the Winnowing, or Gehenna, the night when the most ancient vampires will rise to consume their progeny, taking their lessers’ cursed blood to sate their own hunger.

~

Generations:

A generation describes how far removed is a Kindred from Caine. Caine, as the first vampire, is the first generation, the original vampire. As he sired Enoch, Irad and Zilah, they became the second generation and so on. Every Childe is one generation higher than his/her Sire. There have been a total of 15 generations of vampires, with the 14th and 15th being considered cursed, almost all of them being Thin Bloods.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading~ your comments are always so appreciated, thank you!

Onward~
Izaya woke feeling rather refreshed on this new night, all things considered. He’d stowed away the Astrolite in a cupboard in the kitchen. If he needed it right away for whatever his next task was, he could retrieve it easily after speaking with Mercurio. The radio didn’t offer any updated news, though there was a bizarre ad playing about margarine. Just who was approving these things anyway?

The blood trail outside and inside of Mercurio’s building had been cleaned up at least. The man himself was now sitting up on his sofa. The unfortunate piece of furniture was still quite stained, but that was rather liable to take a while to clean or replace.

“You’re looking quite a bit better there,” he said. “How are you feeling?”

“Yeah, better, that blood you guys’ve got works wonders,” he stretched his arms out a bit as if to test them. “Awright, so down to business – you got the Astrolite, nice work. Did’ja waste them sons’a bitches?”

“Dennis met his slow and rather painful death. As for the others, they’re likely panicking and pissed off,” Izaya smirked. “I thought you’d like your proper revenge on the others for yourself, but I can go back and finish them if you’d prefer.”

Not that Izaya really wanted to, but he would if it were needed. And it wasn’t as though he would do random favors for free exactly, just...those guys really did piss him off, but he wasn’t the one directly offended. It was a relief that he at least had enough control over himself not to go all out on each fo the humans.

“Nah, I’ll get ‘em myself – it’s appreciated. Did he have my money?”

“They had stowed away,” he chuckled a little. “It was rather poorly hidden. Here, take it.”

He had considered keeping the money, but so far, he had already found it pretty easy to obtain.

“Ah, you’re a life saver. I might have to buy new kidneys with this.”

Izaya did not want to know why kidneys would only cost that much even on the black market. He also did not want to consider the possibility that Mercurio wasn’t joking.
“Right, so I assume I’m supposed to blow something up.”

Mercurio sat back, his endurance might’ve been getting low.

“You need to make someplace disappear – a warehouse, look to be a Sabbat interest. That Astrolite, it’s twice as powerful as TNT. Instant demolition. When you engage the timer, you better be on the other side of the world.”

Not that he had anywhere better to put it, but Izaya was now far less fond of the idea of keeping that at his place.

“So I have to blow up this warehouse of theirs?” He was certainly not a fan of explosions, but the job itself didn’t sound difficult.

“I’d love to get in there, get my hands on the equipment they’ve been unloading. But it’d be suicide to walk in there…they got a small army of trigger-happy types and they’re all packin’. I don’t know…maybe…uh…there might be some way in there that wouldn’t get ya killed.”

Oh, great. ‘What, so I’m on a suicide mission? Beautiful.’

“Anything you’d suggest?”

Mercurio rubbed his face with both hands, then rested his chin on them in thought. “Well, there’s a guy, I never met him, but I’ve heard a lot about him. His name is Tung, Bertram Tung. He’s one o’ you types. If there’s anyone who knows more than me about this city, it’s him.”

So this guy would be the most likely to know some sort of way in that wouldn’t get him killed. It seemed strange to Izaya that Mercurio wouldn’t have met the man though.

“Unfortunately, Tung’s hiding out at the moment.”

And why wouldn’t he be? Izaya truly missed the recent days when information was easier to obtain and his jobs not so incredibly obnoxious. He resolved that this would not be the kind of shit he’d be doing for the rest of his nights.

“Someone’s after him,” he concluded, narrowing his eyes.

“Yeah. Layin’ low cuz of Therese. Therese Voerman, you know her? Anyway, word is Therese and Tung are feuding – I don’t know the details. My takes’ that Tung thinks he’s about to get whacked, so he’s gone underground till Therese calls it off,” he twisted his back a little, popping some joints. “If you wanna put that warehouse into orbit any time soon, you’re gonna have to get Therese to call off the feud.”

Izaya sighed, resigned to his task. “And where would she be?”

“She and her sister, Jeanette, they run The Asylum. Some freaky customers frequent that place…I try not to do business there,” he grimaced as if remembering something particularly unpleasant.

In summary, he had to meet with one or both of these Kindred who very well may be in a sour mood, pissed off, possibly crazy and murderous. Perfect. Perhaps he’d wait a little longer on this…

He had seen the signs for the place, it was right behind the clinic, he guessed its entrance would be off of second street.

“Anyway…I’m gonna get some more rest here if ya don’t mind,” he made to lay down on the
cleanest part of the couch possible.

“Sure,” Izaya shrugged. Then he remembered something. “Ah, first, one thing. Do you know someone called ‘Z’?”

Mercurio shifted uncomfortably. “Ah…I think you mean Zen? well, I know he doesn’t really come around here. I know he’s one of you,” he averted his eyes. Suspicious. “Why, where’d you hear about him?”

“So it’s Zen, huh?”

Izaya put one hand on his hip, and gestured with his other arm up in the air, casually. “I ran into another ghoul the other night, he mentioned the name. Apparently, he is not very well-respected.”

One method of obtaining information – make up something believable that can easily be excused as hearsay. The unaware tend to fall for it by then giving out real information.

He was not about to say he’d had any sort of contact with this Zen. He didn’t have anywhere near enough information on the man himself, nor on his own precarious situation. He could easily put himself in jeopardy saying the wrong thing to someone.

“Well…depends on who you ask. I will tell ya the main man doesn’t like him much. I can say that if you make it outta here and see him again, it’d be best not to mention him.”

This wasn’t nearly enough; he’d been expecting to be able to get more info than that, but pressing for more would be way too suspicious…he’d have to drop it.

He wished Mercurio well, and left the building in thought. He wanted a bit of a break for himself, he’d meet this Therese another time. Perhaps he’d grab a meal and then look around the city a bit more.

Maybe he’d find Zen. Just to pay him back for his help, of course.

~

*3 years ago*

~

Kaz and Zen went to see Issac. Issac looked to be nearing his fifties and was otherwise not particularly remarkable. However, he was a powerful Kindred and he also happened to be their Sire. He ran a jewelry store and lived above it, and apparently, he’d worked with a good number of famous actors and directors over time and had even been a director himself. When they’d first met, Zen was still Shizuo and a beginner in English, so he only caught a few words here and there when he and Kaz talked. As awkward as it was, Kaz had to translate for him and walk him through what they were going to do. All Shizuo could do at that time was bow in respect. Somehow, it seemed like the thing to do. And apparently, it was, as it had made Issac laugh boisterously, and Kaz had smiled.

Kaz had told him that Isaac was the one he’d needed permission from to bring Shizuo there and allow him to…join the community. Issac stated he would sire him, since Kaz was still a fledgling himself. Besides, it was the case that Issac rarely sired anyway. Besides, if Shizuo were staying with Kaz, it’s not as though it would be an inconvenience.

During his first few nights, Shizuo had wanted to ask Kaz the obvious question: How did he end up being Embraced and why? At the same time, he thought it might have been a bad memory for his brother so as many times as he tried to ask, he always refrained. It didn’t take long, however, for Kaz to figure him out, and told him the story. It was a straightforward one.
“During filming, the Director had us jumping between cities a little too often. The contiguous US has four time zones. Even though each one is only an hour apart, all the travel and work made it hard to keep my energy constant, and I would end up sleeping at odd hours of the day between work and sometimes at night. When that happened, I liked to take walks at night around Hollywood just to use up some energy,” Kaz’s eyes had glazed over a little and were staring at a spot on the wall as he remembered.

“One of those nights, I had been down by Issac’s store. You know the alleyway we use to go inside? I’d heard the sound of a gunshot coming from down there. When I looked, I had seen Issac fighting off a human who’d had a gun set on him. I learned later that the Kine just had quite poor timing, and then decided to attack whoever happened to be there. Issac didn’t get a chance to diffuse the situation before he’d been shot. The human started to panic, he could clearly tell that the gunshot didn’t effect Issac the way he’d expected – what I saw next was Issac mortally wounding the man, and then he’d drained the Kine dry to faster heal with wound.”

Shizuo had grimaced at that part. That would not have been a pleasant thing to see.

“Now the problem was that I had clearly seen the whole thing. I admit I was a little scared at the time. All I could really do was stand there and stare at him, however. You and I have both seen things in Tokyo just as…different, but it still was not exactly expected. I was lucky though. Issac recognized me, knew who I was. Issac being Issac didn’t want to just kill me like that. He gave me options instead and explained them. One option was that he’d kill me to keep the Masquerade a secret. Second, he could make his ghoul. But being that I was to eventually head back to Japan, and that creates a kind of blood bond; it wouldn’t be a very convenient arrangement to say the least. Lastly, he offered to sire me, and explained I’d basically have to disappear from the normal mortal world. Of the choices, that was the most sensible to me,” Kaz frowned here a little, a strange sadness coming over him.

“This is when I was truly worried: I wanted to make a deal. I agreed to become Kindred, so long as I would be allowed to bring you into this world as well, provided you agreed,” Kaz sighed. “I knew that would probably be a tough bargain; as you know it did take planning and effort to get you here while keeping it all under wraps. As it was, I’d have to remain in hiding for a while until law enforcement called off the search here.”

Shizuo nodded. It was all making sense. He couldn’t help but clench his fists a little though, knowing his brother had been in quite the bit of danger and he didn’t even know.

“But luckily for us, he agreed, and here we are.”

It had been an enlightening story, though somehow Zen was expecting something more bizarre to be involved. Perhaps serial killers, pirates, and a talking pair of pants. Okay, so maybe not that weird, but still. It had almost sounded like a strange transaction from how Kaz told it.

Tonight, Issac had wanted to see them both, it seemed there was some news to share. Interestingly, both Nines Rodriguez and Jack were there as well. This had to be big. Zen and Kaz were met with back claps and warm greetings. There was some pleasant talk until Issac interrupted.

It seemed The Camarilla had officially moved into LA territory. Issac had been visited by several Camarilla representatives and even a couple of elders over the last several nights. The most worrisome of the bunch was Sebastian LaCroix. Apparently, the Camarilla had installed him as the LA Prince, and he was now established Downtown.

In short, they were now all…subjected to this Prince’s rule. Although Zen was annoyed at the sound of it and even pissed to a point, Jack and Nines were more than outraged.
“Dammit, we keep kicking them out and then it just takes them a couple decades to squirm right back in, the bastards,” Nines was baring his fangs. “No way – we’ll throw them out as many times as it takes.”

“Well this time it’s liable to take longer – they’ve brought in some substantial crew with them this time,” Issac interrupted what would have been a long rant from Nines. Jack had crossed his arms, obviously displeased.

Issac asked Nines and Jack to spread the word. He then explained more about the Camarilla to Kaz and Zen.

It was sounding as though they were to be forced into a monarchy. Zen had been enjoying his time as a Kindred unrestricted by rules aside from the obvious agreed upon ones that would keep them all safe.

Really, it was bad enough that he was having to avoid going out too often or even helping Kaz with their newly acquired club since he’d realized Izaya had come around once more. He was hurting enough just having to avoid the flea. And now, this?

Issac nodded at the looks on the young Kindred’s faces in understanding. “Things will certainly be taking a turn for the interesting. Even so, take care of yourselves. We can’t afford to lose you two, especially now.”

He knew he’d need some cigarettes shortly.

~

*Present Night*

~

Izaya was in a pickle. Well to be more accurate, he was in a manhole.

Maybe it would be better to say the sewers. He waited at the bottom of the ladder that would bring him back up to the surface impatiently. This was taking forever.

He tried a new tactic – much as he really didn’t want to, he made his way through the interestingly spacious and huge sewer system. There were even maps of the access points posted up on walls here and there. Did workers really need those though? Luckily, the…water…was shallow. He picked an access point that was some ways away from where he’d entered, climbed the ladder, and emerged onto the surface.

Now why had he gone into the sewers in the first place? Well, after his meal (A man had been distracted in one of the alleys, he’d been peeing and thus not paying attention to his surroundings. Gross, but the blood had been good.), he’d seen a couple of members of the Awakusu-kai. In all the confusion and adjustments he’d had to go through, he’d forgotten that he’d likely be sought after. The good thing was that they’d never find him in the day. Additionally, they didn’t have anyone who matched his level of skill so without some like himself, the only way they’d find him is if he were seen at night, and it had nearly happened. Although this dodging and hiding should work well enough for the time being, he would have to come up with a better solution eventually. After all, no one knew better than he that the Awakusu-kai were establishing and expanding territory in LA.

What to do. After he was done being under the Prince’s thumb, his options might be limited. He
couldn’t rejoin Awakusu-kai. He could probably be an informant again, but it would likely have to be under a pseudonym and he’d probably have to wait before really establishing himself in such a position in the area. He could probably go to other cities in the country or perhaps even other countries though he’d likely have to avoid Japan.

He preferred his plans laid out with clear options, but in this case, he might have to wait and see before starting a plan. He would first need to obtain his freedom.

He had come up next to Kilpatrick’s Bail Bonds. This was familiar. He’d gotten an email about this place, hadn’t he?

The entrance was right next to him.

‘May as well go in, could be something useful to find.’

Upon entering, there was one Kine inside. He was a fairly large man, and was currently busy thumbing through files in a cabinet. It seemed Izaya was not yet noticed. Izaya looked around. There were a few desks, a computer that had the sign ‘Krime-puter’ above it, a box of donuts, and a dart board on the wall. There were darts sticking out the wall itself – someone had terrible aim. All in all, nothing very impressive looking. Time to snoop around in the…Krime-puter….

It didn’t need a password, he merely had to select from a few menus of last names in alphabetical order. Some names had little to no information, but many others seemed to be updated and quite detailed. Crumb, McGee, Toten…he made note of these names and various others. You could never know when this might come in handy. Besides, he had knowledge of some of these names already. It was nice to have a cross-reference, A free one, at that. There was also personal email that was open – apparently, someone had pulled it up and forgotten to close that out. It seemed this person’s mother and written to say that their father had a 3-inch wide boil on his buttocks.

‘There’s one bit of information I could have gone on without.’ Izaya closed his eyes as if pained, and stood up. He’d had about enough of this Krime-puter.

“O-oh, uh, didn’t see ya there, sir.”

The Kine had turned around and had finally noticed Izaya. Well, no reason not to go over and speak with him.

“Welcome to Kilpatrick 24-Hour Bail Bonds. My name’s Arthur Kilpatrick, how can I help you?”

Dammit. He was the one who’d left his email open. Izaya had not only never expected to remember that bit of information, but also certainly not have it come to the forefront of his mind again so quickly. He could only hope this conversation would not be as painful as he thought it might.

“I’m curious about your business, my good man. I hope you’ll indulge me if you don’t mind.”

Arthur adjusted his sunglasses. He was definitely Kine, and it was nighttime. Add that to the list of things that made no goddamn sense around here.

“Bail bondin’? What do you wanna know?”

“Do you tend to have a high number of bail jumpers?”

“You betcha, goes with the business. Then, ya sic the bounty hunter on ‘em,” Arthur smiled, this seemed to be his favorite topic. “I used to do some bounty huntin’ back in the day. Takes a good solid set o’ brass balls to be a good bounty hunter.”
Yet another image Izaya did not require. It’s not that Izaya hadn’t made his mistakes to say the least, but would this incredibly strange torment end?

“I see… is the one you have now any good with it?”

“Yeah, damn good. His name’s Carson and he’s great at what he does when he wants to do it. I can’t seem to find him now, though. It’s pissin’ me off to be honest; I need him to go find someone.”

“And you can’t get someone else?”

“Well, I don’t feel right cutting him off, we go way back – I knew his Father too,” Arthur furrowed his brows. He seemed to be coming up with an idea.

“Tell ya what, since I’m stuck here, why don’t you go look for him? Just real quick. I’ll pay ya for your time.”

Now this might be worth it.

“Alright, I’m up for it.”

“Great, great. Here’s a key card to his place. It’s apartment 1 in Santa Monica Suites – I’d check there first, maybe there’s some kinda clue about where he’s gone.”

The same building Mercurio lived in – easy enough.

“Alright, I’ll be back when I find him.”

He gave Arthur a friendly smile before exiting. Nothing wrong with building as much trust in people as possible.

He set off down the road, The Asylum and a diner came into view. Now, looking for this Carson. Though not his main skill set, Izaya had enough practice with tracking people - this should be easy enough. After all, he’d spent so many years looking…

‘Ugh, don’t think about him. Not now. Just don’t.’ Izaya put his hand up to one of his temples, as though he had a headache. He’d stopped in his tracks, and worked to stop this line of thought before it could continue.

Sometime. Not now, but… sometime. He’d have to face the facts. He’d never find him, would he? Not only were his own methods now incredibly limited, but it had been so many years already. Somehow, Shizuo was gone for good. Somehow, he’d left not even enough of a trace for Izaya to find him. Somehow, this hurt Izaya far more than he’d thought. Somehow, Izaya felt broken.

Izaya pressed his lips together, his face scrunching up just a bit, the pain clear on his face. He made himself continue walking down 2nd street, and cut through an alley to make it to the apartment.

Now he was in front of his own apartment building. At this point he just felt like going to sleep even though the night was still young.

No, he had to push through it. No matter what happened or didn’t happen, he would keep going. He wasn’t so weak like he used to be years ago.

He took a breath and steadied himself. “Shizuo…” it was only a whisper, but Izaya had the feeling he’d never say the name again. This would probably be the last chance.
After another moment, he made his way into the other apartment building and looked for clues to find Carson.

~

Zen had left the club he co-owned. Kaz was understanding; he knew Zen wanted to watch out for Izaya as much as possible. Though Kaz was about as happy for his brother as he could be, they both also knew of the risks. Still, Zen just…couldn’t stay away.

It took some time, but he’d reach Santa Monica. It wasn’t his usual haunt; the Camarilla had stakes down here so he didn’t generally like to stick around. Still, the flea was doubtless off on his task or perhaps a personal task somewhere. He’d find him at some point.

What he didn’t know was that he had narrowly missed the Fledgling standing outside of his apartment building, looking like his world had ended.

~

Carson’s apartment had proved useful. It was pretty much identical to Mercurio’s, and he’d found a key to a nearby tattoo parlor. This Carson had left a recording. Apparently, he was hunting a guy by the last name of McGee (hadn’t he been in the…Krime-puter?) who was last spotted there.

The place really was quite close by, only a few minutes away.

Despite the late time, the door was open. The place gave him a bad feeling. Not only did the condition of the place seem deplorable, but there was single, dirty chair in the back room with very…used-looking restraints on it. Both ink and what smelled like blood was spattered here and there, even in the front room. Weirdly, it didn’t look as though there were any signs of a struggle. The flickering of the overhead fluorescent light was not helpful.

In the corner was a landing with steps that led down. Naturally. He could hear a phone ringing.

‘Why must this place have a basement…?’ he sighed in annoyance and made his way down, reluctantly.

There wasn’t much to see. A concrete room, a furnace, random boxes, and a dirty mattress. The ringing phone was a landline, innocently hanging on the wall. This seemed like a bad idea. It also seemed like a stupid idea. But, as was the norm these night, Izaya needed information.

He picked up the receiver. “Yes?”

“Hello~ Might I speak with Mr. McGee?” the voice seemed to possess some kind of accent, though Izaya couldn’t place it. It was also quite…jaunty.

“Oh, how interesting. I am looking for him as well.”

“Well~! Isn’t that a coincidence!”

“Indeed. Have you, by chance, seen him in the past 24 hours?”

“I’m afraid not – we did have an appointment scheduled a few days ago, but he never seemed to show up. Do you have any information on where he might be~?”

Izaya smirked. Show time.

“Most unfortunately, sir, Mr. McGee went missing over these past few days and we’ve been
searching for him. Oh, how rude of me,” he faked a jovial chuckle. “I’ve forgotten to introduce myself. I’m Dr. Langley with the CDC. Mr. McGee was hospitalized in the county hospital, but he…discharged himself, so to speak. You see, he had contracted Bacterial Meningitis, and was in the undergoing treatment when he up and left all of a sudden,” Izaya let out a dramatic sigh.

“I suppose it’s for the best you haven’t seen him; it’s quite contagious, you see. Moreover, patients have been known to…succumb to it within mere hours…we just may be hunting a corpse as opposed to a person.”

“O-oh...hng...um, I s-see.”

And the trap snapped shut.

“Ah, I have an idea. Do you have any further information about your meeting with Mr. McGee? Perhaps I would be able to notice something that might help in in locating him from any documentation you may have~” Just a little more, come on now.

“W-well, certainly, I’d be delighted! I’m at the end of Main Street, there’s a sign for Gimble’s Prosthetics – it’s a small basement studio. Just ring the buzzer, and I’ll let you in~”

“Excellent, I’ll be there shortly. I do so…anticipate our meeting.”

He hung up the phone.

It was obvious at this point. There was something going on in this ‘basement studio’. This Gimble, he presumed, was undoubtedly behind McGee’s disappearance. Carson was also most likely there. The guy was behaving in a very particular way. It was something in his voice; Izaya suspected he was attempting to tie up loose ends.

If needed, Izaya would bring that end.

~

Zen was having no luck in locating Izaya. Strange, it was usually pretty easy. The flea’s scent hadn’t changed much even with the Embrace. It was entirely possible that Izaya had decided to stay in that night. It wouldn’t be too surprising; this ‘life’ took some adjusting.

He shouldn’t complain, though. Izaya was intelligent as hell; it was lucky he didn’t recognize that he was Shizuo yet. What was likely the reason was that he sounded different when he spoke English. He noticed it with Kaz, and even with Izaya too. He supposed it made sense. Besides, it was helping him conceal who he was – he wasn’t about to complain.

Since he was in Santa Monica, he did also want to check out The Asylum. He hadn’t been in a while, and after all and it was always good to keep tabs on the ‘competition’. He just didn’t want to run into the sisters. He had nothing against Malkavians, but he just still did not know how to deal with them. It didn’t help that even native English speakers would have trouble knowing what a Malkavian might be meaning to say at any given time.

Well, whatever. Maybe he could let off some energy there.

~

At the other end of Main Street was a parking lot, pretty much deserted. In the corner was the sign that Gimble guy had mentioned. He followed the outdoor steps down and there was a door and an intercom. And it was simple, he pushed the button, heard the buzzing sound, and went through the
“Hello~ Welcome to Gimble’s Prosthetics and Medical Supplies. You’re here about the missing Mr. McGee, yes?”

The room they stood in wasn’t very large, and looked like every other waiting room he’d ever seen. Maybe not as dirty as some.

“Yes. I assume you’re Gimble?” he didn’t like the way the guy was smiling. The white shirt and blue tie did nothing to make him look less frightening.

“Oh, yes~ Forgive me. I’m Gimble, Stanley Gimble. But, oh…dear, let us dispense with formalities – you can call me Stan.”

No way in hell. There was something very off about this human. He knew already he was behind those disappearances, but there was something else – he could feel it.

“Certainly. To start, if you could tell me about yourself a bit. I need to file my reports properly, you see.”

“Me? Oh, I’m just trying to make things a little easier for those who find themselves, erm, disadvantaged. Giving a helping hand, you might say – a leg up. Oh ha ha, bloody clever, that one.”

“Hmm…I see. You seem at a…disadvantage yourself.”

“Ah, funny story, that is. Well, you see I’ve always had an interest in prosthetics. And as my interest and erm, hobbies grew, I knew I wouldn’t truly understand what it was like for the handicapped that I was serving unless I knew first-hand what it was like.”

Oh, Christ why. It was only through practice that Izaya kept a horrified expression off his face.

“So, I cut off my own arm, and now I have my own prosthetic,” Gimble sighed in a way that was entirely unsuitable for the conversation at hand.

“Very interesting. Quite the dedication you have,” izaya managed a smile, though he was uncertain if it would fool anyone. “Now then, if you have some documentation on Mr. McGee?”

“Oh, yes, of course. I’ll go dig it up, and we’ll see what we can find,” that smile needed to stop. “I’ll be right back,” he made to turn and go through the door behind him.

“Of course, my thanks.”

Before Gimble closed the door, he said one more thing. “Oh, and you have the most beautiful arms – I must have them.”

‘…Ah. That’s why he kept looking at my arms.’

This guy was just a Kine, but sooner Izaya could get the hell out, the better. Even a blind person would see extremely clear warning signs at this point.

He waited for a few minutes before determining it might be a while longer before he came back. He decided to check through the walls, but didn’t see any movement or any living human shapes.

Izaya went through the door himself and emerged into a large room, clearly made of concrete like most basements. And like most basements, there was a variety of junk stacked around. Unlike most basements, there were mannequins just…standing around. There were others leaning against boxes.
Others were simply models of legs and arms. Of these, many were nailed to the ceiling and support beams.

He saw a camera on a tripod, set up facing toward a wall. There were various fliers all over the wall, but nothing else. Though one of them was a medical diagram of a leg. There was a black circle drawn over the knee and the label ‘GIDDY’ with arrows pointing at the knee. That’s enough of that, then. He followed the room around to another door. It led to stairs going down. Unfortunately.

As he followed the stairs, he was led through a narrow hallway that had rooms on either side closed off with metal doors now and then. They were unlocked as well. He opened only a few, as the rooms were more and more disturbing the further he got. One room had a chair similar to the one in the tattoo parlor, a drain on the floor, and a mattress that looked like someone had died and then was burned up on it. Posters of babies in a womb littered the walls. Another room simply had a large sink used in operating rooms, and a long, metal table with a variety of…instruments on it. Sharp, pointy ones. Lengthy handles with blades and corkscrew shapes. There was a large tome sitting nearby, and the room had an extended corner around the wall, where there was only a drain on the floor.

Izaya took a breath. Even he had never been so depraved, even at his lowest points I life. Not even close. He closed his eyes, and tried not to start shaking. He might have been Kindred, but he hadn’t been party to something this creepy even in his mortal life.

The final room simply contained an operating table, adjustable lights and screens, and liters upon liters of blood on the table and floor. Izaya backed out of the room before he became dizzy.

Finally, the hallway led to double doors, which opened into a large room. There were some things stacked here and there, and a bloody operating table in the center. There was a door on the far wall but before he could get any farther, a voice rang out. It came from one of the two rooms on the near side, they looked like prison cells. There was a pull switch next to one of them.

“Huh? Oh! Hey Help! You gotta get me out of here, man!” Izaya made his way over to the voice which belonged to a man who looked to be in bad shape. Even his red hair was sticking to his face and he seemed pained. This was the same voice he’d heard in the apartment. Carson.

“This guys a fucking nut job; he’s been taking pieces off o’ me and McGee over here for the last three days! He’s crazy, you gotta do something!” Izaya could see a body in the other cell – McGee, apparently. He seemed to be missing all of his limbs.

That was when the door on the far wall opened and out ran Stan Gimble. In his white-gloved hand, he held…a human arm.

‘…That’s not his…?’

It didn’t matter – Gimble was running straight at him, clearly about to attack.

‘Fine. He can’t be allowed to live any longer anyway. I won’t allow it.’

He’d have to be careful not to use his speed since Carson was watching, but he didn’t think it’d be necessary. Taking out his knife, Izaya dodged the arm, and slashed at Gimble, who was not fast to retreat. It had certainly wounded the man, but he barely slowed down. Izaya led him on a chase around the operating table, subtly using some extra speed to get the advantage. Once he got his position right, he pushed the table to slam into Gimble. It did the job well, and the Kine was on the floor. Before he could get up, Izaya caught up to him and used a foot to keep him on the ground.

“I don’t know just what the fuck is wrong in your head, but it’s ending. Now.”
Applying more pressure, he made sure couldn’t move or even respond, and he drove the knife into the heart. He waited, pulled out the knife, and sure enough, Gimble was dead in moments. He’d have to clean the knife properly, but for now he wiped it on the once-white shirt.

Maybe it would indeed be worth investing in guns.

Izaya collected himself, still not used to being so…direct in how he solved such…problems. He made his way over to the switch, which released Carson. He was understandably thrilled.

“Thanks, man. You’re a real lifesaver.”

“You’re Carson, right?”

“Yeah, how’d you know?”

“Arthur Kilpatrick sent me.”

“Aw man, that’s solid – I owe him big. I’ll have to figure out some way to repay him,” he looked a little sad thinking about it.

“He did say he had a job for you, but I’m guessing…”

“Yeah, no way – not for me anymore. Besides, Gimble took my finger trigger as messed up trophy. I hate to leave Arthur in a lurch like that, but…”

“I hear you – I’ll tell him.”

“Again, thanks a lot. I’ll…take care of stumpy, here.” Ah, McGee.

Izaya didn’t wait. He’d accomplished this task, and now he was done. Totally done.

He walked slowly back to Arthur’s place. He didn’t feel guilt for what he’d done – not only did Gimble deserve it, but it was self-defense as well. Plus, he’d saved Carson too. Still, he was not exactly accustomed to that sort of violence. Not like that.

He told Arthur that Carson wouldn’t be coming back, the reason being quite acceptable. Though it seemed Arthur would have to call in other bounty hunters. Arthur gave him $400, but then had another request.

There was a guy Mike Durbin, called “Muddy”. He just needed to know if he was still in town or not. It would be more money, and all he’d do was check out the guy’s girlfriend’s apartment. Which happened to be across the hall from Izaya’s own apartment. Easy enough. He did warn Arthur he wasn’t liable to get back to him that night.

He walked back from there toward 2nd street. He didn’t miss The Asylum, standing tall and bright with lights lighting up the area. Why not, might as well look inside before heading back to his place.

He went through the doors, and past the entrance the bar was clearly visible. A couple of people were standing around it, the bartender was working. The music was quite loud, with the bass most noticeably prominent. Beyond the bar was a stage where no one was tonight, but there was a dance floor with plenty of people dancing. Colorful lights surrounded and mingled in with the people.

He’d been to clubs before, of course. It’d been a while though. There seemed to be stairs on either side that went up to an extra area for seating it looked like. Not a bad establishment for what it was.
The music continued to the next song. The throng of people suddenly began to disperse. Many just moved to the sides, while others seemed to form a sort of circle around someone, dancing with them. The deep bass flowed through the large speakers in an addictive rhythm, and the man in the middle of the floor followed it with his body seamlessly.

It was him, Zen. The lights danced in his dark hair, and disappeared in his tinted glasses. The form-fitting dark red shirt provided easy movement, which was apparent as Zen’s own hands moved and gestured close to his body in time with the beats. He was a capable dancer, and everyone could see it. Even Izaya couldn’t help but be drawn in. But really, those tight leather pants just weren’t fair. But there was something intrinsically enthralling about the man. It wasn’t the movement of his hips, or even how he managed to move his head in perfect timing with the music and expose that neck in certain ways – no, Izaya felt frozen in place and could only stare. It was like there was something in the air. It was a good thing he didn’t need to breathe. It was hard to see his face, but Izaya was certain it was Zen. At the same time, there was something so familiar about this. His mouth dried out, and his mind was racing. Finally, he managed to take a few steps toward the dance floor. Zen’s face…he could hardly see it, but somehow-

Someone stepped directly in front of him.

Someone in the most revealing schoolgirl outfit there could ever have been. Heavy eye makeup and blonde pigtails completed the look.

“What do we have here? Another scrumptious young plaything straight out of life and into my club? You smell new, little boy, like fabric softener dew on freshly mowed Astroturf. Ooh, I’m not frightening you, am I, duckling?”

The spell was broken, and Izaya tried to make sense of what he’d just heard, not to mention what he was seeing. He didn’t know when it was exactly that Zen snuck away.

~

Zen considered sending Jeanette a Thank You card. It wasn’t likely she’d done it on purpose to help him out, but nonetheless, it was a good thing she’d stepped in. He had been hoping to catch an easy…meal on the dance floor. But he’d gotten caught up in dancing and failed to notice Izaya’s entrance. He snuck his way out of the place easily enough.

It might be a good idea to leave another note.

~

“Oh…certainly not; I lead a dangerous existence,” and cue the smirk.

“Ah haha, I can tell you and I are going to get a long just like firehoses…when we’re turned on, there’s bound to be flames.”

Oh, she was good, he had to admit. ‘My club’ she’d said, so this was one of the sisters.

“And what would it be my pleasure to call you?”

“I’m the finger down your spine when all the lights are out. I’m the name on all the men’s room walls. When I pout, the whole world tried to make me smile, and everyone always wants to know Who. Is. That. Girl?” she was certainly pouring on the seduction, he could tell that much. Her smile was dripping with it.

“I…am….Jeanette. And this bit of chaos crammed in a certifiable giggle is my club. Oh, I’d just love
to give you funny feelings all night, sweetheart, but I really must trouble with some business. We’ll reunite sweet and soon, I promise.”

“I’ll be counting on it.”

Jeanette winked at him, and left the area. There was an elevator in the corner that she took.

He realized that Zen was gone, and suddenly felt irritated. He had an odd feeling when he saw Zen. Somehow it was like the image of him was a blurry photo of something familiar. Like there were just a few things off about it or something. He was determined to work it out. He had helped him multiple times already, and seemed to be…kind to him. There was either some kind of manipulative game behind this, or, perhaps…something else?

As he made his way home to beat the sunrise, he considered the strange behavior of Jeanette. It wasn’t very typical, from what he could ascertain.

If asked he would deny it, but he felt his breath seize within him when he saw a note on his bed. He certainly did not rush to pick it up and read it either.

Izaya,

It would have been nice to talk to you earlier. I did see you, but I apologize – I can’t be seen talking with you.

It’s a matter of your protection. I’m sure now you’re upset; I know very well you are more than capable of handling yourself. However, suffice to say, things would be even worse for you if you were seen with me.

I’m sorry I can’t properly explain it further, but when we do eventually meet, we can talk about it then. For now, it’s better this way.

Know I’ll be watching, and helping you if you should need it. There are a great number of things I must speak with you about in person.

This Kindred didn’t know him, they hadn’t even spoken; what did he possibly have to say to Izaya of all people?

You know…maybe next time, you might allow me to be the one to watch you dance, hm? If you’re agreeable to it, I would look forward to that very much.

Zen

Izaya noticed something quickly. The two notes he received read differently from the way he’d once heard Zen speak. His speaking sounded slightly accented but otherwise normal. It wasn’t overly polite, formal, or otherwise anything that really stood out. But this writing – it was as though it would be an undue burden on the writer not to write it this way. Was it the choice of words? Maybe...no, it was more like he was distancing himself with the tone, but then the contents suggested a particular closeness in their relationship. Just what was this Zen doing? Were the people and Kindred of this city just dead set on confusing him and making no sense about anything?

And what the hell was that last line? He was not serious, that was for sure. Zen might’ve helped him out before, but he might have to introduce him more intimately to his knife – he was not going to allow anyone to mock him. Yes, he would have to confront him on that.
Clan Malkavian:

At first glance, the members of Clan Malkavian do not appear to be a clan at all; they are chosen from all races, creeds and social strata. But Malkavians, regardless of mortal standing, bear one disturbing commonality: They are all quite mad. Whether from the clan's choice of victims, the circumstances of the Embrace, or some property in Malkavian blood itself, all Malkavians go insane shortly after the transformation (if they were not insane to begin with). Accordingly, many Malkavians find themselves pariahs, ostracized by a vampiric society fearful of their random urges and capricious whims. Wiser Kindred, however, prefer to keep the madmen close at hand: Behind the Malkavians' lunatic cackling and feverish rantings lie smatterings of insight, even wisdom.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I'm garbage.

But I'm /your/ garbage~ :D Yes?

(Violating HIPAA is bad even if it was fake information. Bad, Izaya, bad.)
Monday Night's Gay Night

Chapter Notes

Yes, finally posted~ I've had a busy time but here we are.

Here we have multiple kinds of Izayas - take your pick! Collect ’em all~!

Also, I (obviously) don't own the mentioned song in here - 'kay?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izaya was beyond pissed.

He had woken up in a bad mood, which he felt was perfectly justified, considering the main reason for it.

If he lost focus on what he was doing, he could hear it. If he closed his eyes, he could see it. That torturous dream.

*The scent of sweat and musk flowed through the club.*

*Bright lights shining through the thick air.*

*Pounding bass music blared through his mind.*

*A presence had appeared right behind him.*

*Familiar.*

*Izaya could feel those strong hands gripping his hips, encircling him from behind.*

*That warm mouth at his neck with its hot tongue and sharp teeth.*

*The taller body pressed up behind him.*

*Glancing sideways, a glimpse of messy blond hair.*

*Suddenly, a sharp increase in temperature. Heart racing.*

*A smirk at his ear, the lips murmur silent words against it.*

*Mouth dry. Breathless.*

“Shizu-“

“Damn it, enough!” Izaya slammed a fist against a wall of his apartment. It went through the wall. Granted, it was thin and flimsy but his strength was still new to him.

Just another reminder.

He pulled out his fist, grimacing. He wasn’t physically hurt, but his mind wouldn’t shut out the
dream.

‘What the hell is wrong with me?’ He leaned against the wall for support.

Over the last couple of nights, he’d decided to stay in and try to properly catch up with just what had happened to him in his mind. It had all happened too fast, and he was exhausted. He got some proper rest, but then the dream popped into his head.

He was trying to come to grips with the thought of never seeing Shizuo again. That he was likely dead and gone; too much time had passed. That he had flown into this country in a desperate attempt to look for his brother and then who knew what had happened to him.

Besides, if anything Izaya should be dreaming about tormenting him or anything else, really. Not… that. Even if it made sense for Izaya to dream it, it was still illogical because Shizuo would never…

His mind had become treacherous.

‘If I don’t leave and do something it’ll get worse.’

A took a breath, pushed away from the wall, and left the apartment.

~

The woman who lived across from him wasn’t home. Now would be the time to see if there were clues about where her bail-jumping boyfriend had gone. The place looked just like his, and luckily, her answering machine was blinking. And it happened to be from this ‘Muddy’ Mike Durbin. Apparently, he’d be staying with a friend in a place called Skyline Apartments which were Downtown. Was everything Downtown…? Well, he supposed it made sense.

Blood packs sustained him while he’d stayed inside, but now he needed a fresh meal. Luckily, the alleyways reliably had unsuspecting people travelling through them. Even though that should be an obviously terrible idea, there was usually at least one person coming through without having to wait long. Tonight, it was raining again and a bit on the cold side. It didn’t take long to get someone.

Ah, a lovely breakfast~

It took little time to report to Arthur what he’d found out. He got a bit more money from him too. Izaya decided to keep this in mind; maybe if he found out more about this guy Muddy himself when he went Downtown, he might get more from Arthur.

He walked back toward the asylum, and someone had…established…themselves at the corner. The scraggly man was wrapped up for the cold, rainy weather. He held a large sign stating ‘THE END IS HERE’. Izaya hadn’t seen this guy before. He could tell he was human.

It didn’t take long for the man to open his mouth.

“WE ARE LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE LAST AGE OF MANKIND!” The man swung his sign around, almost hitting a homeless woman walking by. His rough voice continued shouting.

“REPENT YOUR WICKEDNESS AND ATONE IN THESE, YOUR LAST HOURS.”

“THIS RAIN IS THE PUNGENT SEWAGE OF HELL SEEPING INTO THE CRACKS OF THIS PUTRID PURGATORY! SOON, IT WILL WASH OVER AND CARRY YOU ALL TO THE DAMNATION SEA!!”
This was a new thing for Izaya. He’d seen his fair number of homeless in Tokyo, but this was quite different. He hadn’t seen such a pointed presentation from someone on the street like this.

“THE SEWERS ARE ALL MUDDIED WITH A THOUSAND LOWLY SUICIDES!”

This would certainly be an interesting human to talk to. The man simply paced around the area on the corner by the streetlight, and then would approach anyone who would listen.

Izaya approached the man, and opened his mouth to speak. He didn’t get far.

“I HAVE SEEN THE FACE OF THE DEMON, AND IT IS EXCITED!” The man had quickly approached Izaya and shoved a finger in his face.

“Ah, my good sir-”

“GAZE UPON ME AND SEE REFLECTED THE CONTEMPT OF YOUR SAVIOR!” Izaya blinked. The human’s eyes were intense and unblinking.

“Well that might be accurate, but-“

“TO MOCK ME IS TO SCORN THE LORD’S LOVE!”

Izaya took a step back, the man’s breath was not the freshest. He smirked, sighing. “Well~! Perhaps you would be interested in-“

“THE DAMNED LAUGH LOUDEST BEFORE THEY LOSE THEIR HEADS!” The man swung his sign at Izaya, who dodged easily.

Although certainly not threatened, Izaya was almost starting to feel personally affronted. Regardless, there was little point in continuing. He couldn’t even get the chance to talk to the guy, and there wasn’t much else he could do about it. Either this guy might get himself arrested at some point, or he’d eventually get tired and leave. Thus, Izaya decided to stop wasting his time. It’s not like this doomsayer had beat him or anything, though. He wasn’t running or admitting defeat, no, no.

‘Really, it’s only proper to show humans mercy sometimes~’

His not retreat led him in front of the diner. He looked for the proper name of the establishment, yet found none. Apparently, it was just ‘Diner’. Izaya recalled that he was supposed to ask about Lily here for that thin blood E. Maybe this would be entertaining.

Upon entering, the place looked exactly like an old style American diner. Smelled like one too. A raspy-voiced woman with gray hair stood behind the register.

“What’ll it be?” she peered at him over her glasses.

In the entire place, this woman and a cook who stood at the back wall, apparently cooking something on the stove, were the only employees present.

There were a few customers eating at the bar area, and one man who sat in a booth along the windows, sipping a mug of something. Strangely, they all seemed tense while the two workers did not.

In the background, music could be heard playing from an old jukebox which was situated at the other end of the diner by a payphone. A song had just ended, and another one was beginning. In fact, it seemed to be the same song playing again based on the melody. Each customer visibly shifted
‘You can tell my arms go back to the farm, you can tell my feet to hit the floor…’

“I’m looking for someone. Perhaps you’ve seen some particularly pale types in here over the last few months?”

“…Is that a trick question?”

In all fairness, it was an incredibly vague question, but he needed her to get in the right frame of mind.

“She would have been with a surfer type.”

The woman crossed her arms. “Hmm, gee, let me see…oh, yeah, I see about four dozen a week.”

It may not have been the best question, sure, but she could give some effort.

“She is rather…memorably pale, you could say,” Izaya put his hands on his hips as he started to get exasperated. California was not exactly known for dark days and long winters; most people were not likely to be pale to the point he was trying to describe.

“Pale girl… Oh, like the Fitzsimmons albino? Yeah, she hasn’t been in here in ages,” she tilted her head, thinking about it.

It was an improvement, but not what he needed.

‘She has the right idea – time to try something else and see if she makes some sort of connection out of it,’ he grinned, now there was some progress.

“Have you heard the term ‘thin-blood’ before?”

“Thin-blood? Sounds…familiar…is that one of those tropical diseases?”

Izaya blinked. ‘Damn…alright one more try.’

“Maybe a strange, pretty girl said something about it? She’s quite pale, would have been here after dark,” if this didn’t do it, it might be a dead end.

“Oh, that girl…nice girl. First decent human being I’ve seen in here for years – not like all the junkies and crazies we normally see. Yeah, I remember her,” Izaya relaxed a little in relief. If he could find Lily, then he would get this information on thin-bloods. “Yeah…weird. She’d left a tip but she didn’t order a thing.”

In the background, it sounded like the jukebox had begun playing another song…except that it seemed to be the same one again. As it continued playing, the patrons began to look visibly uncomfortable.

Izaya would admit that the song was catchy but he did feel that it was getting a bit annoying.

‘But don’t tell my heart, my achy breaky heart…’

“Yeah, she looked so hungry, too,” the woman continued. She was looking elsewhere, somewhat absorbed in the memory. “She just sat there all night with a full glass of water in front of her, talkin’ about this and that. She seemed lonely, a little scared, so I let her stay in the booth until we closed.”
Perfect. That sounded like a match.

“She left some stuff here, actually. You seem to know her – why don’t you give it back if you see her?”

Even better, a lead. Izaya smirked, pleased with these results.

“That would be perfect, thank you.”

“I’ll go grab the stuff, wait here.” He nodded his agreement.

As the woman walked away to the back room, Izaya looked around for a moment. The customers at the bar looked about done eating, and the man in the booth was now clenching his mug of what was presumably coffee.

It didn’t take her long to come back with a small purse that seemed to have very few things in it. With any luck, she’d have some sort of lead to her whereabouts in there.

The diner became quiet once more as the jukebox finished the song, and then went to continue playing. The tension in the air was palpable, even those who were not particularly good at reading the atmosphere would have noticed it.

It started up again, with the same song.

‘You can tell the world you never was my girl…’

Suddenly, there was an explosive sound.

“GOD F**KING DAMMIT!!!”

The man in the booth had screamed and leapt out of his booth.

“GAAAAHHH!!”

He threw his mug in the direction of the jukebox, it landed on the floor nearby and broke, a little bit of coffee mixed in with the pieces.

The woman Izaya had been speaking with sighed.

“Guess I’ll have to clean up the mug.” She was resigned.

The man had now dropped to the floor, moaning and…crying? He started rolling around and eventually rolled into another booth, and curled up there on the floor.

“How many times did this song play so far?” he asked, looking at the man in almost wonder. This wasn’t typical human behavior.

The woman shrugged. “Not sure, lost count after the tenth time. Teenagers come in here, they pull that shit constantly.”

Izaya pointed at him and looked back at the woman. “Um…so about him…”

She had picked up a broom and dustpan.

“Like I said, junkies and crazies.” She walked over to the mug and began cleaning it up.
‘Well I think I’ve had about enough of this.’

Izaya was glad to exit the diner. The place was weird, and that said a lot.

~

He found himself in the covered parking lot, standing at the trunk of a red Thunderbird. Inside of Lily’s purse had been loose change, old receipts and a couple of pens. But it also had a photo of herself – orange hair, wearing a rainbow top. The other thing was a bail bond. The name said Rolf Toten – this was one of the names Izaya remembered from Arthur’s computer (he refused to call it Krimeputer ever again).

This car had been his, so now it was time to look for anything in here on Lily. The trunk gave way easily to his strength, and the car seemed to have been there for quite a while. Inside was a tire iron, and a small book. In fact, this seemed to be Lily’s diary.

The entries began in April of the previous year. Lily wrote about how she met a European guy at The Asylum and she was obviously infatuated. She clarified at a later date that he was indeed Rolf, and he intended to give her something special, apparently. The next entry explained her surprise at waking up at night consistently, and not eating anything for days. Days later, Rolf had come and explained to her that she could only have blood from then on, and he’d brought her a blood pack from the blood bank. She had tried to refuse it, but couldn’t. She seemed to still not really comprehend what had happened to her. By July, she stated she’d bailed Rolf out of jail – his visa had expired. He was going to have to leave the country but it seemed he had no intention of bringing her with him. That was in August, the next entry was in December. It seemed Lily had not seen Rolf again after that. She wondered just what to do and why Rolf had done this to her if he cared about her. Now the entries from this year spoke of how she met E at the diner, how she hadn’t felt the way she did about anyone, even Rolf. She knew E was going back to Australia soon after the surf tournament. She wrote how on the night when she kissed him, she ended up biting him and drank too much. To save him, she gave him her blood and had Embraced him. But when she explained everything, he grew upset and left her. She wrote later how she couldn’t bring herself to feed again after that night, afraid she wouldn’t be able to control herself again. She wrote how she remembered Rolf getting blood bags from the blood bank and that she would try to sneak in and get some.

This was the last entry, and it was dated back a good six months prior.

Izaya closed the diary, and put it into the purse with the other items. ‘She’s probably still there. Was she captured or something? But what would they need with her?’ Izaya furrowed his brows in thought, he couldn’t think of a reason why they’d do something like that – would be the advantage or thing to gain?

Regardless, he knew where the blood bank was, it was obviously the next stop. He made his way back to the clinic – in the alley next to it was a door illuminated by a flashing red light. It said ‘blood bank’ right on it. It opened into a stairwell. Through the door on the left was the clinic. There was an upstairs, but the sign on the wall indicated that the blood back was downstairs.

He was almost excited about this – whatever he found was bound to be interesting in some way so he practically skipped down each of the stairs and considered humming to himself. He passed by a couple of vending machines. The popular soda was apparently ‘Demon Seed’ because of course it was. Evidently, it contained 13 stimulants in every bottle. He was suddenly glad that he couldn’t consume human food at that moment. But this would not sour his mood, no. He emerged into a long hallway. There were a couple of locked doors on the right followed by a window where a red-haired man with eyes that seemed to be far too blue stood wearing scrubs, and a…creepy smile.
There was posted some kind of recognition on the wall. This guy’s name was Vandal and it seemed he was consistently the employee of the month. Ah…this must be Vandal Cleaver. He hadn’t seen a picture of him before, but he had come across his information.

‘What, no one else was creepy looking enough to claim this award?’ he wondered to himself.

Vandal, unfortunately, began speaking.

“You up next for the needle, hm~? Your donation could save a life, you know. Oh. But isn’t it a little late for altruism?” he crossed his arms, smirking at Izaya, who had to resist twitching. “I don’t think you’re here to give blood at all. I don’t buy it, bub. I bet you’re here to take blood. Am I right~?”

Izaya saw little risk to admitting to it. “Why…you offering?” he matched Vandal with a smirk of his own. His reasons were simple. Since Lily disappeared here, it was likely employees here were aware of her and her vampirism. Secondly, it was clear to him that plenty of Kindred came through here for the same thing all the time. Finally, this Vandal struck him as peculiar in more than one way – maybe this was his senses telling him that this guy is a ghoul.

Vandal looked…satisfied. “That’s refreshing, an honest customer. None of that ‘I don’t drink blood’ shit. So…need a fix?”

“In fact, I require access into the back room,” Izaya put on a show of looking at his nails, emulating boredom.

Vandal may be a ghoul – a bit of an odd one at that, but he was still human all the same.

This meant, of course, that Izaya could…play with him.

“I’m afraid that’s not permitted – so says the Queen Bitch herself.”

Izaya laughed derisively. Poor ghoul. This ‘Queen Bitch’ would have to deal with it.

Izaya closed his eyes and let out a drawn-out sigh, as if in a quandary. He lifted his arms as if to say ‘what can you do’, but not before pulling out his knife, allowing it rest in one of his palms. Vandal’s eyes went straight to it.

He opened his eyes again, though not all the way, and watched Vandal closely.

Izaya began humming a random tune behind his smirk, expertly twirling the knife between his nimble fingers all the while. It reflected flashes of light off the blade, shining onto his ever-growing sinister expression now and then. Vandal would flinch slightly when the occasional flash blinded him.

“Dear ghoul, you are doubtless aware, I’m sure, of how easy it would be for me to smash that pitiful window that separates us, no?” Izaya smiled. It was not warm, however. It was cold, calculating, and even cruel. Built up over years of his old work, had had crafted this expression perfectly and even now he didn’t have to think about it to put it on. Like riding a bike, as they said around here.

Vandal did seem to be persuaded just yet.

Izaya stopped twirling the knife. “Oh, and I’m unconcerned about any repercussions that might fall upon myself for this,” he cackled. “After all, you can either let me in and you tell your Kindred boss that some other big, bad vampire forced you to, oooooor I can break through there, kill you, and come in to do as I please anyway~” Izaya placed his hand on the window. “Your choice~!”
Vandal seemed startled back into the situation.

“Hmph,” he frowned and almost began growling in defense. “I don’t believe you. You wouldn’t dare kill me – you don’t have the balls to do it, I can tell,” his creepy grin was back, confident he’d one this little game.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk.” Vandal twitched at the sound, annoyed.

Izaya threw his knife up, and caught it with his left hand. He did little balancing acts with it as he spoke.

“Well, I suppose I can’t blame you; you wouldn’t know me, after all,” Izaya looked straight at Vandal now. “But you know, that’s the trouble with lacking information. If you’re lacking critical knowledge, then you can’t expect to get very far in this world, didn’t you know? It can even get you killed,” he grasped the knife in his hand by the blade, allowing it to cut into his flesh. The blood began to spill out of the wound, coating the blade, his hand, and dripping onto the floor. Vandal did not fail to notice this, and stared, almost hypnotized.

“You see, the denizens of Tokyo’s underground know about me. Many of them know only a scant few things, but the one thing they all know without a doubt, the one thing anyone needs to know is…”

As he let the sentence trail off, he brought the knife’s blade up to his mouth, and licked along the blunt edge of it. He moved on to the sides, and even licked the sharp side clean, allowing it to cut his tongue just slightly. He curled his lips around the sides, and watched Vandal’s obvious growing discomfort. Finally, he pointed the knife at the window, right between Vandal’s eyes.

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“Never. Dare. Me.”

Vandal clenched his fists, looking a little shaken, yet angry.

“Fine. You win.” There was a buzzing sound, and one of the doors beside them unlocked. Izaya backed off, smiling, and put his knife away.

“Have a lovely evening~”

~

Inside of the blood back were several hallways and unmarked doors. One of the doors was made of metal, and heavier looking. That seemed the most obvious place to find someone who was being kept against their will, but Izaya decided to confirm it first. With Auspex, he saw through the walls. There was indeed somebody sitting in a room adjacent to the area he would try.

‘That must be it.’

He went through the heavy door, and found that this was freezer storage. For blood and other supplies…usually. He entered one of the freezers, and found that there was a keypad on the wall. This seemed to be the way in to reaching Lily, but he didn’t know the code. He could tell there was another way in – a normal door. But it didn’t look like he could get there from where he was. He could see, however, that there were a couple of normal rooms on the opposite side of him where a person was standing, working on a computer, it seemed.

‘Well, I am a people-person.’

As Izaya stalked into the room, the man turned around, shocked.
He wore scrubs, and was otherwise unremarkable.

“O-oh…are you here for the, uh….special sauce?”

Well that was certainly one way to put it.

This was pathetically easy – he didn’t even have to say anything, and the human was… metaphorically spilling his guts.

“Argh, don’t be stupid Phil, of course he is…uh…let’s see…code is the moon landing…um – 1969!”

Now if only all information came that easily.

‘Then again, nothing would be fun that way,’ he amended.

The guy, Phil, sat back down. He seemed to be an odd one for sure.

It was easy to make his way back to the keypad, punch in the code, and part of the wall slid open to reveal a lever on the ground. He pulled it, and the other wall opened up into the room he needed.

He could hear groaning and struggling. There she was, just like in her photo, strapped into a chair that had questionable looking devices on it.

“You’re Lily, right?”

“Urrgh, let me go--! I need it, it’s calling me…”

Her eyes were wild, and even for a Kindred, she wasn’t looking to be in good condition.

“Let me out! So thirsty…now! Haaarghh!”

He saw no real reason not to. Besides, she was certainly pained; they’d have to fix that.

Right as he was undoing the buckles and metal latches, someone came in from the other door. Izaya recognized the voice as Phil.

“You really don’t look well at all…”

But he couldn’t finish the sentence – Lily sprang from the chair, jumped off one of the walls, and pounced on him.

“Oh, sweet mother of God!”

Izaya merely watched as she had her fill of the man’s blood, obviously killing him. He was at least involved in having kept her here after all.

She got up, and looked at him. She seemed just aware enough to know that he’d freed her and what she had just done.

“The heat, mmm, it’s never been so satisfying. All of it, I drank until I heard his heart stop and I was sucking on a dry, dead artery. It was…euphoric,” she was smiling, obviously feeling relieved and satiated. It didn’t last long. “But I’ve…I’ve…killed him. I’ve never killed anyone before, I – what happened? What came over me?” she started to look panicked now, which was quite understandable. It was apparent that thin-bloods had nothing easy.
“It’s alright, calm down,” Izaya spoke softly, no need to startle her even more. “What we call The Best took over. It happens, especially when you don’t have enough blood like that.”

“B-Beast? What IS that? I couldn’t stop myself, but why did…why did it feel so right?”

Izaya tried again. “It's alright, now. You need to calm down.”

“I…I tried to steal some blood. I’d heard they sold it – I was hungry and I can’t hunt in town. They caught me and…I was strapped – trapped…thought I’d never escape. But now I…I’ve killed a man. I…have to get out of here,” she started to look more melancholy by the second.

“You're Lily, right? The one E told me about,” she was still clearly suffering inside, so he’d try to help.

"E? You know E? I...how do you know E?” The second he’d said the name, her expression became the absolute picture of longing.

“I agreed to help him out. So…what do you know about thin-bloods?”

Lily took a breath before speaking. “I tried to tell E about his condition, but he was so furious at me for what I’d made him into, he wouldn’t listen. A thin-blood, from what I’ve been told, is a vampire whose blood is weaker than most.

“Rolf, my sire, told me some vampires consider thin-bloods a bad omen and want them destroyed. Rolf wasn’t a thin-blood…and apparently I am. I don’t know why. Rolf abandoned me; his group wouldn’t take me in. They said I was a...liability,” she paused here, wrapping her arms around herself.

“He left me with so many questions. I did the same thing to E. I didn’t want to – E forced me out of his life. I should really go. Probably out of this city…soon.”

“All considered, I’d say that’s for the best. You should go see E at the beach first, he wants to see you.”

“E…doesn’t hate me anymore?” she looked as though she didn’t want to dare hope.

“No, quite the opposite, in fact. You should go talk to him.”

“Thank you…I...I’ll go see him. Oh, um...about what happened – please don’t tell E. That’s not who I am – that...The Beast took me over, it wasn’t in my control…”

“It’s alright, Lily. I do understand. Get going, and cheer up – for E, yeah?”

She was finally smiling. She nodded, and ran out of the room.

‘Damn it, I still have her things,’ he sighed. ‘Well, I’ll go bring it to her after a meal.’

But as he walked out of the door and into the hallway, Vandal ran up to him.

‘He really should have stayed away. I didn’t want to do this, but he’ll leave me no choice.’

“Why’d you have to go and let that bitch out? There’s one less Phil in the world now. Why’d you have to let her go and eat him, huh? Now I’ll never get to do in that bastard myself,” he crossed his arms, obviously angry now. “Well, you know what – I’m not gonna sell you any blood, now fucking way!”
‘Here we go…’

Before either of them could speak again, rapid footsteps were closing in from behind Vandal. It looked to be some other guy wearing scrubs.

‘More of these rats?’

The man started babbling about how he saw ‘their blood sack’ running out of the place, couldn’t stop her, and what was going on. Vandal had turned around to face the guy to respond to him.

Vandal was, of course, quite clearly surprised to see the guy collapse to the floor suddenly down on his back. He’d been in the middle of a sentence, and this had clearly interrupted him. The reason became clear relatively quickly.

There, right between the man’s eyes, vandal could see even from where he was that Izaya’s knife was buried deep. He slowly turned back around, to see Izaya’s arm still outstretched.

Izaya brought his arm back down to his side and the other rested on his hip.

“Such a rude human. He doesn’t even know how to wait his turn to speak,” he looked at Vandal, smirking. “Well, it’s lucky that I have now corrected that deficiency.”

“Y-you…” Vandal was angry, an unfortunate reaction to what had happened. Izaya was trying to be lenient with him, he really was. There was nothing for it.

“Oh, I’d practice some restraint if I were you, Vandal Cleaver.”

Vandal was now more confused than angry – there was nothing that displayed his last name anywhere.

“Oh yes, I’m aware of you. You do have a record, you know. Assault charges from a few years ago. I know you also have a particular obsession with blood, but that’s no reason to go around beating up women – did you mother never teach you that?”

“So what? My boss knows that. Don’t think for a second you can hold that over me,” Vandal smirked. This was round two.

“And you’ve made the mistake of underestimating me yet again, Vandal. In all honesty, I was hoping not to have to do this but it is what it is,” Izaya ran a hand through his hair as recalled as much information as he could about Vandall.

“Vandall Cleaver, age 26, blood type A. Grew up in San Diego, but closest family members moved to New York several years ago. Personally, I think that may have to do with the fact that you were caught several times killing small animals, but that’s just me. A below average student, you now attend day classes at the public college nearby, while working nights here. Now, interesting, although you were charged with assault five years ago, suddenly, those were mysteriously dropped. I assume this is when you became a ghoul. You’ve been working here at the blood bank since then. You like bats, blood oranges, and spending your free time at Club Confession because the bartender’s clothing leaves nothing to the imagination and she has a hot accent. You want a snake, and you have an interesting hatred for short pants.”

If anything, Vandal managed to get angrier. “What the hell…have you been fucking stalking me?” He raised a fist, and was obviously weighing his options. To strike or not to strike?

“Oh, that’s certainly not the first time I’ve heard that – I’m simply the best there is at what I do, you
see,” Izaya actually giggled in amusement; it was nice to make work fun sometimes.

“Now – here’s the best part of this, your story,” Izaya crossed his arms, fully confident that Vandal wouldn’t even try to hit him. Of course, it would be easy to dodge and even then, it would hardly hurt him.

“The thing your boss doesn’t know about…” Vandal froze, and Izaya smirked wide enough to show his fangs. “That’s right, embezzling money from your own place of work…my, my – wouldn’t we be in trouble. For some, that’s enough grounds to kill without a thought, didn’t you know?”

Vandal had dropped his fist, and had begun mimicking a silent goldfish.

“Oh, everyone knows you sell blood here – but your boss doesn’t know about all the extra you sock away for yourself,” Izaya put a fist under his chin in mock contemplation. “Now I do wonder what your boss would have to say about that…say, why don’t we find out? What do you think? I’d say it would be incredibly amusing…well, for me~”

Izaya’s face smiled, but his eyes were hardened steel.

Vandal froze up, and started shaking just a bit.

“A-ah, we could work something out, right? R-right?”

‘Oh, how I do enjoy the sound of panic.’

“Hmm~ Well, perhaps we could make this...worth my while.”

~

Izaya strolled out of the blood bank and outside back into the alley. He’d made sure to retrieve and clean his knife.

‘Not a bad deal, blood packs for close to free. Really, he’s lucky I’m such a nice guy these days,’ he thought to himself, feeling quite satisfied. He was tempted to start skipping and humming to himself.

He went down to the beach again, and gave Lily’s purse back to her. She and E were quite grateful to him, and they said they’d be leaving to stay with some of Lily’s family in Oregon for a while. Seemed suitable for them.

There was still some time left in the night, so he could try and meet with Therese at The Asylum.

Inside, he saw the elevator that Jeanette had taken the other night. Weirdly, it didn’t seem to be functioning. That was when Izaya sensed someone watching him. The dancing patrons were dancing, the ones at the bar were occupied with their drinks. He saw some people standing around here and there but it didn’t look like anyone was looking at him. Well...he’d stay on his guard to be safe.

In any case, it seemed the only one around to ask to use the elevator would be the large, hulking bartender, so we waltzed right over to the man.

“What can I getcha, sir?”

“Ah...I’m here to see Therese and Jeanette,” he said simply.

“Yeah? They’re upstairs, fighting as usual. Why do you need to see them?”
“Oh, I have interview with Jeanette for a dancer position – she needs to check out the color of my thong~” he smiled seductively.

The bartender leaned back, with obvious confusion in multiple ways.

“Uhh…wait. You are a…um…” the man couldn’t hold back his blush.

Izaya feigned surprise. “Oh, they didn’t tell you yet? Monday night’s gay night.”

The bartender blinked. “Damn it, they never tell me a fuckin’ thing around here… alright, you got access to the elevator, go ahead.”

“Why thank you very much, dear sir~” he finished it with a wink and a giggle. He might potentially be someone to get blood from later.

The bartender was taken quite off guard and was obviously flustered.

How easy some of these kine were. He headed back to the elevator, and pushed the call button This time, it lit up. He got inside to see that it had a door on the left side too. Presumably it would open on that side on the second floor.

He pushed the button for 2, and just before the gates closed, he sensed someone watching him again. This time, he caught sight of a face sported darkened sunglasses, an unlit cigarette in its mouth, and dark, shaggy hair.

That was him. The guy who was apparently following him around… who now gave him a wave with a peace sign. The elevator doors closed.

Izaya looked at the floor as the elevator moved up.

He gave him help, his knife, and strangely seemed to… care?

No. It defied logic and made no sense at all – this Kindred didn’t even know him.

This guy, Zen, obviously wanted something from him. That was the only logical conclusion. What was it – money? Information of some kind? Some sort of favor? …Was this extortion?

If Zen dared to cross him like that, he’d make him pay, Kindred or no.

Still, there was something about him…

The elevator doors opened into a very short hallway. There was just one door against the red wall. The music from downstairs was far quieter up here. What was not so quiet were the sounds of two voices screaming at each other.

“Your city? Last time I looked, it was called ‘Santa Monica’, not ‘Stuck-Up Bitch’.

Just fantastic.

~

Zen rubbed his face. He kept on cutting it real close. Until Izaya finished this damned mission from that damned LaCroix, they could not be seen associating. Even the eyes and ears the Prince had near Izaya’s apartment were too good to risk going to frequently or for very long. He would have to wait longer.
He just couldn’t help but be relieved to see Izaya ‘alive’ each night.

The flea wasn’t likely to get what he needed from the sisters very easily, but it only got harder for Zen to stay away now that he’d finally be able to actually show himself to Izaya.

Kaz would tell him to remember the risks to them both if he approached Izaya too soon, but at the very least, Zen would follow him wherever he went. As good as Izaya was, he hadn’t been in their world for very long, after all. Zen was strong. He had been and had become very skilled, especially for his young age as a Kindred. Izaya would clearly be on that path as well – it was already evident. Even so, there were things and other Kindred out there that even some elders did not trifle with, and with Izaya under the Prince’s thumb, anything could appear before him. So, Zen would watch closely, and not allow him to face a Final Death.

If he did this mission well, he would no longer be a liability, but an asset. And then, it’d be safe enough to finally meet with him properly. Now that he thought about it, he’d kept his hair black primarily because he and Kaz knew that Izaya was still actively looking for them. But once he could give his identity freely…he’d ask Kaz to get some bleach and blond dye. He did miss it.

He'd seen the flea talking up the bartender over there. He well understood the necessity of getting blood, but damn if Izaya flirting with other people didn't bother the shit out of him - even if it was obviously nothing at all. He grit his teeth slightly, annoyed at the bartender, Izaya, and mostly himself for getting worked up about it at all. He went to lean up against one the huge support poles in the place, away from the elevator's view.

Zen would wait here for Izaya to come out again. He’d wait for however long it would take.

~

Caitiff:

The Caitiff are the clanless vampires, outcast by other Kindred and despised by those who bother to notice them at all. Vampires may become clanless either by having no idea of their sires' identities (and thus having no sense of lineage) or by being of such weak generation that no identifying clan characteristics are discernable. Once there were few Caitiff, but the post-WWII period has seen a sharp increase in their numbers. Some elders whisper direfully of the 'Time of Thin Blood' that signifies the imminence of Gehenna.

Chapter End Notes

And there you have it--

I know, we still have time to wait for them to meet...it's killing me too, I promise! (Long game is long!)

Next time - ghooosts~
He Wants To Kill You

Chapter Notes

Here we are, the next one! Thanks for reading as always~ Ahh this one was tough...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even though the bartender had told him right to his face that these two were fighting up here, Izaya had managed to be a little surprised at having to wait for them to finish. At least it was easy to hear through the door so he’d know when to barge right in.

“Oh Therese, you really do paint a flattering portrait of me with your turn-of-the-century barbs. I always assumed you could do nothing but look down on me.”

That was definitely Jeanette who Izaya had met downstairs some nights previous. It was playful, on the casual side. The other voice was by contrast stern, prim and proper, and must’ve belonged to Therese.

“Just the sight of you! The sight of that wicked, tainted pout concealing that dirty, diseased mind. Sin! You have no shame.”

Perhaps he had a little bit more in common with Jeanette than he thought. Or at least, his previous life certainly did.

“Let she who is without sin cast the fierce tone.”

“Go ahead and mock me. You pull your pranks, make fun of my ways, it suits you; you’re just one big joke.”

“Don’t you call me that!”

“Should I start calling a duck a pig as well?”

“I’m your sister! How can you treat me like this?”

The sound of pounding footsteps was immediately obvious, and got quieter as they went away from the area.

“That’s it Jeanette, run away from truth. I’ll take care of everything, as always.”

So, these were the sisters, the co-owners of the club. It was clear he would have to not cross Therese, but at the same time, he had a feeling about Jeanette. She would not be ignored and likely had her own tricks. It was clear he would have to play both of the fields.

Izaya sighed. As if he wasn’t already stretching his personality out to its limits.

‘At least this is the exact thing I excel at the most.’

It remained silent in the room, so Izaya tried the door. It opened easily, so he went right in.

The room itself was rectangular and was quite large though weirdly decorated. The floor was wood,
the walls were blood red, and the arranged furniture arranged displayed a clear dichotomy. Towards the door was a large, typical working desk with a computer on it. Nearby were two weirdly tall black statues that were human-shaped, if humans could be that... long. In the near corner, an elegant cabinet sat beside a floor lamp and a sofa. Next to the desk was a dressing partition, where on the other side a large, pink, heart-shaped bed in the far corner. In the remaining corner was a lit-up vanity next to another door. Finally, there was a wall-sized painted portrait on the wall next to him. There was a stern-faced man in a dark suit in the background, and standing just in front of him on either side there appeared to be two young girls with blond hair in white dresses. Each set of eyes stared piercingly. Izaya decided never to look at it again.

A woman stood next to the desk, presumably Therese. Izaya made his way over.

"Ah, yes. Please, come in," she adjusted her black-rimmed glasses, and tucked a loose strand of blonde hair behind her ear, the rest of it up in a bun. Unlike Jeanette, There’s eyes matched and were a pale blue. “I do apologize for my sister’s crassness the other night made you uncomfortable. She’s unabashedly scandalous, but... in the club business, I suppose that kind of personality’s a necessary evil.”

Now that he thought about it, Therese had been there at his… trial, where he’d been taken after his Embrace, and the Prince had killed his Sire. She must’ve known who he was as well. She’d been sitting amongst the others in the crowd. She crossed her arms at the mention of her sister, rumpling slightly her professional-cut black suit. The matching pencil skirt was long, but oddly the top suit was low-cut.

“Not at all, it does take much more to rattle me,” he smiled in a comforting manner. “I presume you are Therese?”

“Therese Voerman, yes. I’m the proprietor of this club, and the only person in this city whose good side it’s in your best interest to stay on,” her voice slid like silk around the words. “Now, what brings you to Santa Monica?”

He needed to find Bertram Tung who could get him to the warehouse he was supposed to blow up. But he wouldn’t be found if Therese didn’t call off her feud with him.

“I require the whereabouts of Bertram Tung, you see. It’s my understanding that he is hiding out due to a feud between the two of you. Now if you should call off the feud, I’d be able to do so, if you please,” Izaya knew how to behave as an underling. He had a feeling this would become commonplace for him for quite some time. Ah, the things that even undead humans do to ‘survive’... even him.

Therese stared down her nose at him. Izaya had the impression that she did this to pretty much everyone.

“Tung’s exile is self-imposed, I assure you. But then, what reason would I have not to hate that loathsome Nosferatu scoundrel. Bloody Nosferatu. They’re so... unclean.”

Regardless of her attitude, he had to play along.

“If I may be so bold to ask, why is it that you hate him so?”

“He meddles in my affairs. He’s a bad influence on my sister, and she on him. If you were in my place, would you allow him to compromise your authority? You most certainly would not. I’d quite like it if I never had to hear that name again.”
“That being the case, why not call off the feud?” he titled his head to the side. He needed her calmer than this to strike a deal. Displaying unconsciously submissive signals would likely help.

“Why would I do that? Let him think I mean to kill him – that way, I don’t have to worry about him sabotaging everything. Do you realize how his subterfuge makes me look to the Camarilla?”

Izaya was fully aware of various political climates from the world of his previously life, naturally. Now this world was shaping up to be similar. Such interesting political parallels that were being displayed here.

‘Since Kindred are born from humans, it does make sense~’

He nodded slightly in a show of understanding. “I can appreciate that misfortune; however, I do need to see him.”

“Tung and his co-conspirator’s actions ruined my chance at partnership in a crucial piece of property. I do have several other promising ventures, and one in particular has been, to say the least, and ordeal,” though she looked displeased to say Tung’s name again, there was clearly a reason for it. “Hmm…I’d be willing to put the word out that my grievances with Tung have been swept under the rug, but in return, you’ll have to help me remove a particularly burdensome spirit from a property I’m looking to invest in.”

Izaya blinked, as if to clear his head. He then stared at her for a moment.

“Are you…talking about ghosts?”

Sure, vampires exist. But that did not necessarily indicate that other supernatural beings did as well.

“Ah, I forgot, you’re still new to this. Allow me to break you in – yes, ghosts exist. Werewolves, mummies, and I’d expect a whole lot of other things I’ve never seen before share the night with us.”

Izaya didn’t sense that she was lying. And it wasn’t exactly a stretch to imagine either. Fine then.

“Alright, I’ll handle it,” he smiled, always a good way to put most people at ease. “Now how do I go about removing a spirit?”

“Rumor is that a personal item of a ghost’s may be used to draw it out or excise it from its haunt. While I don’t put much stock in hearsay, it’s my last option. So I want you to go to the Ocean House Hotel, find an item of the spirit’s, and bring it back.”

“I presume that would be simple enough,” there had to be something else to this, though. “I imagine the spirit is liable to be upset with my presence…how does one fight them?”

“You don’t; they’re perfectly harmless.”

Again, this seemed to be the truth.

“Fair enough. After that, the feud will be called off?”

“Oh, I fully intend to do so. You’ll find that dealing with me, on the whole, is appreciably more predictable than dealing with some of the egomaniacs that are my peers. So long as our business doesn’t go sour, my word is gold.”

“Understood.”

“Before I forget, take this. The only way to reach the Ocean House after dark is through a tunnel in
the sewers. You’ll need that key to open the gate for that tunnel,” she handed him a large, though simple-looking key attached to a keyring.

Ah, the sewers again. Not exactly his favorite to say the least. Still, they weren’t as bad as he’d have thought.

“Now then, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got situations to set straight,” she crossed her arms, and walked back toward her desk without awaiting a response.

“Certainly, good evening to you.”

She nodded absentmindedly at him.

It was an obvious dismissal. Well, Izaya wasn’t keen on spending any additional time in that room as it was.

As he descended back down the elevator, the music from the club grew louder. It was likely he’d need to wait for the next night in order to proceed with this task. Otherwise he had the feeling he’d be stuck in the hotel throughout the day which would not be ideal.

If the place was a hotel, it might take a good amount of time to find some specific item. Time to rest, then he’d head out first thing the next night.

There was no note left at his apartment.

Not that he wanted one.

~

The trip through the sewers had been easy. Going in through any entry point, then following the underground map. Besides, there was an obvious huge gate in the way of one access point.

Zen watched from a distance as Izaya unlocked the gate, and climbed up the ladder that led to an exit through a manhole.

Even as a human, the ex-informant was perceptive and observant. Zen would wait until Izaya got inside the hotel before he followed.

~

It figured that Therese would give him a key for a sewer gate, but not a key for the damn front door. And true to his expectations, the place was huge.

‘Now I have waste time lock-picking my way in.’

It didn’t help his progress, but Izaya couldn’t help but glance up at the left porch light often. When he’d stepped onto the porch, the lightbulb in the right porchlight had exploded.

‘Doubtless, someone from Therese’s construction crew put a new one in, screwed it too tightly, which causes an unstable connection of electric flow, so the bulb wore out too quickly and thus it exploded.’

It was always advantageous to be knowledgeable in so many areas, and it was a reasonable enough explanation anyway. Izaya just wished he could believe it in that moment. He had been feeling a slight weird feeling ever since he’d emerged from the sewers. It felt as though someone was standing behind him and reaching toward him, but the hand remained just inches away without actually
touching him. His back had tensed up as if to prepare for someone to touch him, only for there to be nothing.

He almost felt relieved when he got the door open; it would feel better to be able to move – to not remain in the same spot.

Heading inside, the place proved to be in disrepair indeed. It was a strange mix of dilapidation and the ornate décor of mid-century classic style. The musty smell was fairly strong and dust was clearly visible in the air. A large chandelier hung overhead, and just a bit further was a small lobby with a table and sofas, two staircases on either side encircling it. To the left and right on both floors were long hallways, where the doors to some guest rooms could be seen on the second floor.

It had taken perhaps seconds, but it felt as though years had passed for Izaya. Within just these moments, an odd change had occurred within his mind and it was demonstrated with physical affects. Despite breathing being unnecessary, he found himself doing so rapidly. His eyes darted around, as if trying to focus on something specific, but being unable to. It was then that he realized that his thoughts had become…muffled, in a way. Yet at the same time, they were racing. Both his mind and what he had that passed for a heart were on overdrive as though he were being chased through Ikebukuro again.

Izaya felt his body tense up to a painful extent as he tried to swallow his nerves. He could have sworn there were a pair of eyes drilling into the back of his neck, and his skin prickled as sweat began to appear on it. Mouth dry, panic was setting in – he held back a wave of nausea. It was a suffocating fear and what was worse, Izaya did not even know what he was so suddenly fearful of.

The feeling was akin to suddenly falling far through a trap door, and all he could see or hear was nothing and he couldn’t know when or if the bottom of it was close…when he would inevitably splatter against whatever would constitute a ground.

Somehow, he was unbearably frightened. A sinister energy had washed over him, and it was terrifying. It was the fear of being unable to preserve one’s own life, one’s own existence.

‘Fight or flight…I didn’t even let this get to me as a human…what is going on here?’

From the front windows, lightening occasionally shown and he could hear thunder following after it. But another sound made its way forth and grew louder. That chandelier was shaking overhead and it moved unnaturally; in thrashing movements.

Izaya dove forward into the lobby area as it crashed violently to the floor where he’d been standing just seconds ago. It was lucky he’d had just enough wits about him to move on time – he had to almost wrench himself from the spot. Not that it would even hurt him that much, but why allow it to happen?

He slowly got up, and took deep breaths. He had to break out of whatever had come over him. He’d need a cool head to get through this place, or at least that’s how it was looking. He would not face a Final Death, there simply had to be someone or something screwing with him – and not in the fun way.

‘Ghosts, huh?’

Strange as it was…he had to acknowledge the likely possibility that this was the cause of his…condition.

He heard a sound from behind him, and he ducked in time to avoid a heavy vase come hurtling
toward his head.

Strangely, this calmed him down more. Gaining an understanding of things always diminished fear.

“I invite you to try to harm me with various interesting objects, Ghost-san~”

He felt better; it was obvious that this ghost wanted to harm him, but this was all it could do.

If dodging objects hurtling toward oneself was an Olympic sport, he’d get the gold.

‘Thanks…Shizu-chan,’ he smiled to himself. It didn’t hurt to use the name now…finally.

He felt stronger.

He dodged a rather large framed painting as it crashed to the floor near him. A shame, really, it seemed to have been in good condition previously.

On the table lay a rather old-looking newspaper – The L.A. Sun, apparently. It was worn, yellowed, and faded. It also seemed to have various stains on it, and it was burned in some spots.

**GRAND OPENING! SANTA MONICA CELEBRATES THE NEW OCEAN HOUSE HOTEL!**

An interesting item to find just conveniently laying around. Hm. If we were to find a personal item, it would take a good amount of digging around; he began investigating.

He went all the way down the left hallway, dodging projectiles all the while. Nothing in the area save for the check-in area, and there was nothing useful at all. Down the hallway on the right, it seemed to serve as just a general area to sit down and interact with others. The end of the hall turned to the left, but it ended just feet away, somewhat abruptly with a small table against the wall below a picture. The wall light to the left exploded, which he’d almost ignored completely as it’d become commonplace by now.

What was hard to ignore was the voice. It was a woman’s voice, and it didn’t come from anywhere nearby nor from a distance. Instead, her voice had crawled along his brain like a whispered dream.

*He’s watching.*

True enough, Izaya turned around and there stood someone blocking the way back…he held an axe. His face was bizarrely indistinct, and Izaya felt a chill run up his spine as ominous and sinister laughter rang in his ears, clearly coming from the man who…suddenly disappeared, unblocking the way back.

*He wants to kill you!*

So there were two ghosts for certain. If this Axe Man was the aggressor here, then whoever the woman was seemed to be trying to help Izaya to stay away from him or at least avoid harm.

Back in the lobby, a landline telephone and a very small picture frame launched at him. Despite the speed, they were still simple to dodge. His enhanced speed was helpful, but Izaya was confident that he could’ve dodged these in his human days too.

‘The rooms upstairs probably have something.’

But upon climbing the stairs, they practically shattered beneath him, and fell through the floor.
He landed harshly on the concrete floor of what was clearly a dark basement. Only a red light on the wall shown brightly. It was next to a sign that said elevator. Indeed, there was one around the corner but it seemed inoperable as there was no electricity running through the place. Back where he fell, the only two doors there did not open.

In front of him was a very narrow hallway and he could just barely see an intersecting path down the way.

‘This is clearly a trap but I don’t have another option,’ he winced, hating this lack of control.

As he approached the intersection, he heard panicked whimpering and the form of a woman ran by – she wore a simple blouse and skirt, and was looking behind her in fear as she kept running to the right.

‘Better follow her.’

That pathway turned, and a door lay at the end. Inside the room was nothing of use, it seemed to have been used for storage. Just a shelf with junk on it and a dirty desk. It was then that heavy, deliberate footsteps came from outside of the room – from the way he’d entered. The things on the shelf which even included a radio shot towards him, and hit the far wall as he dodged. That specific part of the wall, despite being made of brick, gave way. It was simple to crouch down and get into that room.

This room also looked to serve as storage, but there was also another newspaper on one of the desks.

There was a picture of what seemed to be a laundry room with large washing machines – the machines had large, round openings for loading clothes. In the picture, one of them was open.

**HOTEL HELL! CHILD’S SEVERED HEAD FOUND IN HOTEL LAUNDRY ROOM!**

‘Oh, dammit,’ he sighed aloud, and ran a hand over his face. This was not going to reveal any information that he really wanted to know. Izaya was never previously picky at all about the type of information or their contents that he’d dig up. Now, however…

Exiting the room through the only door present, he found himself back in the area he’d fallen through once again.

‘Who designed this area…?’

Back down the hallway he’d first walked down, he could now hear a banging noise coming from the left.

The noise was very…distinctive.

There was a soft sound of running machinery, but far louder was the ominous thudding every few seconds that echoed off of hollow metal and ringing against the walls, the only sounds present amidst the silence.

Every normal person knew not to follow creepy sounds in horror movies. So naturally, Izaya was aware of the fact. He hadn’t really previously considered that here was simply no other option until he found himself in that very situation. The sound came from a large room which contained many washing machines and dryers. The sound was clearly coming from one of them, reminiscent of the newspaper photo.

‘There is no way there is a tiny human head banging around in there.’
Just to prove it, he strode right open to the machine, and jerked the circular door open. The only thing inside was a key with the tag ‘boiler room’ on it. With immense relief, he sank to the floor in front of the machine, his knees touching the ground as he rested his head against the machine. He felt the tension drain out of him. Considering everything he’d been seeing so far, it was no stretch of the imagination that there really may have been a head in there.

Outside of the doorway (which was missing a door), he heard the terrified voice of the woman again. He saw her figure running by. Time to follow her again, apparently. Large pipes ran along the ceiling of the narrow hallways. This led towards a metallic door that had a bright red light next to it, similar to the one by the elevator. And now he had the key to go through it.

Inside were huge tanks and there was a fenced in area in the back with a fairly obvious looking lever, another red light above it. Pushing the switch up, he activated the power for the entire hotel. At the same time, he’d also activated the apocalypse if the sudden quaking and flashing lights was anything to go by.

This was not a normal boiler room at all. Izaya proceeded slowly back to the door, being careful with the shaking floor. But once large nuts and bolts began flying at him, he instead began sprinting. He made it back through the door, rubbing at his head.

‘Good thing Shizu-chan never thought to throw impossible-to-see-tiny objects in the dark at me.’

Just the thought made him smile, just a tiny bit. Any comforting sensations that may have accompanied it were quickly snuffed.

He made his way back to the elevator, which was now making a dinging sound, the doors opening and closing on their own. Not that the entire building didn’t feel like a death trap at this point, but the elevator was feeling particularly unsafe. There was nothing for it, though.

Stepping inside, the elevator doors now remained closed. But then, a few loud buzzes and that sinister, deep laughter came about as the elevator rose at a faster speed than any normal elevator moved at. Luckily, it did stop and open for him – he was on that second floor that he had originally tried to go up to when the stairs had collapsed. He emerged from the elevator just in time to have a painting on the wall fly at him. Now this, of course, he could avoid. On both sides of this floor were a few hotel rooms for guests. With the previous detour over, maybe he could get an item, or at least some kind of clues to help.

Leaving the area with the elevator, there were two rooms to the right that proved to be locked, he couldn’t pick them open. Thus, he followed the curve of the walkway that the stairs led up to, and the curve would lead to the other side where there were more guest rooms. Of course, he first had to dodge a few small pictures, and not be taken too off guard by the grandfather clock that had suddenly decided to chime loudly right as he passed it.

Nearby the other rooms was a matching elevator, though it seemed inoperable. There were two chairs with a small table close by, and there lay another newspaper.

Despite the photo being black and white, it was quite surprising that an obviously hacked off arm was there as the front-page photo on a floor that obviously had blood spattered everywhere.

**ANOTHER BODY! POLICE SAY SECOND CHILD WAS “CHOPPED UP LIKE FIREWOOD.”**

What had happened to the kids was not confusing, though there was no information that explained exactly why it had occurred.
The first hotel room did open easily, though the doors were oddly slow to do so. Inside, the room was lit. The room’s décor was mostly green, the double bed large, and an assortment of tables and chairs in the room. On the floor was a very small quilted blanket, a couple of toys, and a few drawings done in crayon. One drawing called attention to itself easily. The paper itself was very faded and torn at the edges. What was drawn and colored on the page was creepy in its own right. Four people stood on grass beneath the sun and clouds. From the right, a girl holding hands with a boy, who held hands with their mother. He mother held hands with what appeared to be a demon. This was presumable the father, or Axe Man, who wore black, had red eyes with a sharp-toothed frown, and was also on fire.

‘I’d be pissed too if I were on fire.’

Regardless, it was another clue that aligned with the other ones.

He entered the other room next door, it was just the same, a mirror image. However, the bedside table had a key on it. That was when the doors slammed behind him, and the lights went out. It was pitch dark, but Izaya could still see well enough to make his way to the table. There was a crash of thunder, accompanied by several lamps and tables flying across the room to hit him, though without success. The light came back on as he snatched the key. Before leaving, words had appeared, carved into the wall above the bed:

GET OUT

“Nice try, Ghost-san. You will have to try much harder than that, I’m afraid~” Izaya smirked. Even taunting other supernatural beings was turning out to be fun.

The key turned out to be for one of the rooms back on the other side that he couldn’t get into before. As he got closer, the ghost of the woman stood in front of it, her hair in her face as she pointed at the door, disappearing before he could reach her. At least he only had to try the one door. Inside, the room seemed to be in greater disrepair than the others, though it still looked the same. The main difference was that there seemed to be a large hole in the floor, barely sufficiently covered by loose boards.

Moving them away and jumping down into the area below was a simple matter. This was a bar and lounge, devoid of any other person, of course. The door did not give at all, as though it were held shut on the other side. Behind the bar, however, there was a dumbwaiter. Not a particularly large one either, but it looked like he could fit if he had to. And unfortunately, it was looking as though he’d have to.

First, however, was yet another newspaper. The photo showed, this time, an obviously dead body with blood spilled out of the head.

MURDER SUICIDE! OCEAN HOUSE KILLER POSSIBLY RESPONSIBLE FOR INFERNO!

‘An inferno…? Did the guy go torch out some other place?’

It didn’t quite add up.

The dumbwaiter, luckily, did indeed accommodate him well enough. He pushed the button inside, the doors shut, and it made its way downward along the concrete wall. The thing was like a mini elevator, most likely it was used to transport food items to the lounge up from the kitchen. And indeed, the doors opened up to reveal what had obviously been the kitchen. The central islands had cooking burners, and various appliances resting along countertops. Large cookware consisting of
heavy pots, pans, and various utensils including knives were spread about the grungy room.

There was a door in the top left corner of the room, and one in the lower right. Izaya made his way around the room, not expecting to find any item that would help him- these ghosts seemed to have been guests, so it was unlikely they’d been in the kitchen. Close to the dumbwaiter he’d crawled out of, a book suddenly fell off of a counter. Picking it up, he saw that it was a diary.

*Help me…*

The woman’s voice echoed inside of his head like before. Help her?

Therese had said an item of the ghost’s could excise it from its haunt. If he found an appropriate item, then he would not only complete the task, but he’d be helping to free this woman from the hotel. If this was her diary…would that count?

‘It’s unlikely the Axe Man would have seen this, though…if I could find something attached to them both…’

The diary must be a clue.

**05/30/1958**-

*Just arrived here, at the Ocean House. We have a week-long holiday here in Santa Monica, and Ed has booked us a room for the hotel’s grand opening. It’s a wonderful place, almost magical. The children have been swimming all afternoon.*

**05/31/1958**-

*The first two days have been almost perfect, except that Ed can’t seem to stop asking about the locket I received from my mother. He seems to think it was sent to me by some other admirer. Ed can be sweet, but sometimes his jealousy can get the better of him. Hopefully he’ll feel better tomorrow.*

**06/01/1958**-

*Sun is out today, not a cloud in the sky. Ed seems a little on edge, keeps guessing as to who my “new boyfriend” is. Silly Ed.*

**06/03/1958**-

*There was a picnic for the hotel guests this morning…quite a grand affair. Ed is in a dark mood. I don’t know what I can do to reassure him that he is my one and only love. The only time he seemed to brighten up was when he was speaking to the groundskeeper. Boys and their tools…*

**06/04/1958**-

*We only have two days left, and thank God we’re finally going home. Ed won’t speak to me or the children, and I’ve found him more than once in the bathroom holding the locket and staring at it. I’m afraid he’s suffered some sort of breakdown. I’ve told him we can go home, but he just shakes his head. He won’t look at me. I just want to go home.*

**06/05/1958**-

*Ed left early this morning, and I haven’t seen him since. If I haven’t seen him in another hour, I’m going to call the hotel manager. Against my better wishes, Ed Jr. went to look for him in the*
basement. I’m going to send Tiffany down to fetch him, if…wait…someone is knocking at the door.

Oh my God, Ed is covered in blood…come to kill me…I locked myself in the bathroom…he’s gone crazy…he keeps shouting that we’ll be together forever and he’ll never let me go…someone, somehow, please

The writing descended into illegible scratching and trailed off the page. A horrific fate, to be sure.

‘Then that’s what it is – the locket of hers. And it must still be here somewhere.’

Closing the diary, it was clear that the woman’s goal was to point out the existence of the locket to him. So then, he’d need to find it, and it would probably be in another guest room. Considering the overall size of the place, there had to be many more accessible from elsewhere.

He’s coming!

And there was the Axe Man’s, well, Ed’s laughter again. Izaya watched some of the pots and began hovering in the air while flames from the gas stovetops sporadically flared up. It wasn’t that dodging would be hard, it’s just that there was limited space to do so, and a seemingly unlimited number of weapons at Ed’s disposal.

Izaya dropped to the ground, and ducked behind one of the big counters. The door that was nearest to the dumbwaiter (which refused to open again) was close to him. He’d just have to shoot over to it, break it down if he had to, and make his way into that next room.

The plan failed at the breaking down the door part. Despite his vampiric strength, the door just wouldn’t budge at all.

A pan narrowly missed his head as he turned back around to phase the barrage of kitchen weaponry and pulled out his knife. It should be enough to defend with, or so he told himself.

It was then that a figure came crashing through the door on the opposite side. Not just any figure. Between the shooting flames, he could just make out the shape of Zen, who also happened to be hurtling towards him at an insane speed.

Izaya pushed himself back against the door as if to brace himself from an imminent attack, or at least some kind of aggressive force.

Instead, he was simply pressed harder into the door as two hands slammed against it on either side of his head. Another head was practically nuzzled into the left side of his neck, and he felt a leg in between his own, the knee a bit too close between them for comfort as it pushed hard against the door.

Meanwhile, in his state of shock, large cookware continued to attack and forcefully struck Zen’s back which resulted in low grunts sounding out near Izaya’s ear. Izaya ignored this to the best of his ability, and instead used his knife to block incoming utensils which included large chef knives.

After just another moment, the door behind him finally gave way, and the force caused the door to collapse back onto the floor of the next room, some kind of empty storage room. Izaya fell with it as it slid a bit further into the room. Luckily, he’d held on to his knife.

Perhaps it would still be possible to ignore the body that was still pressed on top of him.

Not likely.
The sound of clanging pots and pans began to quiet down in the kitchen. What did not quiet down was the sound of blood rushing through his ears, and his increase rate of breathing.

Still, Izaya did not forget the notes that had been left for him and how this Kindred had to be mocking him in some form. As Zen began to lift himself back up, Izaya clutched his knife in his fist, and drove it towards the taller man.

It seemed he’d expected as much however, as his wrist was grabbed quickly and easily, and was pinned back down on the floor. The pressure caused his hand to loosen and release the knife.

Izaya huffed, annoyed.

“Why do you persist in mocking me?” he questioned, a genuine curiosity ringing in his voice. “You seem to imply that you know me in some way, but if you did, you’d know that I don’t require assistance in my tasks, nor am I the type to cross,” he paused, and looked directly at Zen, who still had dark shades over his eyes. He found it strangely hard to focus. “You should already know that I’m a monster.”

Zen only smiled. Was he trying to piss him off?

“I know well what and who you are, Shinjuku’s informant,” Izaya tensed under him. “I know you were called one of Tokyo’s monsters and are not in the least bit helpless. I know you grew up with twin sisters, I know you went to Raira Academy, I know about your past dealings in the underground with gangs and your own agendas. I know about what happened to that girl and thus what happened to you. I know that you’re top-notch in information dealing and that you’ve used it for justice and to help people in these past few years,” a hand found its way to Izaya’s face and held it there, a thumb stroking his cheek.

“I know you like to help children and animals, even out in the rain. I know you searched hard for Kasuka and Shizuo Heiwajima for years, even though you’ve hated the other labeled monster. I know you accepted that human side of you, and it changed you forever.

“I know as well that if Nines hadn’t spoken out at your hearing, then I would have. I know that until you finish this insane task LaCroix has you on, your continued existence is not guaranteed – when you finish it and report to him, you’ll be considered worthwhile and at that point…as I’ve said before…we would be safe to speak then,” Zen stared into Izaya’s eyes. Said informant was beginning to shake underneath him.

“So just…don’t ask about me and we can talk Downtown soon enough. Nines will watch for you.”

Zen got up, and headed back toward the kitchen and the other door there. Before he could leave, however, Izaya got back onto his feet, snatching up his knife. He’d had about enough of this bullshit.

“Just who the hell are you?” the question came out in a threatening whisper, though it was based in frustration. “You know all this shit that no one could possibly know. You’re familiar, but I don’t know you,” he raised his arm and pointed his knife at him. He hated to be the one lacking in information. Even worse, it was being held over him.

Zen paused at the door. “I’m sorry, I…I shouldn’t tell you, for your sake…” He grasped he doorknob.

“Didn’t you say you knew I could handle myself?” Izaya snapped, now borderlining on fury. “Are you trying to scare me? I’m not afraid of anyone, and especially not you.”

Zen turned around, facing Izaya again. “Of all people…you were the one who never was,” Zen
sighed, and resigned himself to something. “I am glad that hasn’t changed.”

Izaya ran towards him, knife at the ready. He took a swipe at Zen, who was too close to the wall to fully dodge it. His shirt was torn, and he’d been cut across his chest, horizontally. Before Izaya could dodge and keep a distance, Zen grabbed his jacket, turned them around, and pinned Izaya against the wall.

Izaya growled, his anger apparent. “Stop talking to me like we’ve met – I wouldn’t forget this.”

“That’s just it, we certainly have met…many, many times. This is nostalgic, really.”

“Fuck you!”

Zen smiled, showing his fangs and teeth. Chuckling, he leaned in and pressed his forehead against Izaya’s gently. A warmth seeped into him.

“Sure…anytime.”

Izaya froze up. How had he walked right into that? This guy was throwing him off completely – he had lost his temper, and all of his control. There was only one other person that had ever existed who could do this to him.

Izaya’s eyes widened…it couldn’t be.

Was this the answer he was looking for all these years? Behind those sunglasses, underneath that black hair…Shizuo?

Was this his…was this Shizu-chan?

Zen saw his face, and smiled. “When you’re done with the warehouse…meet me Downtown. Sun’s gonna be up in a bit, so you should hurry,” he leaned back. “I can tell you this…”

After Zen(?) said just one more thing, he released Izaya and left the room quickly.

Izaya felt himself slide down the wall. It felt like an eternity before he could get up and move again, though really it was about five minutes. Even so, he’d confirmed something – something very important. That last thing replayed in his mind…quite against his will.

もう一度会えることが実に奇跡だな。通常にいらないんだって知ってるが、俺がいつも守ってくれるぞ。。。臨也君。

～

Cities:

*Vampires are inherently creatures of the city, though some claim this is a matter of decision rather than nature. Urban landscapes offer everything a Kindred could want: near-infinite supplies of*
blood, enough contact to satisfy the most social of vampires (and enough seclusion to satisfy the most isolationist), and refuge from the werewolves who linger in the rural lands beyond the city lights.

Chapter End Notes

The Japanese:

"It's truly a miracle that we could meet once more. I know you don't usually need help, but I'll always protect you...Izaya-kun."
Chapter Notes

It so feels so good to be back~!! Below, I will include the explanation on where I’ve been. I deleted the temporary chapter 10 and have replaced it with the real deal~

Thanks for all your patience, and for the kind words I received. I have discovered recently that I have detached myself from emotions kind of a lot actually. I never knew so I feel disorientated about it. So…this is now another source that I consider helpful for me in trying to express things exactly the way I want.
And heads up, lots of Japanese this chapter. Translations at the bottom. (Yes, I opted for English punctuation for it).

As for what happened:

I have always had a variety of anxiety disorders, and later depression too. My life as a kid/teen was generally not helpful with this. Suffice to say, I’ve always…pushed through it, or staved it off with medication alone and…well, inevitably, eventually, it came to a head. A couple days after I posted the last chapter, I was hospitalized for a week on an inpatient psych floor (no electronics or many other things allowed. I thought I could try writing in there on paper but…it just wouldn’t come).
I underwent intensive outpatient therapy for a couple of weeks but have now returned to work.
Although I’m doing quite well now, I still will get chronic episodes or bouts of either anxiety or depression or a mixture of them- it can be quite debilitating. Still working on getting the right medicines and correct amounts of them for me. So as you can tell, I’ve slowed in my writing a bit.

If you are not very familiar with anxiety or don't know the details much, I recommend reading up on it, if only because so many people suffer from it and if not yourself, then it's quite likely you know someone who does.

Please take care of yourselves and if you're struggling with something yourself, please seek help. <3

Thank you for your support and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His face was flushed with the heat of the blood that rushed up into it. He had to have had some weird, messed up dream again, right? Perhaps he’d secretly consumed acid (drugs were everywhere in America, right?) and was simply trapped in a horrible hallucination in his head. Izaya closed his eyes, hands pressed to his face in an effort to slow his breathing.

Actually, he wasn’t sure if being drugged would be preferable to reality or not.
He sat against the wall, knees drawn up, and red face still in his hands as shiver made its way up his spine.

He’d found him…Shizuo. And in fact, he’d found him even sooner than he thought.

Shizu-chan called himself Zen, and he looked different. He couldn’t be 100% certain that it was truly him…until he heard his voice speaking their native tongue.

He truly sounded different speaking English…really, both of them did. It made sense, linguistically. He’d come to this city more than once as well in his pursuit of the brothers, yet he had no inkling that this was the city where Shizu-chan had gone off to. Had they missed each other by chance? Or…was it the opposite of their old cat and mouse games?

Shizuo didn’t look a day older than last he’d seen him in Ikebukuro. He had to have come here purposefully.

But he’d been right – Shizu-chan was dead…just not in the way he’d originally thought. Despite that, the warmth of his hands lingered where they’d grabbed him. He refused to think further about the close proximity of Shizuo’s face, how close the lips had been to his. Then the mere centimeters that Shizuo’s body had been to his own…how he could just barely see his eyes behind those shades – and how they had stared into his unwaveringly, piercing through his defenses and how that made his own body quake so severely.

He still felt some after effects of the shaking and he swallowed harshly. It didn’t help that another phrase from before repeated inside his head.

“Sure…anytime.”

Before, he’d immediately assumed that the man had been trying to further irritate him, mock him, try to weaken him further, perhaps.

‘But was that the truth? Did he…does Shizuo really want…want to…’

He felt the heat in his face grow stronger, as his body and limbs grew heavy. There was a strange kind of jittering inside his chest with the occasional random jolt, making his breath grow rapid again. At the same time, it was as though there were various shapes and sizes of super bouncy balls wreaking havoc inside.

Another strange sensation was that he felt as though his stomach was somehow dropping down inside of his body perpetually.

No, that was enough. Such…distractions were liable to get him killed. He had to ignore this. Even though finding his Shizu-chan frequently occupied his mind for the last 5 years, it felt as though it had all happened far too quickly. Somehow, in the last 20 minutes or so, he’d managed to feel a variety of emotions that he’d not felt in a long time.

Not since little Shizuka had he felt that number of emotions, nor the sheer intensity of them. It began from the moment she told him to call her Shizu-chan…innocently not having a clue what that name meant to him at the time. Still…without her, he might have given up his search for Shizuo a long time ago. He owed her a lot; his own life, his wellbeing, as well as indirectly helping him to find Shizuo. Most of all, he could never make up for the fact that he’d been the root cause of taking her life away. He only hoped that the way he’d been living his life and now unlife would be somewhat suitable as a grain of penance for all that he’d done.

Izaya began to shake off the shock of seeing Shizu-chan again after all that time, just when he’d
started to accept his death, that he was gone forever. But there he’d come barging into his unlife; so very typical of him. The ex-bartender brought with him a whirlwind of confusion in several ways.

Worse, Izaya still wasn’t sure of Shizu-chan’s exact intentions. Words could have strong effects, but they were proof of nothing.

He could not risk his heart again.

…

So much for ignoring distractions.

Izaya rubbed at his face, and got up. It was probably true that he didn’t have too much time left of that night. He ran his hands through his hair, trying to gather his wits.

Once he’d finally managed to compose himself, he made his way back into the room they’d fallen into earlier. Nothing much special about it, except for the large square hole in the far wall – it seemed to be an incredibly large vent. It was no task to jump into and begin crawling through it. After a couple of turns, he saw and illuminated room ahead, bathed in a red light, and again there was the woman’s voice.

*Be careful!*

At the end of the vent, he saw why.

It was an elevator shaft. He was at the ground floor, and the elevator itself could be seen above. The red light across the way matched the same ones that stretched up to the ceiling. The light was on the opposite wall from him, in a little nook that was narrow, but not too small. A ladder leading all the way up the shaft was there next to the light. He’d just have to cross the short distance to the ladder.

Unsurprisingly, the smell of the air was far mustier and unsettled than anywhere else.

‘At least it’ll be easy to get out,’ the *completely* calm fledgling jumped out of his crawling space and onto the floor. Before he could step onto the platform on the opposite side, a loud clanging sounded from overhead.

Izaya’s eyes widened as he looked up and the elevator car above began to fall at an alarming speed, sparks emitting from where metal met metal as the screeching sound rapidly came closer.

Leaping ahead of him at the ladder, Izaya made sure to move before fear could freeze him. He turned his head away from the elevator car’s direction and covered his ears as it inevitably slammed onto the floor, kicking up dust and dirt.

‘That bastard really could have killed me this time,’ he thought with a scowl. Well, he’d just be giving payback to the specter by being the reason Ed would be exorcised. And hopefully the woman could find peace upon being set free.

Izaya climbed up the metal ladder, and passed a couple of the red light before he found an open elevator door which seemed to lead into a hallway of many more guest rooms. The décor matched the style from the entrance – neutral colors with simple designs, and dim lamp lights on the wall. Each guest room had a number next to the door. Many of the guest rooms wouldn’t open, and even the ones that did contained nothing of use. One hallway had a dead end made of collapsed wood and other material that protruded through the ceiling and into the floor. Wall lights would shatter, throwing some hallways into complete darkness occasionally.
One very short hallway ended with a window, from which the light of the nearby lighthouse shined through along with the occasional lightning strikes. On the side was a small table with decorative plants on it though it also had a newspaper.

MURDERS UNSOLVED! MOTHER OR FATHER COULD HAVE BEEN OCEAN HOUSE KILLER.

The photo showed both of them alive, though there was something inherently creepy about the way they looked. Something about the eyes and the fact that it looked more like individual photos of them had been cut out and then pasted together in an odd way.

Continuing down this hallway led to a dark area without any lighting at all. Izaya could only rely on occasional flashes from the lighthouse and the lightning.

That was when, of course, a lamp from another small table shot straight at him – he wasn’t able to dodge this time, but he could block it a bit with his arms. Predictably, it shattered against him, though he only sustained minor cuts that would heal quickly.

He hadn’t missed things being launched at him. Besides, it was beginning to remind him of a… certain…

He could think about it later.

Running through the various hallways with different amounts of light as random objects flew at him, Izaya hastily dodged even a guest room door that had exploded to pieces in front of him.

The woman was running ahead of him and he could only catch a glimpse before she’d turn a corner, faded shrieks following her. She eventually led him to another guest room, although this one was at least twice as large as the others he’d seen. There wasn’t anything else special about it except that at the other end, several wooden beams protruded down from the ceiling.

Nowhere to go but up.

On the third floor, it was plain to see that this was the highest level being that the roof was almost completely gone, the light rays emanating from the lighthouse spinning overhead. The lightning and thunder were beginning to fade into the distance.

What happened next was best described as ghostly, sparking purple fire spilling out from much of what was left of the walls. The only difference between this fire and real fire was really just the purple coloring of it. It was even about as hot, thus likely damaging as typical fire. Making his way through the room and into another hallway, he was blocked from all routes by the fire and was left with just one hallway to go down. The fire would sporadically burst out from walls and now the floor too. Old pipes from the walls burst through, releasing hot steam.

Izaya knew it was hot by finding out the hard way. He held back an annoyed expression as he heard the mad cacklings of Ed from elsewhere.

Finally, there was just one room waiting at the end of the hall, and the only other path was again blocked by fire. From the outside, it was easy to tell that this had likely been the most expensive guest room in the whole place, room 310.

Opening the door, the entirety of the room’s floor was gone, and Izaya had a very good view of the lighthouse from there. He was only able to take a few steps in.

Izaya sighed. “Some support beams here and there, a few planks along the floor and wall…
obviously burnt up a long time ago,” he crossed his arms, thinking of his next move. There wasn’t really anywhere in the hotel to return to right then, after all. In order to escape, jumping back down from there to the second floor would work, but he hadn’t really found what he needed yet.

That was when everything changed. The entire room rippled in front of his eyes, and suddenly it was completely back together. Pristine, as though it was never used, never burned, never damned to be forgotten. Even stranger was the fact that sunlight streamed into the room through the hand-crafted stained windows.

At first, Izaya had flinched in reaction, but relaxed as he confirmed that this was simply just a memory…somehow. Or perhaps some kind of psychic imprint on the building? Maybe this would be best unknown.

There was a song that had begun playing from somewhere in the back corner of the room. It was slow-paced, and sounded almost like elevator music but it was deep, comforting, and a woman’s low voice was singing.

“…pink at dawn…”

The décor, like the rest of the hotel, was similar to what could be seen in the main lobby. Mostly shades of green and other neutral colors, smaller chairs and tables spread across the large room away from the large bed.

“If I lived forever…”

Books were stacked on the floor in a corner, a pricey vase sat on a coffee table. It was easy to imagine a couple sitting in the chairs, a table with used coffee cups on top of it next to them, casual and loving laughter shared in their private space made for their own world, where just the two of them existed.

Izaya just stood there by the chairs, facing the window. His expression was solemn as his eyes glazed over.

“We’re pilots watching the stars…”

Izaya shook his head. In the strange haze of sunlight, he’d lost himself to the atmosphere of the room. He wanted to stay there a bit longer; this would be the last time he’d see the sunlight, after all.

“And this time, I know it,” he muttered to himself. On his last night as a mortal, he didn’t know that the daylight he saw that day was going to be his last. It was almost a comfort to be fully aware of it this time. As though he could have a feeling of choice.

“It’s just the sound…of you and me…”

In the far corner, the exact source of the music was clear. It sat on top of a wooden stand – a small record turntable. It was only large enough to play 45s, and one was spinning the song in the air right then. Next to it was a tiny side table, atop which was a pendant necklace.

That had to be it.

Picking it up, Izaya placed it into a coat pocket gently.

The room changed again. He was now standing on one of the only other spots in the present-day version of the room that had some semblance of flooring. There was the lighthouse again, not even close to a proper replacement for the sun.
Even so, now was the time to jump through to the second floor. There was no more phantom fire, and he was able to use the elevator shaft to make his way back to the main lobby. Of course, things were thrown at him with little pause, but it was nothing troublesome. Standing in the doorway of the front door, seconds away from his exit, Izaya turned around, and cupped his hands around his mouth, and shouted as loudly as he could.

“MR-ED-GHOST-SAAAAAN~!!!!” he took a breath. “ENJOY HELL, OKAY~? SAY ‘HI’ TO YODOGIRI-SAN FOR ME!”

With that, he twirled out of the hotel. Finally, he could go back into the city and away from ghosts. Probably.

He assumed.

~

It wasn’t a difficult task to get back to Santa Monica. The sewers were easy to navigate. What was an issue was that he was having to play an avoidance game for the last couple of hours, hiding in the sewers as well as the shadows of alleyways.

Shiki’s guys. Awakusu-kai. Apparently, they’d planned some kind of raid that night to try to find him as there were a lot of men sent out onto the streets. From what he could overhear, if they were to find Izaya, he wouldn’t exactly end up having a good time.

He’d need them to retreat by sunrise. That or get a better chance to retreat to his apartment. Since the entrance to it was in an alleyway and the men were diligently searching those as well, it was proving difficult to get back.

He used the shadows to his advantage, and waited to find a chance. He wouldn’t be able to get back to Therese that night. This was just taking far too long so she’d just have to wait.

~

Shizuo sat in his club. Well, their club. He and Kaz both ran the place, and they were able to make a rather decent income from it. The place was fairly large, with a very high ceiling. This was to make a second floor possible. There were two sides, not connected to each other. On the left side were stairs leading up to a second floor that provided more seating, tables, and the ability to overlook the first floor. It was…advised that anyone who wished to smoke should do so here.

The first floor contained a circular bar right in the middle. Surrounding it along the walls were a good number of booths for patrons to sit in. These areas were slightly elevated, one would have to go up just a couple of steps. At the back was a stage from which the music and dance lighting came from. It was like a very wide slice of pie – the back of the stage was a corner, and then the front of it fanned out. This provided more room for dancers in the area surrounding it.

On the left next to the stairway that led to the upper lounge was a short hallway for restrooms and the back door. On the right side of the place was another stairway with a sign usually blocking it for ‘VIP’s. This really just meant it was for Kaz and Shizuo along with anyone they wanted to bring up there. It was their office where they worked on the business side of things. Music could certainly be heard from the club outside of the small room, but when they were there, they’d do much of the work during non-business hours anyway. Just outside of the office was a seating area, though it was much smaller and rather unnoticeable being on the second floor.

The entire place had a theme of dark blue and some darker red colors along with the occasional
snake designs going across the walls and on the dark flooring.

They’d named it The Asp Hole.

They knew it would attract patrons who even just wanted to see what the place was, and who the hell it was that had named their place obviously for the sheer amusement of it. It had been an accident really, an amusing mistake on Shizuo’s part when he was still learning English. So, when Issac had given them the place (and they later insisted on properly buying it from him), that was the name they decided to go with.

Their closing hours were well on their way, and Shizuo sat in the upper lounge area having a smoke, a few customers sitting alone or with a friend and a drink. There were still a few at the bar as well, a couple of people dancing to song that was on the mellow side.

Across from him, someone sat down. Kaz.

They stared at each other for a while until Shizuo had to look away. Damn.

”兄さん,” he began. “ちょっと話があるんだけどな。”

Ah…here it was, the conversation he was dreading; the Japanese was a clear indicator. He knew why they speak in their mother tongue; due to the topic at hand the conversation would naturally contain rather sensitive information.

Shizuo knew it would be coming when he’d spilled what had happened at the hotel to his brother. After all, he himself was aware of the ramifications of what he’d done so he knew he’d need to tell Kaz. At that time, Kaz had simply looked at him and pointed out that they’d be opening their club shortly.

Of course, he’d looked perfectly calm at the time, but that wouldn’t make this any easier.

With a sigh, Shizuo simply nodded as he opted to stare at the table instead of his brother. “分かった。”

Kaz rested his arms on the table, linking his hands together and leaning forward a bit. The movement caused Shizuo to look at him. “知って通りって分かってるよ。僕たちはもう何度もこれって話したけど、明らかに、単に話することが足りないな。”

“それはただ…” Shizuo’s expression was scrunched up as he tried to think of a way to explain himself. “あいつを一人のままにすることができなかったぞ,” Shizuo ran a hand through his hair in mild discomfort. “その場所なら。”

Kaz sighed. He was already resigned to accept that kind of answer. Still. He had to try to be harsh about it.

”よくわかっているじゃないさ？兄さんと臨也さんの関係を発見すると、あいつの命が没収されるぞ!” Kaz refrained from slamming his hands onto the table, but felt free to raise his voice. His brother needed to understand – he could have destroyed all of them. “臨也さんだけではなく、また僕たちも危険にさらされる。今でもラックはもう知ってることが可能性があるよ。”

Shizuo couldn’t help but feel the guilt. “俺はあの時、動く前たださっぱり思わなかったけど。”

At that, Kaz couldn’t help a small smile and tension began to leave him. “さすがにな…,” it was a
characteristic Shizuo had never quite lost. Depending on the situation, his brother would still charge right in without thinking of consequences or anything, for that matter.

“別に我慢できないそうだね。兄さん，” Kaz leaned back in his seat, and closed his eyes just briefly as if settling on a choice. “臨也さんはあまり感謝しないのに、あいつも守り続けば大丈夫かもな。”

Shizuo straightened up a bit, a hint of excitement cross his face. “カスカ…まじか？そういうことは何故大丈夫だと思ってるさ?”

“臨也さんのことを守らなくてはいけないことがコントロールできないだろうな。だから、僕たちの秘密を守るために、彼を見守っても良いじゃん。自分の存在を絶対にみんなからうまく隠すならば、または群衆に溶け込まれば、この状況が救難できるはずだろう。”

Shizuo allowed himself to relax completely against the table as he practically laid on it in relief. “よかったな…カズ、ご面倒かけてごめんな。”

Kaz shook his head. “謝らなくていいよ。兄さん。分かってるからさ，” he let a smile cross his face. “こういう風に、臨也さんの安全性を保証されるべきだね。更に、それはまた、自分のことがコントロールできるはずだろうな。”

They both stood up; it was about time to close the place up for the day. With things settled, Shizuo was feeling much better. He trapped his unsuspecting brother in a hug.

‘I should have seen that coming,’ kaz thought, relaxing into the hold and returning it.

They parted, though Kaz didn’t release his brother quite yet. “兄さん、僕はただ君を幸せになって欲しいんだぞ。だからこそ、兄さんに支えてあげるんだよ。”

Shizuo had known this…it was what he wanted for Kaz as well. Still, the affirmation worked wonders on his soul. “カズ…こちらこそ…ありがとうな。”

They shared a small laugh together, both satisfied with the result of the conversation, and feeling much better. They were a pair of siblings who were lucky in that they were more or less always able to get along well.

Kaz nodded to him in silent understanding, and went downstairs to relieve the remaining employees and help shut everything down.

Shizuo felt warm and comforted. He wasn’t naïve enough to think that it’d all be smooth sailing from here, of course. Even so, he was feeling lucky.

He had been lucky he could get so close to his flea. It was lucky he could help to protect him and talk with him, however violently the flea had reacted. He’d smelled just as Shizuo remembered. It was a relief to hear his voice, even.

‘Hm. Now that he’s an actual bloodsucker, Flea is an incredibly fitting name now，’ Shizuo chuckled at his own comparison.

The Flea’s reactions had all been downright adorable in his own way. Shizuo didn’t know how things would go with them from there. It would be better not to even be seen by Izaya until he could make it Downtown. So long as he was safe, that was all Shizuo really needed. Really.

But still.
'Ah, gotta remember to get some bleach and hair dye.'

With a smile, he enjoyed another cigarette before he joined his brother in closing shop.

Tomorrow would be another night of possibilities, after all.

~

It had taken Izaya an uncomfortably long time to get back into his apartment. Fortunately, however, the members of Awakusu-kai had begun retreating about an hour before sunrise.

‘I’d rather not spend the day in the sewers, dodging sewage workers and rats, thanks,’ he thought. But now able to wind down, he cleaned up, opted to drink a blood pack, and settled down to rest.

Naturally, intruding thoughts wrestled him into submission quite easily as he fought for sleep.

Despite the warmth creeping into his body caused by the memories of that night, he told himself to stop thinking about it.

A weight had been removed from him so suddenly. He’d finally solved a mystery that haunted him for years. Even so, another sort of heaviness had emerged weigh on his mind and heart.

It didn’t matter what Shizu-chan had said. Izaya had unknowingly allowed himself to be broken once already. He’d been scared at the time that he’d never recover. As it was, he’d been changed for good.

No, it was too risky. No matter what Shizu-chan felt, no matter what me might say or do the next time he saw him, he couldn’t allow anything to faze him. He’d have to avoid him as much as possible from here.

‘Of course, that won’t be so simple but I’m sure as hell going to try,’ he thought, resolving himself.

Hi thoughts and emotions spun around in a haze of confusion, wariness, denial, and apprehension.

It didn’t matter that he still felt ghostly echoes of the burning hands that had captured his wrists. It didn’t matter that he felt his heart rate increase as he thought of it. It didn’t matter that the actions of his cardiovascular system made no sense considering what he was.

It didn’t matter how Shizuo had looked at him, nor did it matter what his voice did to the strength of his muscles.

It especially didn’t matter whatever he felt or didn’t feel for Shizuo.

Shizu-chan would not surprise him any longer.

Shizu-chan could not affect him in any way.

Shizu-chan had no say in this.

Shizu-chan was not interesting.

He wasn’t attractive.

He wasn’t worth thinking about anymore.

He was…nothing.
Izaya closed his eyes.

These things would not change.

.
.
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His last thought before he slept was of blonde hair.

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His dreams featured the scent of cigarette smoke.

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.
.

All he could remember of his dreams upon waking was that devilishly handsome smile, accompanied by overwhelmingly intoxicating laughter.

Not that it mattered, of course.

~

Auspex:

Reveals the auras of the living & undead within a distance depending on the strength of the skill.

Celerity:

Allows Kindred to move at incredible speeds.

Presence:

Victims suffer a chance to be Mesmerized, a penalty to Strength, Wits, & Perception, and a reduced rate of attack.
The Japanese: To make this easier, I will proceed the translations with K for Kasuka, and S for Shizuo to keep straight who said what. (Does the inclusion of the Japanese seem like a needless procedure? Eh, maybe, but well...it is what it is~). As I’ve said before, I'm no native. So if someone with better skills has corrections/suggestions for me, feel free to let me know.

K: Brother, we need to talk.

S: Got it.

K: I know you know this. We've talked about it so many times but apparently, that simply isn't enough.

S: It's just...I couldn't leave him alone. Not in that place.

K: You understand, right? If they find out about the relationship between you and Izaya-san, then his life is forfeit! It's not just Izaya-san, but our lives are in danger too. Even now, the possiblity exists that LaCroix is already aware of your connection.

S: At the time I just didn't think at all before I moved.

K: That's just like you... It seems like you can't be very patient, right brother? Even though Izaya-san won't likely appreciate it, I think it's probably alright if you keep protecting him.

S: Kasuka...are you serious? Why do you think it'll be ok?

K: You can't control your need to protect Izaya-san, right? So, in order to protect this secret of ours, it's fine if you watch out for him. If you hide your presence well, if you blend into the crowd, this situation should be salvageable.

S: What a relief...Kaz, I'm sorry for causing you trouble.

K: You don't need to apologize, brother. I get it. In this way, Izaya-san's safety should be guaranteed. Moreover, you should be able to control yourself too.

Brother, I only want for you to be happy. That's why I support you.

S: Kazu...likewise...thanks.
Welcome once again~!

I had a good time writing this one, so I hope you all have a good time reading it! Thank you so much for reviewing - it gives me inner strength!
Thank you so much for reading, as always~!

Next time, some proper diner destruction.

~

*Three Years Ago*

~

“Brother, you are the strangest Toreador,” Kasuka was laughing, which was a rare thing for most to see. It was true, the clan’s typical characteristics did not exactly fit his natural personality. Still, since his Sire was a Toreador, it really couldn’t be helped. As such, it was also the case that some of the characteristics did also influence him as well – which could lead to interesting situations now and again.

Such as the topic at hand.

“It’s just been kinda boring around here, Kaz, you know?”

Kaz had to try very hard to hide his amusement. “You know that doesn’t sound like the old you at all, right brother? If anything, well – I’m sure you can guess.”

“Yeah…” Zen sighed. “It’s just that some other Kindred have been talkin’ about those rumors; the ones about those other sects coming around, yeah?”

Kaz nodded. This was true, the two huge sects were once again attempting to gain territory and invade California and the LA area, which many local Kindred were very wary about. They’d been told by Kindred such as Jack and Nines about it now and again.

“So, I just thought – maybe if I could find some of them and just beat them up or something…they’d back off?”

Kaz knew his brother had changed quite a bit, even before he’d come to the US. But after his Embrace, his behavior and personality continued to evolve. These days, he seemed to have an interesting mixture of multiple influences from time to time.

“That still doesn’t really explain how you managed to get lost in the Hollywood sewers and then actually find your way to where much of the Nosferatu have made their home,” Kaz placed a hand on his brother’s shoulder as if to express his incredulity at the situation.

“Well it didn’t stink like…” Zen cut himself off.
Anyway, it wasn’t like they were that hard to find.”

“As you say, brother,” Kaz was still smiling. “The most interesting part about it is you managed to get on their good side, really. As I think I told you, our two clans don’t really get along well to say the least.”

Zen shrugged, “I dunno, that Mitnick guy was alright,” he ran a hand through his hair as he thought about it. “Besides, even though I remember some of them saying shit to me, they didn’t try to kill me, so I didn’t really care.”

“Hmmm, alright, I see your point. Still, it is impressive; I certainly wouldn’t have just waltzed right in, but it does sound a lot like you, brother, as I said.”

~

It was over the span of the last couple weeks that Zen had managed to get on the local Nosferatus’ good side. It was interesting, if nothing else. Although he nearing a high level of fluency in English thanks to all of the efforts of his brother and some others, the more he spoke and the more people he spoke to, the more rapidly he’d been improving.

He’d run into the Nosferatu called Mitnick before anyone else. Within the winding, dark caverns hidden beneath even the main sewers, there were piles of what most would consider junk strewn about in the slippery and grimy tunnels.

Thanks to his advanced senses, Zen didn’t face any issue making his way through when he’d stumbled upon the place despite the darkness and the confusing tunnels and rickety bridges over dirty water that he’d had to cross. Along many pathways were string lights glowing in various colors. Additionally, some neon signs sat on the ground, still lit up that were clearly from the local area in Hollywood. These light sources weren’t in the way, they just helped with the lighting and made for useful landmarks in the event one got lost.

The strangest part about the place was the noises. They were creepy. There were the typical sounds of dripping and running water, the whistling sound of air, and the echoes of small rocks shifting. These sounds didn’t help to soothe his nerves in the near silence, however, they weren’t the source of what was starting to put him on edge.

“You’re in for it now…”

There were nearly undetectable whispers echoing off the walls. A normal Kine wouldn’t be able to hear them. Zen began to feel envious of that. He began to feel little chills run ever-so slowly up his spine. Whether the temperature had truly decreased or not was debatable.

“Try the corpse in the oven with peppers and fur…”

Zen stopped in one of the tunnels, trying to watch out for any possible attacks. He hid in the shadow made by a large neon sign in the shape of a star.

The worst part was that he couldn’t tell if the words actually made any sense; was the English just too advanced, or was it as nonsensical and disquieting as he thought it was?

“Maggots love you. Trust me.”

In between some of the strange statements would come dry cackling. Zen constantly checked over his shoulder, as it seemed as though the soft laughter came from right behind his ear. Yet there was no one to be seen. It had the tone of a person teetering on the edge of madness; just a small exhale
from falling into insanity.

Zen began trembling despite himself. Now he leaned against the rough and slimy wall just for support. He’d have to try and get back up to move forward. He couldn’t just be squatting there forever.

“Look at it, bent like a calf for the butcher.”

That settled it. He needed to go, and fast. He couldn’t help but start running from there, though there were some parts of the terrain that would slow him down. Still, the voices followed.

“Cemetery run-off congealing at the door…”

The was the unhinged laughter again, nearly freezing his legs in place.

“Ask about the free arsenic.”

Finally, he emerged into a wider space. Mercifully, the voices stopped as they trailed off with laughter.

The larger and more open area seemed to lead into a few simple ‘hallways’ within the cave structure. Along these were several wooden doors worked in around the rock. Many had string lights surrounding them, and crudely made mailboxes.

One door was open, and Zen could easily hear whoever was inside talking to himself. It was a low voice, and it gave the impression that the person either had cotton in their mouth, or perhaps just too many teeth to speak around. The occasional snort could be heard between sentences as well. At first, Zen thought to avoid whoever this was – he may have been hearing voices but talking to oneself didn’t indicate that this person would be the epitome of mental health either.

Once he heard the rapid sound of typing along with some clicks, however, it made a lot more sense. Like many things, these sounds reminded him of a particular individual that he was futilely trying to never think about.

“What the-? Haha, oh, you did not just try to run a trace on me,” an amused chuckle echoed throughout the stone room. “Alright, take that…oh yeah, hope you backed up that server tonight. Boss is gonna be real pissed when his mom starts getting love letters from porn sites.”

Zen didn’t feel like hovering near the door would be a good idea, so he simply decided he’d wait for a good opening to appear and say something. This guy still hadn’t turned around, though he was clearly Kindred of some kind. He slim, and overall unhealthy looking. What didn’t help that image was the fact that his ears were pointed, and he seemed to be completely bald.

“Oh, my god…are you kidding me? What are you using for security down there, a Trash-80?” the guy raised his voice, clearly annoyed. “Ughhh! Guys, it’s called encryption. This is just too easy. I’d let you off the hook, but stupidity always brings out the asshole in me.”

“Uh…”scuse me, you got a minute?” Zen tried to get the guy to stop typing away and turn around, but it wasn’t working.

“Uh? Just one minute…” It was possible he had heard Zen, but was just simply that he was distracted. “No, no, no, nothing to worry about…just a harmless e-mail…not a self-replicating embedded virus or anything…” between snorts, he began laughing with some kind of glee. “Wow, you really opened it. I can’t believe you just opened it. What kind of a freakin’ idiot just opens it?”
“Should I come back later…?”

Finally, the man turned back around and faced him. “Ah, right. Aren’t you one of the newbies from a couple years back? Zen, was it? Toreador?”

That was odd. Not usually the response he got when meeting someone these days. The guy’s bright orange eyes threw him off a bit, along with his tightly odd outfit, and sharply structured face. Still, in the last few years and back in Tokyo, he’d seen weird enough shit.

“Yeah, actually. Who are you?”

Well I was watching you coming through the sewer systems- I’m impressed you made it down here the way you did. It doesn’t even seem like you were looking for us or anything.”

Zen rubbed the back of his neck, feeling a tiny bit embarrassed. “Just been looking for anyone from those invading sects around here. Though if I beat ‘em up, maybe they’ll get lost.”

The guy laughed whole-heartedly. It took him another moment to calm down.

“I don’t mean to sound too harsh, but you do understand how ridiculous that is, right?”

Zen let out a breath. “I know, mainly it’s just been good for working off energy. I gotta keep my stress down, ya know?”

The guy nodded at him. “I can’t say I get that personally, but it makes sense enough to me.”

“By the way…who are you? I’m not really sure where this even is, and what was with all those voices back there?”

“Name’s Mitnick, and this is where we Hollywood Nosferatu have made our lair,” he smiled in a way that reminded Zen just a little of a smirk. “Those voices – I’d guess some of my brethren saw you and decided to have some fun. We’ll also get random Malkavians down here from time to time and that’s the kind of shit they’d jump right on board for.” He waited for Zen to absorb that before he continued.

“You’re not exactly from around here, right? You ever heard of us?”

Zen crossed his arms in thought. “This isn’t...uh...my mother tongue so it’s kinda hard for me to remember.”

Still, the word seemed familiar – he knew Kaz had mentioned Nosferatu to him at least a few times, but he was having trouble thinking of what he’d said.

“Oh, that’s right,” Zen made a fist, and dropped into the palm of the other hand as he remembered something. “You guys are real big with information, yeah? And you’re able to go invisible too?”

Mitnick didn’t reply for a moment. He was just staring at Zen for a moment like he was trying to figure him out. “You’re not like other Toreadors, are you?” his expression was one of curiosity.

Zen merely shrugged, “I was never like other Kine when I was one of them either, so...I’m fine with that.”

That drew a laugh from Mitnick. “You’re not bad, Zen. Especially for a Toreador.”

“Oh yeah...our clans are supposed to not get along at all, right?” Zen looked off to the side with an almost concealed smile. “Seems fuckin’ stupid to me. What’s the damn point of that?” He let out a
small, amused grunt. “Actually, from what I know of your clan, you guys remind me of an old friend.”

Mitnick looked satisfied.

Over the next couple of weeks, Zen would take the direct route that he was shown to visit Mitnick most days. He found a certain comfort in the down-to-Earth attitude the Kindred had, and although his technological prowess and ability to obtain information reminded Zen of Izaya so much, it was in a good way – a pleasant nostalgia – so that was fine. It was easy to talk with him, and over time many of the other Nosferatu in the area seemed to tolerate his presence more and more. Many still didn’t show themselves to him, but others did eventually. He had even managed to eventually be on good terms with Gary, the ‘boss’ of their group.

~

*Present Day*

~

That Zen managed to make friends of his own made him feel more secure and confident within this still relatively new lifestyle of his. Mitnick and some others felt ok about his brother Kaz, but otherwise it seemed that they were the only two Toreador that these Nosferatu would interact with – willingly, anyway.

From Mitnick, Shizuo learned a great deal about computers and a good portion of various skills that came with that. Overall security and more advanced workings, using the internet, hacking, information gathering, and a widespread basic knowledge of various hardware and software.

Once Zen had some decent income of his own from the Asp Hole, he set up his own system over time. He couldn’t compare himself to the capabilities of the Nosferatu, but he felt that with more and more time and practice he’d eventually be able to reach Izaya’s abilities.

It was around the time Izaya had been coming to the US including LA trying to look for Zen and Kaz that he got more nervous. This encouraged him to ramp up his efforts in developing these skills. He could not let Izaya find him, no matter how much he wanted to.

Many a night was spent with Zen figuratively and literally half-laying on his desk or banging his head against the wall in frustration; Zen didn’t regret his decision to leave Japan and be with Kaz, he just managed to become filled with ‘if only’s.

The suffocating pain sometimes grew to be unbearable. He’d dig his fingers into brick walls, go running along building rooftops, and end up destroying trees in parks on the edges of the city to work out some of it. Still, nothing provided a long-term solution for getting rid of the vice-grip in his chest that made his throat feel like closing at times.

It was in this instance that not only Kaz but Mitnick too, were great support for him. With all that was going on, Zen explained a lot about his background and past to Mitnick, who decided he would help however he could.

In return, Mitnick told him how he joined the clan. It seemed he had been a lone hacker. Good enough that there wasn’t a system he couldn’t crack. Apparently, he’d even e-mailed the president the nuclear launch code. ‘Had the FBI shitting their pants,’ he’d laughed. It seemed that one day he’d stumbled upon an incredibly secured and dark system. He went through a few laptops trying to break in, and it took months before he caught a lucky break and got into it. It had turned out to be a Nosferatu database. Mitnick insisted that it wasn’t even an important one which was the only reason he’d gotten in. But the contents scared him and he backed out. Only a couple of hours later, Gary
showed up, and that was that.

Despite the ever-growing Camarilla influence, the Hollywood Nosferatu played the role of being under LaCroix’s thumb, but truly they were more loyal only to themselves and each other. Zen knew he could count on some of them. Thanks to help from the Nosferatu, Zen had been able to track Izaya and his movements, along with others in Tokyo as well. Kaz felt that it wasn’t healthy, but otherwise didn’t stop him.

Now it was the night after he spoke with Izaya. Some of the latest news was that a ship called the Elizabeth Dane had been brought near to port. The trouble was that all of the crew were missing, blood found all over the place, and a certain item of widespread rumor was said to be on board.

It was time to ask a couple of specific individuals about this newest mess.

~

The next night, Izaya was careful to look out for any Awakusu-kai, but they seemed to have moved on to a different district as there didn’t seem to be anyone there now. He’d need to get back to Therese about the necklace.

He made his way to The Asylum quickly, this area of town was not very big. When he was about to head inside, any thoughts were quickly cut off by a vaguely familiar voice becoming louder strangely quickly.

“I HAVE SEEN THE SQUIRMING ON THE HORIZON!”

It was the creepy scraggily man from the other night. He dragged his doomsaying sign behind him as he was sprinting toward Izaya’s direction, yelling.

“THE WORMS ARE STRIPPING THE FOUL-”

And with that, Izaya dashed into the asylum, almost slamming the heavy doors behind him. That man was only a Kine, and likely required help in a few ways. However, Izaya couldn’t help but hide when he saw the guy basically sprinting right at him. Had he somehow offended the doomsayer by trying to talk to him the other night?

Regardless, Izaya let out a relieved breath as he entered the club properly. Hopefully the guy wouldn’t still be out there when he left.

He pushed passed several obviously drunk people, though he first made a stop to get an easy meal from a very inebriated woman before accessing the private elevator. As before, the music faded out and he made his way into the large room that it seemed the sisters shared. Izaya remembered not to look at the unsettling huge portrait on the wall.

Instead of Therese, there stood Jeanette. Once again, in the incredibly skimpy schoolgirl uniform. She could put the most outrageous Halloween outfits to shame.

As he approached Jeanette, she spoke with a sickeningly sweet smile on her face, and the obviously well-prepared sultry voice followed it.

“How odd, I was just having naughty thoughts about you. You made quite an impression earlier. Did you come just to cheer up lonely, little me~?”
Izaya had nearly forgotten her skill with seduction. This was another person, along with Therese that would a valuable contact in the future.

Well, it was his turn.

“But of course, my lady. I simply could not resist,” this could turn into a fun game.

Her red-lipped smirk took over her face. “Oh, really~? Do I often pogostick through your thoughts wearing nothing but a smile...? Be honest...or don’t.”

As he’d thought before, this would surely be a challenge – she had an unknown number of years of experience over him in the art verbal games such as this. Moreover, her being a Malkavian would make this harder.

“Well, it most certainly wouldn’t be a lie to say that I’m lying about not lying to you in regards to honestly admitting to envisioning you always during each of my waking hours without pause.”

Interestingly, this drew out a genuine laugh from her. “Well, kitten, that’s enough of that...for tonight.”

Kitten?

“So, Therese told me you might be back with something for here. Do you have it with you~?”

Izaya narrowed his eyes a mere fraction of a centimeter. ‘Hm~ Now here’s a trick she’s trying to pull...’

Therese was far more translucent in her ways – much more direct. She didn’t have a high opinion of her sister. Meanwhile, between the two sisters, Jeanette was the silver-tongued viper.

“Indeed, I’ve brought it with me.”

“Ooh~ can I see it?”

‘Time to jump over this trap.’

“I’m afraid I’m quite required to give it directly to Therese.”

In an instant, her countenance changed. She both looked and sounded as if she were about to cry. Masterfully so.

“I’m not just some silly doll, you know. All my life my sisters made me out to be a joke,” as she spoke, her expression grew more intense and it was clear her tone was changing to anger. “She told you I was an embarrassment, didn’t she? That I couldn’t tie my shoes, let alone hold on to something for her. Is that it?” the words strung with bitterness very clearly. She was certainly putting on an act here, but there was truth lacing her words as well.

‘Interesting~!’

“More or less, I’m afraid.”

Her words continued to waver between sadness and anger. Either she was just that good, or she was allowing some truth to continue leaking out. Either way, the ultimate results were bound to be interesting.

“She’s always belittling me. She’s the smart one, she’s the favorite, she’s the successful one. Well,
it’s not fair! I’m not a fool; this club’s success is just as much my doing as it is hers!”

Izaya crossed his arms, and shifted his weight to the other foot. He looked like a disciplining parent. “Though I understand your feelings, I’m afraid I must insist that I only give it to Therese.”

Jeanette’s face took on a pinched look. “Do you understand what it’s like to have your own flesh and blood ripping you apart on a nightly basis for two lifetimes? Can you?!”

‘Hm, almost getting desperate,’ he thought. ‘Hard to say if there’s anything genuine about it.’

Izaya relaxed his stance, implicating a more open sort of feel to his body language.

“Even so, I’m giving this to Therese.”

And once more, Jeanette’s disposition changed once again.

This time, Izaya could tell she was in her most natural mood. It was a little bizarre, however. It’s not that her face was now lacking any expression, it was just a noticeably neutral looking one. It was reminiscent of Therese’s down-to-business face.

“Fine. You hold onto it. Hmm…since you were so willing to brave that big, spooky place for my darling sister, how about doing a teensy, tiny favor for little, troubled me?”

Predictable.

“Do you know Gallery Noir, down the street? I happen to know there’s a charity event being organized there. Lots of influential Santa Monicans slithering in for token appearances,” she hadn’t even paused and with a smirk, she kept going, her voice becoming more animated now as it leaked an amused tone.

‘This won’t end well for, that much is obvious,’ he thought. ‘What mess am I to be forced into next?’

“But there’s one thing they don’t know…the whole event’s been set up by a Kindred trying to establish their own power clique in our city. And we can’t let that happen, can we? So I need some brilliant young upstart to spoil the milk.”

It was interesting – her word choices. The unveiled compliment at the end combined with the usage of ‘we’; insinuating unity. It was obvious she hadn’t come up with this task on the spot, either.

Well, it didn’t matter; clearly, he’d be doing it regardless.

“Certainly, my lady~ How can I be of assistance?”

She giggled with excitement as though she were an actual schoolgirl; matching the persona in a way more suitable than her attire.

“I promise this won’t take long. Take this knife,” she handed over a large one – it was an oddly shaped kind of dagger. “Give the paintings in the gallery a good slashing. Don’t get caught, and don’t turn it into a massacre. Oh, and steal the charity box, would you? Buy yourself something velvet.”

It sounded simple enough, and the place was nearby. He had no intention of stealing the money, but he’d consider getting something velvet in the future…that might be nice and comfy.

Still, there was a strange…insistence in the back of his mind. It was nearly screaming at the idea of destroying art. He didn’t generally have an opinion on art either way, but something seemed so
wrong about harming delicately crafted images made by individual and repetitive but oh-so different strokes of the brush – the masterful mixing of colors that created a living world with such pronounced shadows and living features of nature, humans, all living things that---

That was new.

‘That was…the Toreador side?’ he thought. He did wonder how much the strange urges and thoughts might mess with him from here on out.

“It would be my pleasure, truly,” a purred response, easily crafted. “I don’t suppose that afterwards Therese will have returned?”

“I’m sure Therese will be thrilled to honor your agreement when you get back. But in the meantime, get to the gallery and wreck the paintings, then pay me a visit; I want to hear all about it……Hurry up, I can only amuse myself for so long…”

There was one thing he could say about Jeanette with absolute certainty: She was not a boring conversationalist.

“Then I’ll hurry back with bells on, my lady.”

She smiled at him in response. It would seem she was just as entertained.

As he walked away, she added one more thing.

“Oh, and there was something about the paintings…hmm, what was it…? I can’t remember. Oh, well. Have fun, duckling!”

‘So now I’m a duckling?’

No matter. It was an easy feat to make his way across the club and back to the entrance once he got back to the first floor. The bartender saw him, and then none too subtly averted his eyes as he tried so incredibly hard not to look at Izaya.

He could help the smirk that crossed his face. ‘Ah, the discomfort of humans – always amusing.’

Outside, the gallery really was only a couple of minutes away. What’s more, the…interesting shouting man wasn’t anywhere around. This was, of course, irrelevant, and Izaya didn’t care. It was not a major relief, no. Nope.

A quick cross through the back alleyways, a turn here and there, and he’d arrived at Galley Noir.

‘Don’t get caught, huh?’ the gallery was actually a very small building and seemed a little out of place as it was comparably nicer than the other ones surrounding it. A bright light shined on the wooden wrap-around porch of the entrance. There’d had to be a way in elsewhere. There was an alley right next to the place. He walked casually past it, and saw a door at the far back. However, there was also an officer standing nearby. A guard, it seemed. He could probably cut through the parking garage right next to the place and sneak in that way, but…

Talking with the guard was likely to be far more fun. There was clearly a small set of keys attached to his belt among other things, including a police baton.

Izaya strode boldly up to the man.

The man was balding, rotund, and had a bit of a baby-face considering his age. The uniform was the
very same as any other officers he’s seen around town.

“Hey! Hey-hey, hold on a minute there. I’m afraid you’re committing a 351, that’s trespassing on private property. I’m gonna have to ask that you vacate the premises immediately or I’m afraid I’ll be forced to radio this in.”

To top it all off, his voice was nasally and higher pitched than he’d have thought. It was the type of voice that would catch you off guard, but then you’d get used to it the longer you heard it.

‘He’ll be fun, though far too easy…I, too, know how to make up numbers if I so desired.’

He began with half-lidded eyes and a smirk.

“Ah…the way you said that – it was so…commanding.”

The officer’s face shown surprise at first, though his body gave off signals that this was not new to him.

“Huh. Well, young man…that’s just the natural response that people have to someone in my kind of position, huh. The risk, the prestige, the authority…it’s a tough job, but somebody’s gotta do it.” He was smiling now, relaxed far too easily. His sentences seemed to occasionally be accompanied by those vocal pauses – perhaps it was a kind of speech tic.

“You know, you’d be surprised how often I hear that in this line of work, heh. It’s the uniform, you know. Women and even some men just can’t get over the uniform.”

Izaya ran a hand slowly through his hair, and tilted his head to the side, his neck more exposed as he just so slightly exposed more of the natural curvature.

He stepped forward, closer to the officer as his next words came out with a breathy sigh.

“In that case, I would be most…delighted if you would take your baton out,” he directed his eyes at the officer’s belt has he noticeably trailed his gaze along it. He looked back at the officer, eyes relentless.

“Perhaps you could take…both of them out,” he poked his tongue out just slightly over his top lip before speaking again.

“If you would demonstrate how they…operate, I’d be so very grateful to you.”

He moved closer still.

“If you’d like, you can feel free to hit me with them too…”

The officer was clearly flustered and hadn’t a clue how to respond.

“You see, it would be an experience that I could truly…savor.”

Izaya waited for the other shoe to drop in the human’s mind.

It took the man a good minute or so to get himself back together. Izaya waited, just staring at him.

“W-well…uh yeah…u-unfortunately if I continue to engage you in conversation, it’s a violation of code 613.”

Izaya leaned in, his mouth closing in on the Kine’s ear.
“Then let me tell you another code we could…violate.”

The fangs sank in.

Not only had this been effective, but beneficial as well. This Kine actually had rather good quality blood.

Izaya moved passed the officer, who now stood in a sleepy daze, and snatched the keys off him.

As predicted, they were the keys needed to open this back door. It hadn’t been quite as easy as he’d thought, interestingly. Still, he made it work.

Inside, the gallery ended up being just one large room with brick walls, wood floors, and a high ceiling. There was little in the place aside from a desk with a small box on it, and 4 very large canvases that were set up near each corner of the room and faced towards the middle. Each one was a painting, and each had clear titles. They appeared to be biblical, and the titles described well what was clearly illustrated. They were colorful too, each seemed to have its own color theme – red, green, blue, yellow –

Izaya shook his head. No distractions.

Aside from the sudden crashing sound that came from outside, anyway. He didn’t know what it was, but he waited to sure that there wasn’t anyone or anything out there that might threaten his task. After a few moments, he still seemed to be clear to go.

He took out the large knife, and approached each one. Jeanette had indicated clearly that there was something crucial about the paintings.

For Izaya, it was all too easy.

It was a very, very brief summarization on the story of Caine.

He took the knife to the painting that was labeled: ‘Caine Slays Abel’ and moved on from there.

‘Caine Cursed By God’

‘Caine Meets Lilith’

‘Caine Spurns Lilith’

They were easily torn, and it took so little time.

It was odd, though. Why would he have to do this in a specific order – he saw no reason for this.

Until just a few moments later.

Each canvas began glowing bright red and large red circles appeared before them. What looked like blood began to spill out from the circles. Izaya moved to avoid the streams as they met in the middle. Once it had finished, there was amorphous shape of blood just hovering there for a moment.

Unfortunately, it then took the shape of a human, and wasted no time in attacking.

It sprang forward, and Izaya was hit hard by what seemed to be claws that this strange creature had apparently produced.

This would not be very fun.
Shizuo had finished looking into the news about that ship. Word on the Kindred grapevine held only dark and superstitious grumblings about it.

Aside from his own investigations on it, Mitnick didn’t have much else on his end.

So, on his way to go find Nines and ask him – the Kindred was usually a good source of information to pull from – he decided to stop and check on Izaya. It hadn’t been very long, so it wasn’t likely that Izaya was in danger.

Of course the odds weren’t in his favor…why would they be?

He had arrived in Santa Monica and found the Fledgling standing just in front of Gallery Noir.

‘A remodeled pizza joint, they mean.’

He saw as Izaya was stopped by a large, human officer.

It was what his hearing picked up that mercilessly rubbed his temper the wrong way. He’d lessened his angry quite substantially to say the least over the past 6 years. He had a far better grasp of control over it too, and he took pride in that.

However, it seemed there were some things that he could only hold back so much.

Okay, so the logical part of his brain knew Izaya was using the Kine for sustenance and to apparently get into the gallery, but…it was altogether completely unnecessary to make such…lewd implications.

Especially because the words’ effects were not limited to the officer. Shizuo quickly lit a cigarette and crossed his arms from his spot in an alley’s shadow across from Izaya’s alley.

Shizuo had to work hard not to grind his teeth too much or to punch a wall. The feeling was relentless – it would feel better to tear out one of the bricks on the wall and attempt to eat it.

He’d be completely given away if he got too loud so he couldn’t even scream.

‘Deep breaths. Stop thinking about police batons, and other things that are similarly shaped.’

It took just a moment but finally the anger was at a tolerable level.

Still, after the anger came the intense need to stifle the sudden possessiveness. This was clearly worse than when Izaya had flirted with that bartender at the club. Who knew meeting with him directly again would do that?

Still, after Izaya got into the building, Shizuo couldn’t help but throw a metal garbage can nearby across the street, landing into a huge dumpster that was stationed against the wall, several feet in front of the officer.

That felt better.

Still…somehow, of course, his flea would manage to summon and piss off a Blood Guardian.
Clan Nosferatu:

To put it bluntly, the Embrace transforms them into hideous monsters. Unable to walk among humans, Nosferatu must dwell in subterranean sewers and catacombs. Other vampires revile Nosferatu, considering them disgusting and interacting with them only when they must. Because of this stigma, however, Nosferatu are survivors par excellence. They are masters of the shadows. Few creatures, mortal or vampire, know the city's back alleys and dark corners like the Nosferatu do. Additionally, Nosferatu have refined the crafts of sneaking and eavesdropping to fine arts; if anyone or anything has the latest dirt on mortal or vampiric society, it is the Nosferatu. A millennia of shared deformity and abuse have fostered strong bonds among the monsters. Nosferatu forego the squabbling and feuds ubiquitous to the other clans, preferring to work in unison. You mess with one, you mess with them all - and that can get messy indeed.
Box Mysteries and the Clown Wallpaper

Chapter Notes

And here we are again!

As always, thank you very much for reading, commenting, kudos, etc. It makes me so very happy~ :3

A heads up, this chapter contains a bit of sensitive subject matter, so...please keep that in mind.

I hope you enjoy, and everyone take care.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It did prove to be somewhat less than fun.

Izaya wasn’t really sure how to fight a being that had just suddenly emerged from what appeared to be some other dimension, and then could form itself into whatever shape. It was solid and corporeal, yet not quite.

Despite that, what better opportunity was there to test out his newly obtained knife?

The creature’s attack pattern was simple, but it would require a defensive strategy to win.

‘Blood versus knife...let’s go.’

Izaya picked himself up off the floor, and dodged to his right. For the most part, he’d only be able to dodge and run while he got his bearings. At least the creature wasn’t intelligent; it made the same movements and implemented the same attacks over and over again. Izaya even began simply running in a circle and that was working. The dangerous part was that the monster would spring forth incredibly quickly at random times, cutting across the floor, but never quite reaching him.

Still, he could run, even dash much faster than the creature did but he could not go on forever, whereas for all he knew, this monster could.

It would cut across the floor quickly, only just barely missing Izaya each time with its outstretched claws. Izaya used the pause after the next attack to squat down and as he bolted at the creature, he threw the knife straight through it.

As he’d guessed, it seemed to take damage. However, it was quick to recover. Izaya met the creature at close distance again, and attacked with the knife that he’d already possessed. This seemed to be effective as well, luckily. The blood monster would roar each time as well, and would try to attack with more ferocity.

Still, Izaya was already fast on his own, but his new abilities assisted him incredibly well. Especially being able to use Celerity for even more speed.

Aside from the first attack, Izaya managed to evade further injury. Still, this meant the creature was in a tight position now, and was perhaps just an attack or maybe two away from destruction. But when
you corner a dog, it will turn and bite.

And so, the monster’s final chance at attack was a powerful one. Powerful to the point that he’d managed to pierce into Izaya’s abdomen. Said Fledgling collapsed against one of the destroyed paintings and its large canvas. In the process, he’d lost his other knife somewhere on the floor and he’d heard it skid away.

That was unexpected. Since the thing wasn’t human or even humanoid save for in shape, he should have known better. This had actually managed to take him off guard a bit. Apparently, the creature had a little bit of a brain in there. He pressed a hand against his stomach to staunch the small amount of blood flow. He was able to get up, he could tell – the problem was he knew whatever he could do from here might not be fast enough.

He dodged another quick attack, and used his fists to defend. It really wasn’t his preference at all – bare-handed attacks were not usually graceful. Plus, it might take a bit more effort to kill this thing.

‘There’s no way it’ll kill me but it’s gonna be a pain and I’ll probably have to feed more than usual,’ he mused. ‘It can’t be helped, though. So be it.’

He’d have to keep moving at such a high speed to evade attacks, so it was unlikely he’d be able to pick up either knife. If only he had one more he could throw; the blood monster was definitely on its last leg.

~

The moment the flea got hit a second time, Shizuo was in motion. He shot across the street to the alley next to the gallery. The policeman was still swaying in place in a daze. Just by peering through the building, he could tell Izaya wouldn’t fall to the blood guardian. Even so, he just couldn’t help it. It’d probably mean Izaya would be pissed at him yet again.

‘I’d be more surprised if he didn’t get pissed at me,’ he thought. He couldn’t keep a smile off his face at the thought. It wasn’t likely that anyone else got to see the flea truly angry or upset. Which was just fine, in Shizuo’s opinion. No one else needed to be informed of this fact.

Shizuo fished out a flat, sharp object from a hidden pocket of his jacket as he opened the back-entry door as quietly as possible. There he was, dodging and running as fast as he could, the aptly nicknamed flea. Although it would be just a matter of time before he got in one last strike, Izaya was also definitely losing a lot of energy. He’d need to feed soon. When the flea had turned with his back to Shizuo, and the blood guardian moved within range, he threw his weapon and landed a direct hit. Projectiles were much more the flea’s thing than his, but at least he did have some aiming capabilities with them.

Of course, now he’d have to move quickly. The flea would undoubtedly know it was him; there would be a huge giveaway after all. But when he saw the weapon in Chinatown, he couldn’t resist.

In any case, he did need to be going and reach Downtown before too long. He’d been contacted by Jack – seemed he had information about the presumably cursed ship.

‘And anyway, why give Izaya the pleasure of bitching me out, anyway? Ha.’

The ex-bartender who was entirely too pleased with himself grinned almost maniacally.

“You’ll just have to deal with it, flea,” he muttered to himself before rushing off.

~
Well.

That happened.

All that was left of the strange monster was a rather large pool of blood in the middle of the floor.

Izaya took a moment to catch his breath. ‘Is it from the energy loss and injuries?’ For the most part, he didn’t have any reason to breathe unless he simply did it for shits and giggles. On the other hand, it seemed if he lost energy and blood to an extreme enough extent, he’d need to do so as well. Obviously, this was a bit of a weakened state.

Well. He’d done the job, decided to continue ignoring the charity collections box, and took a look at what had ended the creature’s life.

Shizu-chan.

“I told him I don’t need help…does that damn protozoan need new ears?” without noticing, Izaya had morphed his expression into a pout. “I’ve always known he needed a new brain, but really now…”

The fact that it was a dagger on the floor was a giveaway; it wasn’t a simple dagger, it was a kunai.

‘Where did he even manage to find a kunai around here and why do I not know about it yet?’

Sure, he wasn’t exactly an informant anymore, but still – he’d spent a couple months in the city as one so he shouldn’t be drawing a blank.

Izaya let out an exhausted sigh, “Well, another weapon for me, why not.”

He’d get out of there, snag himself a mid-night meal, and get back to Jeanette.

Obviously, she knew this about the paintings.

Sure, he knew it would be a trap, but a blood monster…?

‘Really, now…to set such a thing on me…such a rude kindred.’

~

Shizuo sighed. The very idea of this plot exhausted him.

It was already near daylight by the time the vague layout of it was explained to him.

But then…

It would end up being even more of a pain not to go through with it in the end.

They’d required absolute secrecy which would explain why they’d gone out to the Chinatown sewer system.

Timing would be crucial.

This would be dangerous as hell.

But then, what was immortality for, anyway?

~
There were still a good couple of hours or so before dawn.

Izaya was wishing for mortality right about now.

He had gone up to the Therese and Jeanette’s room.

Therese was there, but she was not at all pleased.

‘Though displeased seems to be her usual mood anyway, this is clearly different,’ he thought as she considered tearing out his own hair.

The trap he thought he’d known about had been a bit more complex than he’d realized.

Though he knew pretty much every kindred he’d be running into would be older than him by incredible numbers of years, he was a genius in his own right, so how did he let this happen…?

“What were you thinking?”

Therese’s tone of voice betrayed her calm expression.

It would be wiser to allow her to vent while picking up the exact situation from her words without interruption.

“I thought I could control my sister as long as Tung was out of the picture, but nothing’s changed! I should’ve expected that you’d succumb to Jeanette’s influence like all the others…but how dare you!”

She crossed her arms as the anger now leaked into her expression, twisting it.

“The museum – that was my event!”

Dammit. It had been somehow just a little too convenient, now wasn’t it?

“…well, it’s not so much that she tricked me, as it is—“

“Don’t lie to me! Jeanette already confessed she tricked you into doing it! It was probably all Tung’s idea – I’ll deal with them later. However, that is still no excuse for ruining my museum.”

‘It’d be nice if she’d put those fangs away,’ they were a discomforting contrast to her painted black lips. ‘I won’t get out of this without persuasion.’

“I do have the item from the hotel...please have it.”

“Excellent!” Good, a smile returns. “I’ll take that…however, Jeanette claimed you did it for her – but let’s say I believe you. After all, you’ve acted decently and rationally up to now,” Therese’s posture relaxed, and she stopped shouting. “I imagine you’d like me to call off the feud?”

“If you please, I’d be much obliged,” and end with a friendly grin.

“There’s only one problem. If Tung gets word that I threatened Jeanette, which he almost certainly already has, it’s likely he’ll believe me. So, in order to call off the feud, you’re going to have to convince Jeanette to forgive me first.”

“I’ll agree to that – so where would she be?”

Therese sighed in exasperation.
“I made some threats against my sister – idle threats – involving fire and her impious satin sheets. She took them quite seriously and is avoiding me. I want to meet with her and explain that they were said in the heat of the moment.

“I asked her to meet me at The Surfside Diner, to reconcile, but I’m busy with the club and my other endeavors. I’d like you to go to the diner and promise her that I don’t plan to take any action against her. Wait for her in the back booth, near the phones – she should be along in an hour.”

‘So that diner does actually have a name.’

“Understood, my good lady. You are most forgiving, I should say,” though he was getting sick of all the ass-kissing, it did seem to be working in his favor.

“For all her unwholesome diversions and irritating disruptions, I should be less tolerant of her. She is my sister, however, and I suppose I’m obligated to forgive her her trespasses. I did sire her, after all,” she was unexpectedly quiet, speaking in a soft voice. “Please…don’t let her leave me.”

~

That could have gone far worse. Izaya was apparently not through being an errand boy, but the result wasn’t catastrophic.

Downstairs near the bar, a familiar ghoul stood, looking like he was waiting for someone. Izaya approached him.

“Ah, Knox, wasn’t it?” The ghoul turned around.

“Aw, hey, man!” The ghoul seemed far calmer compared to the first time they’d met. Not only was that a relief, but it might also signify something. His overall behavior seemed slightly different.

“How’ve you been these nights? I don’t suppose you’ve been up to anything very interesting?” Izaya kept his hands in his pockets, giving off a more casual and nonthreatening stance.

“Eh, not much. I’m just waitin’ around for my master.”

“Hmm…I see. Is that the person you couldn’t tell me about before?”

Knox looked off to the side. “Okay, okay. I guess I can tell you about him,” he returned to an enthusiastic demeanor. “Oh man! His name is Bertram Tung. He’s a Nosferatu.”

Izaya noted that Knox was particularly forthcoming here. It dignified something was a little off. Still, this could be an opportunity.

“Small world, Know. I happen to be looking for him as well. Know where he is, by chance~?”

“Aw man, I wish I knew where he was. I’m getting antsy waitin’ around for him. I need to tell him some stuff, ya know,” true to form Knox was shifting his body weight around anxiously. “I dunno where he is or stays or anything. Aw man I – Whenever he needs me he just…ya know…appears.”

Most interesting, to have such an ability.

“Can you tell me what he’s like?” Izaya kept his tone light – it seemed the best way to keep Knox talking.

“Oh man! Well he’s, like, the only vampire I know but, well, he seems pretty damn powerful. Aw man, w-when he’s lookin’ at you it’s like he’s really scanning your brain, you know, it’s like trippy,
it’s crazy. Hoo man! But I guess that’s the Nosferatu thing, ya know. They like, know everything I-I
guess.”

‘Now that would be a most advantageous individual to know…’

“So then…what is it you need to tell him?”

“Aw man! Well, Bertram had me keeping an eye on this guy, this Asian dude who’s been pokin’
around Santa Monica. Bertram thought he might be a vampire or…something like a vampire, I
dunno.”

An eyebrow rose on Izaya’s face. ‘Asian vampire…he obviously knows little else…does that mean I
would be more like this vampire or not?’

“So, you’re having some trouble?”

Knox started to get twitchier.

“Aw man, this guy, this…this thing…got wise to me. Now instead of me watchin’ him, he’d
watchin’ me, you know? I see this guy appear around me all the time, like off in the distance
watchin’ me, he’ll…warp up next to me…aw man…then ‘whooo’ disappear.”

Know purveyed a decent feeling of anxiety and a slight amount of fear.

‘He’s good, I’ll give him that,’ he thought. ‘But he’s lying, at least to some extent. Just what is he
trying to do?’

“Something is a bit off about your story there, Knox.”

Knox tensed. “Uh-uh? What are you saying?”

Izaya pursed his lips to the point that it wasn’t noticeable – just enough for him to notice his own
frustration. He’d have to persuade him to come out with it.

‘Shouldn’t be hard….’

“Look, Knox. Tell me the truth, and I’m more liable to help you.”

“Whu-? How did you know? Uh…look, man. I don’t know what you’re talkin’ about. Anyway,
why should I tell you anything, huh? I mean, you’re not bein’ straight with me.”

‘He has an interesting mix of screwing himself over while also redirecting it back at me…odd. I
could tell him I don’t have the tendency to be…straight with anyone, but he already seems to have
incurred enough brain damage.’

“I am.”

No messing around, he just needs a little push.

“Okay, okay, okay. Dammit Knox, damn! Oh man, alright, look, I messed up, okay? I’m just doing
what I was told though.”

Now his expression was real pleading.

‘From here it’s unlikely he’s lying.’
“It’s fine, continue.”

“Bertram knew you were comin’, knew you’d be coming by here. He planted me and told me what to say about the Asian vamp, but it’s true, I swear. And everything else is true too. This guy needs to be taken out. Whoop! I can’t do it, so Bertram needs you to.”

Izaya put a hand on his hip, suddenly feeling more tired.

“So why couldn’t he just say something to me himself? Or better yet, handle it himself?”

Knox bit his lip. “Ah, uh, well, he can’t stick his neck out like that. He doesn’t deal directly…his way, I guess. So…can you do it?”

‘Interesting. Can’t stick his neck out, huh? Not sure I buy that, but fine.’

“Fine, what do you have for me?”

“Hell yeah!” Knox did look genuinely relieved. “Right on. Okay, like I said he’s some kind of Asian vampire…thing, ya know. The only clue I’ve got is this driver’s license that he dropped once when I was tailing him. I’ve been so freaked out though that I haven’t had the chance to check it out.”

“I should think a driver’s license should tell you who he is…”

“Nah, the picture isn’t him. I don’t know why he had it, but…I figure it might help you find out where he is, what he’s doing. Here, take it.”

Izaya sighed, it’d be a long night.

“Alright, I’ll handle it.”

“Right on! Just come let me know when you’re done, yeah? Maybe I’ll see Bertram by then too.”

It wasn’t as subtle as Knox was aiming for; Izaya could tell he was still trying to manipulate him. Even so, it was possible he could directly get to Bertram with this. It was worth a shot, anyway.

~

Izaya crawled through the hole.

It had been hastily covered. That, or it had been done with an extreme lack of motivation. The license had said Virgil Crumb – a name Izaya remembered from…the…Krime-puter.

‘I still hate that name,’ he thought, annoyed.

According to that information, this man was dead and in the morgue nearby. This would be beyond the blood bank. Not only did he get more blood bags for cheap from the immediately-terrified-Vandal, he was also able to sell random items he’d picked up for cash, such as jewelry, car radios, and random drugs.

He made his way through to their laundry room, where there was a huge hole in the wall that had a terrible patch job of balsa wood over the opening.

Just on the other side, the morgue apparently had a huge window one could peer through to see inside. Didn’t seem like a great plan, but the entire place was weird, after all.

It was simple to get into the room, and right there was the man’s corpse, just laying out in plain sight.
The biggest thing of interest, however, was the trunk in the corner.

It took up a fair amount of the corner space, and was secured with a simple masterlock. It took a little bit of time, but he lockpicked the trunk until the lock clicked open.

‘I’m getting better at this,’ he smirked to himself. ‘Ah, the life of crime~’

Inside, the trunk was almost completely empty. It only held a magnetic key card with a label on it.

**FOXY BOXES**

He remembered where the place was – it was close to the asylum and diner. It still didn’t really explain anything about the place, though.

‘There’s no way it actually just has a bunch of boxes, right?’

~

‘…It’s actually just a bunch of boxes,’ he thought, ruefully. ‘They don’t even have anything in them.’

Upon entering the building, there had been one door on the right of the entryway, an innocuous potted plant next to it. Then there was another, larger door straight ahead. Izaya didn’t have the luxury of time, so he went to where he felt would be the main event, so to speak.

Inside was a high-ceilinged room made mostly of concrete. The only noteworthy thing was that there was some kind of balcony constructed halfway up. It could be reached with a ladder.

Otherwise, there was simply box upon box stacked upon each other in various formations around the room – mostly in a few main piles.

Even after someone stepped out from behind one of the piles, called himself “The Cathayan”, bowed at him, then pulled out a katana and lunged forward, Izaya still had no idea what the hell this facility was originally intentioned to be used for.

They both used the terrain to their advantage, and this Cathayan often hopped around, and would try to close in for an attack before jumping back – not dissimilar to Izaya’s own style.

It made no sense that this guy would have intentionally brought the boxes in there just for fun.

True, Izaya did not have the advantage of reach, but he was far more skilled in precision and agility. It didn’t take too terribly long to get in a couple of slashes from behind. It certainly damaged the guy well enough.

‘Even if he named this place himself, it’s still illogical that he’d have brought all of these boxes anyway.’

Izaya sustained a few small cuts here and there – nothing at all major. The boxes would occasionally end up helping as well as hindering both of them. Sometimes collapsing, other times moving in ways that threw off one’s balance. He was beginning to wear the man down with injuries, and now he was throwing the projectiles he had to finish him.

‘It’s a shame, he’s giving me no choice, really,’ he really did regret having to kill him. Izaya really wanted to get a bit of information out of him. He held no particular sense of loyalty for his own kind
of vampire as apparently, he was made to believe that this guy was a separate kind of being. Either way, he’d never met somebody quite like this. ‘He’s defying logic the way Shizu-chan does, but in a completely bizarre fashion.’

‘There’s just really no point in having the boxes here even as a cover – they’re useless.’

Just another couple of throws, and the Cathayan would be finished. He was clearly a bit frustrated, but still didn’t speak. This guy seemed to be Chinese as far as Izaya could tell. Still, it was highly likely he also knew English.

Regardless, they’d rather suddenly become enemies so it was pointless to think on it too much.

‘And, even if he neither brought in the boxes nor named the place, one would think he’d get rid of them.’

Izaya threw one of his last knives with a speed faster than a Kine could see, and the Cathayan was on the floor, clearly defeated. Izaya approached somewhat cautiously.

“Lovely, now we can have a bit of a chat.”

Then man groaned on the floor, just barely audible.

Izaya stooped over, his shadow cast over the dying man.

“So, tell me…”

He waited for the man to look at him.

“What’s the point of these boxes?”

The man disappeared as he disintegrated into the strange orange and yellow particles, leaving a blackened skeleton before that crumbled away as well.

“Damn.”

Now he would never know the answer to the mystery of the boxes.

~

In the other room of the building was a small office. The only useful thing was a computer that sat upon a standard oak desk. The only thing on it was a series of log entries that were clearly made by the Cathayan.

He had described following Knox, keeping an eye on his movements and playing with him to scare him. He made note of some of the places of interest around the city, and then there were a couple of last entries for that very same night. He’d written how Izaya had found the clues to reach this place and how he seemed to know of his own demise. The uneasy part came when he mentioned that should someone read this, that Lo Angeles was ripe for the picking. They could take it over from the Kindred easily should they so choose.

Though interesting, it was also not particularly good news. This was a Chinese faction of some kind, and there were likely other scouts around this city and others. Apparently, Awakusu-kai had certainly not been alone in international interest.

To be on the safe side, Izaya erased the logs. It was probably too late, but still.
Izaya still had a little bit of time remaining before he was to meet Jeanette at the diner, so he stopped back at The Asylum to see Knox – he might be able to not deal with the sisters anymore.

It was not to be.

Knox turned to face him when Izaya approached.

“Hey, man, you do that thing yet?”

“I did, he’s no issue anymore."

It was probably pointless to mention details to him.

“Oh thank god. Oh man. Yes! That thing was hounding me, like, every night. Look, I wanted to say sorry about before, again. I still haven’t heard from Bertram thought…sorry. I’ll still let him know, but for now…I don’t have a way to repay you.”

Maybe there was a little more he could dig out of him.

“Do you know what he was at all?”

“Well…Bertram said it’s like a vampire, but different…ya know? It’s like what they have in China instead of vampires. He said lots of ‘em have been comin’ in to California for some reason, I dunno.”

Izaya nodded. “Got it. I’ll see you around, then.”

“Yeah, man. And hey, thanks again.”

~

Entering the diner, it was strangely quiet.

Izaya wasn’t sure if it was an improvement compared to the events that had occurred the last time he’d been there.

To the left was a group of four humans wearing bandanas and wife-beaters. They weren’t even speaking, just standing around, sometimes looking at each other, other times the walls. They were definitely not looking at anyone else. Though the only other person there seemed to be the cook. No Dorris in sight. Though it was noticeable that they were purposefully not looking at him.

He’d keep an eye on them. It was clearly suspicious. If they were attempting some kind of covert operation, they were already terrible at it.

Izaya turned to the right, away from the suspicious human group. The last booth with the phone next to it was that way, though Jeanette wasn’t there yet. The moment he stepped around that curve of the diner counter, however, a bullet penetrated his side.

The group of four men was now shooting at him, and the cook had ducked under the counter.

Izaya ducked behind his side of the counter, clutching his side. Sur, it hurt a bit – but it wasn’t debilitating. It was more akin to a bee sting than anything else, perhaps a little bit more severe. The wound was already beginning to heal. Even though he was out of sight, at least two of them were still firing.
Obviously, this was yet another trap. If they would just work together, the sisters could be truly formidable indeed.

The shots began to fall silent. Out of the group, one of them seemed to have shotgun. Now that could be useful, even though he wasn’t really partial to guns.

Footsteps were approaching his area. Just one of the men, though another wasn’t too far behind.

Easy.

Izaya peeked around the corner, and saw the guy with the shotgun. He dashed around the corner and shot like a bullet himself right in front of the human, who, naturally, stood no chance. With a quick and easy slice, the man’s neck offered zero resistance when the blade of Izaya’s knife met it.

Foolishly, the second man raised his gun, and started to back away. He may as well have simply run; he’d be much better off. The bullet grazed his left shoulder, but didn’t really do anything.

‘I might be spending some days sewing back together my clothes at this rate.’

This one was taken down in the same fashion. The other two, despite seeing the others taken down as they were, did not attempt to surrender or even escape. They just kept shooting – poorly.

Thus, they, too, met their ends.

Izaya didn’t like having to kill Kine like that. If avoidable, he’d much prefer not to.

‘But if they’re practically begging for it, trying to kill me like that, it can’t be helped~’

Izaya took time to backtrack a bit, picking up the guns and ammo. Even if he didn’t use them, he could surely get a good amount of money selling them.

Then that phone rang.

He smirked, and spoke aloud to no one as he practically strutted over to the phone.

“Ah~ a phone call to my wonderful self? Now whoever could it be?”

Before he answered it, Izaya noticed out of the corner of his eye that the cook was…somehow continuing his work despite what had just occurred. Was…was this also business as usual?

He focused his attention on the phone, and pushed those thoughts away as he answered it.

“Well, hello~”

Therese’s silky voice came in over the receiver.

“I’m terribly sorry about that. My sister was just furious about your refusal to take part in her designs, so she sent those men to kill you. But I’m going to make sure it never happens again. Drop be, we’ll handle this Tung business.”

Another voice – a shout, really – sounded out just before the connection was cut.

“She’s CRAZY! Help!”

For a moment, he could only stare at the phone that now produced on the sound of a dial tone.
It was bizarre beyond words.

‘Something is most clearly wrong here. More than I’d thought.’

It would only be solved by going back there.

~

Izaya dodged the horrifying doomsayer again. It was odd how the man would immediately run after him the second he saw Izaya. Creepy, really. No one else seemed to receive this special treatment.

“RUN ON YOUR WAY TO THE APOCOLYPSE—“

As usual, Izaya ran inside The Asylum before the man could get to him. ‘What the hell does he want with me, anyway?’ The manic ad wide-eyed look in the man’s eyes was enough for Izaya to not stick around to find out, however. ‘Mark this as another piece of information I’d actually prefer not knowing.’

As he headed up to the elevator, he only heard muffled bickering sounds outside of the room before he entered.

This was one of the few moments in his life he was unprepared for. Many of them were occurring in these recent nights.

There stood someone dressed in Therese’s black suit ensemble. She lacked the glasses, however. The right side of her head sported the blond bun, or at least, a small version. The left side was pulled up in a pigtail. The right eye was blue, the left was green and had heavy makeup around it. Even though the lips were painted red, the left seemed to have been smeared off the lips a bit and slightly onto her face.

What was also not at all beyond notice was that her right hand held a gun – in a threatening way that was not immediately obvious – almost innocently staring at him from her side. It was obviously a very old-fashioned one, apparent from the full visibility of the rounds.

Therese’s voice spoke as the person turned fully to face him.

“You! I’m really sorry it had to end this way, I truly am. You seemed promising, but…you’ve been tainted by the stink of my sister’s schemes. And now, I’m going to make sure she never double-crosses me again.”

Throughout her talking, the gun would be pointed at him from right in front of her face now and again. She stared at him with an oddly satisfied look.

Quickly, the gun was moved down, and Jeanette’s voice sounded from those lips, her eyes wide with a look of horror.

“Don’t listen to her! She’ll kill us both! Save me and I’ll help you find Bertam, I swear!”

Izaya knew it would be for the best from here to listen and observe before he could suss out the best course of action.

“Shut up, Jeanette!” Therese was yelling, the face contorted with rage. “I warned you to stay away from Tung – he’s turned you against me! I always looked out for you! But you couldn’t stand my success. You had to meddle, didn’t you? I didn’t want it to end like this but you’ve forced me!”
“You never give me credit for anything, Therese!” Jeanette looked pained beyond a teary voice. “I was the one calling the shots! Bertram was dancing on my leash! …How does it feel to know that I beat you…?”

Izaya broke in. It was obvious to him that there would be a finite number of results possible from this encounter, and he’d decided what would be the best for all parties involved. It would only take all of his persuasive ability to do it.

“What makes the two of you fight like this?”

Therese interrupted quickly.

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m about to rid the night of a deviant, back-stabbing whore! Do you realize that despite her condition, she still…fornicates – with Kine, no less! So despicable…so unclean.”

Now Jeanette wore a cocky grin.

“You’re one to talk, dear sister, or should I say Daddy’s little girl?” She then directed her next words to Izaya. “Do you want to know just how depraved the Baron of Santa Monica can be?”

“Shut up, Jeanette!” Defensive.

“You’d looove the world to think you’re a saint. When you thought I was asleep, I used to hear father come in at night. I heard him whisper how much he loved you in your ear before he –

“Don’t finish that sentence or you’re dead!”

Izaya felt unusually tense. This wouldn’t be a light matter.

“You both must let go of your conflict.”

“Oh~ don’t you want to hear what happened? How she became the pillar of the community she is today?”

“Shut up! Just shut up!”

“You both need to stop fighting – resolve this peacefully.”

“Don’t try to stop me. I’ve had to overlook her treachery, her seduction, relations with my enemies – and the consequences of it – but I won’t endure her any longer.”

“Endure me? Dear sister, you’ve done everything you could to smother me. You’d love to bury me in your closet, along with all your other skeletons.”

“I’m the good girl. You’re the wicked one. You’ve done nothing but plot against me – when I had our best interests at heart. And despite that, I’ve always covered up your mistakes. I’ve taken care of you. And this is how you repay me?”

“Taken care of me? You’ve done nothing but keep me down, blamed me for every mistake. Did you expect me to let you rule my life until the end of time? No, sister, you’ve had it coming since our last sunrise.”

They were both beginning to sound snarky and confident now.

“Is that right, dear?” Therese become patronizing. “If it wasn’t for me, you would have never survived this long. Remember? They tried to separate us, but I refused. I chose this life and brought
you into it so that we could stay together. Obviously, you’ve forgotten.”

“The two of you need to learn how to live in the same skin.”

He’d needed to say something else before things came to a head.

Jeanette wasn’t going to leave it at that.

“She’s a control freak! People, things, emotions – if she can’t control something, she gets rid of it.”

“And you’re a wild animal! You’ll rub up against anything that’ll take you in for the night, then, when you’re stuffed and bored, you bite the hand that fed you.”

In that moment, Izaya found it almost fascinating how he managed to relate to both of the “sisters” in different ways.

“If you could join forces, you would command a great deal of strength. Think of it.”

Interestingly, they both seemed to consider this. Therese was always the one quick to respond.

“I don’t think it’s possible. How could I ever trust her again?”

“Trust me? Who could trust you after what happened with Father dearest?”

‘Damn, I was getting somewhere,’ he thought with a just a hint of frustration. Naturally, he didn’t allow it to show on his face. He really did want them both to come out of this. They would make a great ally for him, and, it was true – he could relate to both of them in some ways.

“Father loved me. I was a good girl. I always did what I was told,” Therese was becoming defensive again, as though she knew exactly what Jeanette was going to say next. Surely, she did. “You always hated that he loved me. You disobeyed him, you brought men home when he wasn’t there. You were an awful daughter to him.”

Jeanette turned back to Izaya. “Father came home drunk one day and mistook me for Therese, because I’d fallen asleep in her bed.”

“No – don’t listen to her, she’s lying!”

“Therese walked in while he was there and she saw me lying with him. And so, she went to the closet and pulled out his hunting shotgun, loaded it with deershot, and blew his mind out all over the silly clown wallpaper.”

“That’s a lie! Father killed himself because of Jeanette! She made him miserable!”

Jeanette smirked.

“As I recall…he died with a smile on his face.”

It was about has heavy a past as he’d figured.

“You both should cast aside the past, and work together now.”

Again, it was Therese with a fast response.

“Why? How will this time be any different?”
“Again, just think about it – work as a team and your power would more than double.”

Jeanette was not convinced. “Therese doesn’t like to share.”

“Jeanette’s irresponsible. She’s undependable. A venture like mine requires class and distinction, which is something a pig-tailed, face-painting harlot does not lend very well.”

“You do have a way with words, sister. You’re right, I’m not in the same class, am I? I mean, murderers are so respected these days.”

“Therese, let Jeanette have more responsibility.”

‘Just a bit more.’

“More responsibility? So that she can ruin every opportunity I give her?”

“Of course. You’re the only one who can secure zoning permits and shake hands. I’d never be able to keep up!”

“Jeanette, don’t mess with Therese’s plans.”

“Aw, but I only do it for attention, and out of love.”

“You do it because you’re vindictive and jealous.”

“And you deserve it!”

“If you got along, you’d be an indomitable force.”

Jeanette was again the faster one this time.

“If she’d stop treating me like a child!”

“If she would start behaving like a rational adult!”

‘It’s like there’s one more wall…ah.’

“Wasn’t there a time when you cared for each other?”

Jeanette’s voice came softly this time.

“Yes…there was a time.”

Therese seemed to agree.

“When I was a child, I didn’t have many friends. I suppose Jeanette was the only one. We never did get to go out of the house much. Father wouldn’t allow us.”

“He said we’d get hurt. So we stayed inside and we imagined our own worlds. And we spent so much time there, together, ruling over those places. Those were-“

“-happier times. Before we grew apart.”

“You don’t really want to kill each other, do you?”

“I never did,” Jeanette was sincere, interestingly.
“No…I guess I don’t. Jeanette: If I were to give – *offer* you equal control in Santa Monica, would you quit consorting with Tung?”

“I’ll stop working against you with him,” Jeanette’s ton turned to a conspiratorial one. “But since I’ve got him in my pocket already, there’s no reason for me not to pay him a little visit once in a while, when he can be of use.”

Therese was, thankfully, agreeable. “That’s not a bad plan. There’s just one more thing: I want to be in charge of Santa Monica – but only publicly. I want you to continue to convince others that our relations are strained. That way—”

“-we know who are enemies are. I agree.”

They were smiling now.

“Therese, please give me the gun.”

And with that, the situation seemed to be resolved.

“Take it. I’d hate to look at it again and think of what almost transpired. I suppose now that Jeanette and I have settled our differences, I’ll call off the feud with Tung.”

Jeanette gave him the bit of info he needed.

“Bertram’s hiding in an empty oil tank at the old Sunco gas station. I’ll tell him to expect a visitor, and I’ll ask him to be extra nice.”

“That is most appreciated, my good ladies. I’m very happy for the both of you. I should like to remain in contact, if you could acquiesce to such a request.”

“I’m sure we can arrange that,” Therese’s voice returned to its normal silky flow. Please give Santa Monica’s regards to the prince.”

Jeanette giggled, suspiciously too confident.

“And keep your tongue tied about what happened tonight or we’ll have to—“

“*Kill you.*”

~

**Clan Ventrue:**

*From time immemorial, Ventrue has been the clan of leadership, enforcing the ancient traditions and seeking to shape the destiny of the Kindred. In nights of old, Ventrue were chosen from nobles, merchant princes or other wielders of power. In modern times the clan recruits from wealthy 'old money' families, ruthless corporate climbers, and politicians.*
Whatever the origin, Ventrue vampires preserve stability and maintain order for the Camarilla. Elegant, aristocratic and regal, the Ventrue are the lords of the Camarilla. It was Clan Ventrue that provided the cornerstone of the Camarilla, and it is Clan Ventrue that directs and coaxes the Camarilla in its darkest hours. Even in the modern age, the majority of princes descend from Clan Ventrue. The Ventrue would, of course, have things no other way. In the tradition of noblesse oblige, the Ventrue must lead the other clans for their own good.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact:

The voice for Therese is Grey DeLisle.
Among many things, she voiced Azula in Avatar. :D
Order a Pizza?

Chapter Notes

Hello~! Thanks for waiting, guys. I'm so often slowed down, so thanks for your patience~

I hope you enjoy, and as always, thanks for reading; your support makes my world better, thank you! ^^/

~

*2-3 Years Ago*

~

Gary didn’t seem hideous to him.

Especially for a Nosferatu. Interestingly, Gary had a wickedly sarcastic and self-deprecating humor that seemed to imply that Gary felt rather the opposite about himself. To Zen, Gary was one of the more put-together looking Nosferatu. Even though he was embraced in 1960, Gary had already risen to the rank of “Primogen” though Zen was not very clear on what that meant. It had been a recent change with the Camarilla’s near-takeover of Los Angeles. Mitnick said it didn’t seem to change Gary, however. Zen supposed that was a good thing from what he could tell. Moreover, at least he knew that this guy held some kind of higher rank before just talking to him in whatever casual way, practically a guarantee in making trouble for himself.

“Well if isn’t the talk of the deep, dank, and dark playground,” came the mildly scratching voice. “Mr. tall, pale, and handsome.”

Gary spoke as if he was always talking around a smirk whether he was smirking or not. In this case, he had an amused grin, his somewhat crooked teeth on display stretched almost from one pointed ear to the next. His amused eyes were deep-set and his nose a bit large, but otherwise he looked particularly mild for a Nosferatu.

Being polite, Zen did what naturally came next. He stood up straight, facing Gary, and bowed to him. Kept his arms firmly at his sides. He came out of the bow as Gary began clapping and laughing heartily, as if he’d just watched a very amusing show. Well, perhaps he had.

At first, Zen was actually feeling a little offended. Then he remembered where, exactly, he was. Yes, westerners would find it a delightful mannerism and reactions varied among people.

Well the good news was he reacted in a positive manner.

Zen ruffled his dark hair with some embarrassment. “Ah…It’s nice to meet you.”

Gary crossed his arms, smile heavy with amusement. It was then that Zen realized that Gary was wearing a bartending outfit.

“Well if isn’t the talk of the deep, dank, and dark playground,” he gestured widely at the scene to the side. Gary’s…office…was basically just a large room in the caves with a large table surrounded by chairs in the middle. Oddly, there were skeletons with various articles of clothing hanging on them sat there
in the chairs, odd glasses of drinks on the table.

Mitnick kept standing there at his side. Having finished introducing them, he had remained there looking like all of this could not have been more natural.

“We’re having a…late wrap party for Bill Haley & His Comets,” he gestured at the skeletons. “A little before your time, eh?”

This wasn’t the weirdest thing Zen had seen. Oh, it was up there, sure. What helped the most, however, was Mitnick’s calm attitude. It was then that Zen noticed the bar behind Gary.

‘Might as well roll with it,’ he thought, a smile coming out. “Well…I can help…liven the party up, if you will.”

Gary’s outfit had given him an idea. He had been a bartender himself, after all. And, if customers of the past were to be believed, a damn good one.

Gary followed his gaze. “And just what will clever idea has your fledgling mind produced…young Toreador?”

A challenge.

Zen smirked.

“You got the equipment to make a Rum Martinez?”

Gary’s laughter echoed through the entire cave system.

~

*Present Day*

~

Shizuo mused on the first time he’d met Gary. They’d all actually had a pretty good time, and even some other Nosferatu had come around to see what was happening. Even though they couldn’t actually drink, Gary and Shizuo engaged themselves in an odd drink-making competition.

When…unorthodox ingredients got involved, things started to get a little wild, as many of the Nosferatu were unabashedly amused by it. Both competitors were able to show off their skills, and some new and inevitably disgusting drinks were created.

‘It has been a while since I’ve seen Gary and some of the others,’ he thought, almost whimsically. ‘Ah well, hopefully I’ll see him when I get this over to him.’

He had to focus on his job at the museum.

~

After getting more blood and ensuring his knives were all set, he swung by his apartment and grabbed the explosives.

Izaya could not have been more relieved to get out of The Asylum. The sisters were creepier together that way.

Still, he would try and follow-up with them – it was true that they could be powerful allies.
In any case, it was time to find Bertram. This ended up being almost depressingly easy; this was one of the reasons why he knew how important information was. Bertram was actually quite close by and he’d unknowingly gone past it numerous times. The sign for the Sunco gas station was only that, a sign. Beyond where the sign hung was a chain link fence, wrapping around a wide area that had large metallic and cylindrically shaped buildings, or so it looked. These must be the large gas barrels – these were tall enough to be two stories high. After walking around the fence perimeter, he found one section that would open. Right beyond it, the immediate barrel had an unnatural opening, a torn out hole big enough for most people to fit through.

Inside, if no one were squatting in it, it would be obvious that the barrels were no longer used as it was completely empty with a sandy and grassy ground for a floor, complimented by the pitch-black high ceiling.

However, this one was a bit occupied. By one Bertram Tung, or so Izaya assumed. With Therese’s previous description of ‘unclean’, this would be the guy.

Bertram Tung stood next to the only source of light – lamp on top of a very small table stand. Nearby, a desktop computer and monitor sat on its own flimsy-looking wooden stand. There was a dirty mattress on the ground, and little else.

“Well, look who it is…bet’cha thought you’d never find me, did’ja Cupcake?”

What was it with these Santa Monicans and them calling him food pet names?

‘Ah well, new face, another game,’ the ex-informant thought as a smile concealing a smirk crossed his face.

“I was just about reaching that point, yes. You must be Bertram Tung.”

“The one and only,” Bertram was smiling, revealing crooked teeth, and staring at Izaya with his red eyes. Interestingly, where the human eye is usually white, his were black. His skin had a strange tint of light orange, and his head was bald and misshapen – as if the back of the skull had risen up to resemble a mountain against the horizon. It caused one of his ears to practically be non-existent. At the same time, the other ear was very pointed and pronounced, a large metal ring piercing going around the top. In his nose was a matching septum piercing.

His raspy voice touched with amusement sounded again.

“Don’t bother with the introduction, Fledgling, I know who you are.”

Izaya had to think for just a moment. “How so?”

“News travels fast down the Kindred grapevine like wildfire and that courtroom spat between LaCroix and Nines Rodriguez is a juicy little morsel, and you in the middle…how interesting.”

Izaya chuckled, trying to create a casual atmosphere. “Then I’m sure you’re glad to know that I made it out in one piece.”

Bertram snickered, “Ooh, you did, did’ja? Hmph, well I’m not surprised. You had someone else watching out for you too.”

Izaya couldn’t keep the hint of surprise out of his expression. Bertram caught it.

“Ah~ and who might that have been?” Izaya asked, attempting to keep any real emotion out of the question. Tried, and failed.
Bertram just chuckled with amusement. “You’ll have to find that out for yourself, Cupcake. I don’t have the time to go into that. Not now, at least.”

‘Damn.’

“Well, knowing so much, I’m sure you now I need to get to the warehouse.”

It was poorly disguised snark, but Izaya became more and more certain as to who had watched out for him. And to have to be thinking about Shizuo at this point agitated him.

Bertram ignored his tone, luckily. He got down to business.

“I’ve been watching the place. The Sabbat has a bunch of low-life humans working day and night to move stuff through there…there’s some major staging going on.”

Izaya spied an opportunity for information gathering. He felt he got a good idea of the Sabbat already, but he’d never refuse…almost any information.

“The Sabbat, huh?”

“Jeez, you are green…it’s like this; we’re all monsters, like it or not. I’m not gonna say the Sabbat are the evil vampires ‘cuz none of us are the good guys here. But the Sabbat, they glorify their monstrous nature. They reuse to hide it, and go out of their way to show it. Worse, they’re also brainless and reckless; they got a life expectancy like vampire fruit flies.”

So I was mostly an opinionated statement. Still, it may be useful.

‘Let’s try again.’

“What about the humans there? Do they know they’re working for vampires?”

“As far as I can tell, the humans seem to know the score from the way they’ve been talking. I think most of them have aspirations of joining the next graduating class of shovelheads,” he scoffed. “Losers.”

Izaya frowned. “That sounds like a lot of humans – and they all know of our existence?”

“Yes. The Sabbat like everyone to know just who they’re dealing with. So if you get in there and have to bust a few heads – don’t feel bad. Think of it as ‘upholding the Masquerade’.” Bertram’s chuckle was creepier than his smile by far.

Moving on.

“So, you can get me in there, right?”

“Yes, I can. Just let me know when you’re ready to go, and we’ll leave. Once you’re there, however, you’re on your own. You’ll have to get inside the place and plant the explosives in the middle office to take the whole structure down.”

Izaya smiled. “I do believe I’m ready now.”

Bertram smirked, satisfied.

“This way.”
Izaya had to follow Bertram through the sewers as well as some abandoned fields with insanely tall grass and weeds until they reached the compound a few miles away. Bertram got him into the area which was right in front of several large concrete tunnels. Apparently, this would get him into what used to be a train station. Beyond which lay a large trainyard, also not in use. Behind that was the large warehouse. The offices would be upstairs in the large building, so said Bertram. It was likely that there would be a few ways of getting in, though he’d probably have to choose early on. Bertram waved farewell, and Izaya was alone.

It hadn’t escaped his notice how despite being unable to blend in with Kine, that this Nosferatu had easily – from the sound of it – been watching the operations there and gathered information well. There had to be something to that. Perhaps it was because of the fact that he couldn’t be among humans. He’d have to remember to watch other Nosferatu and see if they were similarly gifted. If so, there would likely be a lot to learn of their techniques.

But now, it was time to begin.

Crawling through the long tunnel, he saw through the other side that the wall of the old train station was proof of the structure’s dilapidated state; this end of it was more or less gone. Straight ahead was a small bathroom, that really only had a toilet. There was no door, and the room only mostly covered it. Dead ahead was a human…utilizing the facilities. He was facing away from Izaya’s approach.

‘How lovely, a late lunch just for me.’

After feeding on him, the man fell to the floor. ‘Good, feeling better after that,’ he thought, absent-mindedly.

He crept through the intact part of the train station, avoiding the couple of thug sitting inside, who seemed otherwise occupied. This led him outside once more, on the other side of the station. Nothing off to the right, and to the left, all of the old train tracks with various train cars. It was apparent that they were long-since out of operation and that included the whole facility. Izaya crept onto the platform, where there was a metal barel for trash…though it was on fire. A man, bundled up for cold stood by it, looking as though he was almost sleeping.

‘Isn’t it summer, though?’

Nevermind.

He left the platform, hopping down onto one of the many tracks. Now, it felt like he was in a maze of train cars, light posts, railways, and gravel. He’d need a proper look of the main warehouse before he decided on any kind of route or plan.

Before turning another corner, there was a lightpost nearby, and to voices sounded from the other side. Izaya waited to see if they’d move.

“Yo, what the fuck is going on here tonight? Marcus is in everyone’s face and shit!”

“Didn’t you hear? New shipment came in tonight – some pretty serious hardware.”

“Yeah, I heard. But what the fuck? We get that kind of shit in here all the time. What’s so different about tonight?”

“I don’t know. Marcus’s as tense as a motherfucker. Maybe he heard something.”

“Like what?”
“Like I don’t know, but keep your fucking eyes open. And someone better tell those clowns on the freight house to quit playing cards before Marcus comes out and starts peeling some fucking caps, you know what I’m sayin’?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I hear ya.”

From there, the two kept themselves in place

‘Strange…it sounds like everything should be business as usual, and yet…’ Izaya contemplated the matter. ‘It’s as though this Marcus knows to be on guard for something…well, I need to finish before dawn – I can think on this later.’

He had to find another way around. These two were blocking the only way forward from there. True, there might be an alternate way, but ultimately his main focus was to remain totally unseen. And he already had a plan for this situation. There had been some garbage on the train platform.

‘Time to throw shit.’ Not quite literally.

He retrieved a crushed metal can from the platform, and used the height of it to his advantage, enabling the trash to fly over a train car, and hit another one making a metallic clanging sound. It made the noise right in the perfect area to me make the two men walk passed him.

And they did, making vague statements of “What was that?” the whole time. The instant they had passed him and gotten far away enough, Izaya crept by, keeping as close to the edge of the light from the large light post as he could – it covered pretty much the whole area. He had to be silent, yet quick. For Izaya, that was better and more exciting than any sort of large scale shoot-out.

He made it passed the lit area and turned left – toward the warehouse. After weaving between more train cars, he saw it.

It, being dozens of thugs obviously positioned to be on guard, as opposed to doing any other work.

That clinched it. ‘There’s no way they aren’t expecting me. Or at least they were told to be aware of an intruder.’ Izaya frowned. Now wasn’t the time to reflect on it, but this was clearly a problem.

But once again, it’d be a problem to think about later. He’d just have to have his guard up even more.

He kept low and stayed in the shadows. There were so many of them guarding the wide open industrial rolling gate that despite how large an entrance it was, he still wouldn’t be able to weave between them. There needed to be another way.

And there was.

To the left of that main building was something akin to an alley, big enough to house the front car of a train – the pilot with the cowcatcher on the front of it. On either side was a narrow walkway. There was just one light on the side closer to the main warehouse. It was next to an almost conveniently placed ladder that led upwards…to a hatch just under the rooftop.

‘That just might lead to exactly where I need to be,’ he thought with a self-satisfied smirk. ‘Perfect.’

The only problem now was that right near that light, thus the ladder as well, was a guy working on some kind of panel on the wall. He’d walk around to look at the train from time to time but his movements became predictable quickly.
Izaya crept to the other side of the train. His idea was simple, yet should prove effective. He found it easy to half climb, half climb, half hop on top of the train car. He’d need to get the timing right so that the light by the ladder wouldn’t give him away but this thug needed to be facing the wall.

Sure enough, the human faced away, and Izaya silently dashed over behind the man, though he was still on the train car. Now was the time.

He jumped, landing right behind the guy almost completely silently. Covered his mouth with one hand, used a knee in the back to keep him in place, and one slash to the throat with Izaya’s knife ended him.

Izaya moved the body toward the darkness in the back. Someone would otherwise notice a bit too quickly. The guy had some pills and a knife on him. Nothing he couldn’t sell for profit~

He climbed up the ladder quickly, making sure there weren’t any other humans around or least not looking in his direction. He unlatched the hatch and climbed through it.

The room was shaped like a triangle and was certainly an attic of sorts, complete with creaky wooden beams. Still, he couldn’t see anything aside from more wooden planks below. Not much to be done about it, especially since the rooftop was so low that he had to crawl to get to an identical hatch on the other side. Upon opening it, he could see the entirety of the warehouse. Luckily, he was high up enough to be unnoticeable. There was a catwalk just below him, running horizontally along the outside of what looked like offices, and it also extended vertically to the other side of the large room.

He could see the entrance that he’d avoided, with many humans guarding it. Perhaps a dozen more or so were inside the place standing here and there on the floor. Everyone seemed to be armed with something, most often a gun. Large metal shelves with small equipment stood here and there, and many wooden crates were scattered around by the larger, heavier machinery. Nothing very suspicious looking on the whole, but who knew what was inside everything.

Using Auspex, he could see that there were three offices, and all the humans inside were gathered inside of one on the end. Which was fine, Izaya needed the middle office. Once dropped down, he kept to the shadows as much as possible which was actually pretty hard considering all of the lighting coming from the ceiling. But being on the catwalk did have its advantages; despite all of the numerous humans, they weren’t likely to look up and even if they did, the catwalk would help to block him from sight.

Luckily, it seemed like there were exit doors to the catwalk for each office, and doorways in between them each as well. Izaya moved to get in front of the door he needed to get into the middle office. The hard part was that it was locked. Upon working on the lock, Izaya knew he could open it. The biggest problem was how bright it was right there. Still, he could work both quietly and quickly.

In just a couple of minutes, he was in. There wasn’t much in the room aside from various fake potted plants and a crappy table on the far wall. Right near him though, was a wooden desk with a chair, looked to be made of oak. It was the most expensive looking thing in the whole place.

Right underneath the desk should do nicely.

Right before he was about to arm the explosives, the thugs in the other room started talking. He decided to wait a moment. If he was caught with these things, it’d make it worse.

“Anything missing from that last shipment?”
“I don’t know. I forgot to look, but I’ll do it tonight.”

“Fuck I pay you guys for?” the man was close to shouting. “This is the big score, so do your goddamn job right, or I’ll bury you in the desert and find someone who can.”

Perhaps that guy was Marcus.

“Won’t happen again, swear I’ll check the shipment tonight.”

Now another voice chimed in.

“I’m hungry, let’s order a pizza.”

In response, the assumed voice of Marcus.

“Order a pizza? Order a PIZZA??!” There was the shouting. “Where they gonna deliver it, numbnuts?? 13 Abandoned Warehouse Full Of Kill On Sight Hot-Heads Way??”

“I could pick it up.”

This guy did not know when to stop…

“No, no one’s going anywhere while we’re sitting on this shit.”

“But there’s no vending machine or nothin’.”

“How about I put a bullet in your gut, that fill you up, huh – you goddamn mongrel lookin’ bastard?”

“No Boss, now I ain’t hungry.”

Now the other voice from before. Were those two complete and utter morons?

“Well I guess that’s not really surprising all thing considered.’

“We ain’t eaten all night’s all, Boss, he didn’t mean anythin’ by it.”

“What’d I just say?”

“Hey, sorry Boss, forget I said it.”

“No, I want you to tell me what I said. Say it clear and firm, like a man.”

“Y-you said no one’s leaving here while we got this stuff here.”

“I swear to God, one of you mouths off again, I’m gonna pull out your tongue and nail it to your thick shit-filled skulls.”

‘Now that was entertaining~!’ Izaya smiled gleefully as he began to work on arming the bomb.

“Now I gotta call my woman real wuick, so keep your mouths shut, your eyes open, and your hands away from your pockets.”

Izaya had a feeling they’d be quick to disobey.

“Yo, baby.”

“No, late tonight…not tonight.”
“Hey, shut up and deal with it, I don’t care.”

“Yeah, y-you do that. You touch my bike and I break my foot up in your ass when I get home.”

“You testin’ me??”

‘Ah~ an equally amusing one-sided conversation…I’m glad that sometimes humans will still live up to my expectations now and then.’

“I don’t care if the kid’s in the room, I don’t even know she’s mine – don’t you raise your voice to me, woman!”

“Listen, bitch, that’s just the way it is!”

Finally, he managed to get the bomb armed.

“Deal with it!”

There was one problem, however.

“You do it, then. See what happens…”

There was a timer on it, rapidly counting down.

“End of conversation…END. OF. CONVERSATION!”

It was, indeed, the end of that conversation as it seemed Marcus had hung up his phone.

But there were more dire things to worry about. The timer indicated he had just three minutes to get out of there.

He crept out of the room, and into the other office where there wasn’t anybody. He’d have to wing this escape, unfortunately. Luckily, beyond the exit door onto the catwalk from this office was a set of stairs he could go down. Right by that on the ground floor was a door. He might have to pick the lock, but no one was standing very close to it.

Remaining crouched, he managed to get the door open, and it led him outside of the building, on the rear side. There was one guy out there, but he was out by the fence, peeing, it seemed.

‘No time to lose.’

He dashed across the grassy yard, and followed the building until he turned and found himself crouching again, hiding behind oil barrels as he crawled passed several humans, and what was possibly a Sabbat vampire. The only way beyond here would be through what looked like a small train station, or perhaps it was a freight house. Either way, he had to take the time to pick another lock. Luckily, it was dark in front of the door. It took longer than was typical for him, but it worked out. Through the door were two large trains, with a few cars attached. There was a door on the other side, with a red light over it. That might mean trouble.

That was when he noticed – there was someone standing on the catwalk that stretch along the wall over Izaya’s head. Whoever it was, they were a vampire and they’d be an enemy. There was no time for a fight.

‘There is a gap between these two trains…I could probably squeeze through there.’

After all, that direction did lead back outside. It would be on the far right of the trainyard he’d started
in. He'd just need to reach the platform again, and that should be fine.

He kept low to the ground, and made his way to the two trains, squeezing into the small gap. He looked ahead, and there would be a little of a ways to go, but it wouldn’t take him too long.

As he slid through the gap, moving quickly yet cautiously, he could hear voices from the other side, likely coming from a train car maybe 20 feet away.

“-And once they come pick up the stash, they promised they’d make us just like them.”

“Know what that means?”

“It means we never die, we get super strong, we can even fly and shit.”

“We can even fly?”

“Shhh, why not? Don’t they fly in the movies?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“And, like, that punk who dropped your brother, you could hit his whole crew and the bullets wouldn’t do jack shit, I’d tear their asses up if I were a vampire.”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s not so bad.”

“You’d be stupid not to run with this crew, they said the run whole cities, you understand that? Working with a crew that owns a whole city, you could do anything you want, kill anyone who gets in your way, fly all over the place.”

“But what about blood, do we really gotta drink blood?”

“That’s how they do it in the movies.”

“That’s kinda nasty, what if I want a sandwich or somethin’?”

“How should I know? Probably tastes good to vampires.”

“It’s still nasty, and what about sex? Don’t tell me I gotta give up hitting it, ‘cuz my cousin got her friend staying at my place and she…”

“Man, how d’you expect me to know? Not like it falls off, right?”

“Wha…?”

“You never use it anyway.”

“…that’s messed up.”

“Just keep your eyes open, man. We screw this shit up and you can kiss flying, sex, and your ass goodbye. These Sabbat guys, they said they kill us and our families if we blow it.”

“I never agree to-“

“Look, just shut up and shoot anybody who ain’t supposed to be here.”

Well, lovely. Izaya had gotten through the gap by the time they finished talking. ‘So at the very least, the Sabbat were aware of this and they probably told just a few select humans as well.’
The conclusions he was drawing weren’t going to have simple solutions, that was for sure.

He continued along the trainyard, weaving between the old train cars back toward the platform. It would be a real close call, but he knew he’d make it to the platform on time.

And he wasn’t wrong. As he climbed up onto it, the platform shook rather violently as the explosion sounded from the warehouse. Various large and small pieces of debris were flying through the air as well.

As he turned to look and try to see something of the warehouse, a loud howl sounded from nearby.

A grey-ish white wolf was on top of the nearby train cars, and was running toward Izaya. He pulled out a knife just in case and watched as the wolf jumped and landed not too far in front of him. From there the wolf actually…transformed.

There in front of him, stood an individual not as pale as Izaya, with longer black hair down to the shoulders which rested on a trench coat. Behind dark glasses were orange eyes with a yellow iris surrounding the pupil. It was hard to look away, since one didn’t usually see eyes like that every day.

A drawling, low and soft voice came from him quickly.

“The warehouse. Your…handiwork, I presume?”

Izaya felt it best to answer the question for the time being.

“Yes, it was. Why?”

“Hopefully no Sabbat saw you – they can be quite…antagonistic.”

“Who are you, anyway? I’m certain I’ve seen you around Santa Monica now and again.”

It was true, he remembered seeing a wolf like this at least once around the city.

“I see my reputation, for once, does not precede me. My name is Beckett. I haven’t been following you per se; we’ve just coincidentally been at the same place at the same time... for different reasons. So sorry if I unnerved you.”

Izaya wasn’t sure he believed that. This Kindred (who could turn into a wolf somehow…?) had to be significantly older than Izaya.

“Tell me, have you by chance seen or felt anything strange since your Embrace?”

“Hmm…well, I did see ghosts at a nearby hotel.”

“Ghosts? Hmph. Quite ordinary,” Beckett was beginning to sound bored. “I generally pay wraiths no mind; all but a few are willing to give up their secrets.”

“Well, I did meet some thin-bloods on the beach.”

“Thin-bloods…they’re a fascination of mine. They are considered a weaker, more human-like Kindred, hence the name “thin-blood”, but they are sired same as any of us. I’ve heard a large concentration of them live in this city. They’re one of the reasons I’m in Los Angeles.”

Izaya would file that away. There really was a lot of discrimination against the thin-bloods.

“Most of my contacts here report sensing something unusual in the night air, like a sense of dread or
pressure…but I’m not native to these parts, so I can’t tell if it’s irregular. And since you’re still rather fresh, perhaps you’re not attuned to it.”

He had some good points. ‘Still, Beckett is obviously intelligent – can’t let don’t my guard.’

Izaya simply nodded.

“Please making your acquaintance, but there are rumblings for me to discredit. We shall, I’m certain, meet again. Or never again. Good night, young one…and be careful; you’re very likely being hunted by the Sabbat.”

“Good night, Beckett.” He could be polite to Beckett. Although he’d remain cautious, the intelligence and mystery to the Kindred was interesting. He’d be a good contact to retain when he had the chance, that was for sure.

Beckett turned around, and ran into the trainyard and out of sight. It was only a few moments later that he heard that howl again.

~

After making his way back from the warehouse which had taken a decent amount of time, he probably had about an hour until sunrise. He’d meet with Bertram again and then sleep before he went Downtown the next night.

Bertram was standing by his computer yet again.

“Nice work, Cupcake. I felt that explosion a mile away. It’s all over the news too. Man…there’s gotta be some pissed off Sabbat just howling for blood tonight, heheheheh.”

Izaya pursed his lips just slightly. He was still a cupcake, apparently. Ah, well. He’d have to drop it.

“Well, thanks,” despite the cupcake pet name, he could probably gather some info here. “Do you know someone named Beckett?”

Bertram looked curious now. “Beckett? Hm, well, I know of him. Why?”

Interesting. So he really was reknowned among Kindred.

“We traded words.”

“No kidding? Huh. Must be something major happening if HE’s in town.”

Now that was a good detail. Although he could have probably inferred it on his own anyway, confirming that Beckett was not only a big name but also likely older than he thought would likely be helpful.

“Beckett is a historian of sorts. He’s unearthed more vampire lore than anyone. That’s all Beckett does; seek the truth behind our…condition.”

And he even continued without Izaya having to ask. Excellent~

“I have some other questions for you, if you don’t mind, of course,” he said. ‘Back to the innocent fledgling routine…the local Kindred don’t know who they’re talking to. Sure, nothing is going to be easy for at least some time, but it’ll be worth it.’

“So what was going on with Therese Voerman?”
Bertram was evasive. “That was just silly vampire politicking, Cupcake, no more. You get used to that kind of thing.”

Izaya raised a brow. “I’m quite certain she really wanted you dead.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Bertram chuckled bitterly. “Now that the Camarilla has moved into LA, Therese wants the title of Prince of Santa Monica. I guess she saw me as a threat. Funny thing is, I could care less.”

Interesting. But he was more than likely lying to some extent, anyway.

“What man is not intrigued by fame and power?”

“I wouldn’t want to be Prince of Terre Haute. I leave that headache to the Ventrue. Besides, there’s only like four vampires in all of Santa Monica. Hmph. Some kingdom.”

“Hm~ I see, I see,” Bertram was full information, and he seemed to be quite willing to share. Perfect.

“Would you mind telling me about the clans?”

“Hmmm. Clans are just bloodlines, you know, a common root shared and passed on from sire to childe.”

Bertram continued all by himself from there. Izaya merely had to nod and make occasional noises of agreement.

“Now, the Brujah are a bunch of malcontents. They get pumped up by rousing the rabble they keep around them, like that’s hard. Nothing breeds faster than contempt, and that’s what the Brujah are all about. Jealous and contempt.”

Quite opinionated, but there was likely some amount of truth it was based on. The guy Nines seemed to belong to this clan, far as he could tell. Probably Jack as well. Still, Izaya liked them well enough – for all of the brief times he’d seen them. The old Shizu-chan would have fit right in with them, he thought. But he really was different from then.

Bertram was annoyed talking about the Brujah, and seemed just as much about the next clan.

“Gangrel fancy themselves loners and drifters, running around the countryside and barking at the moon. Hmph. It’s just an act. Gangrel can walk upright, they just choose not to.”

‘Odd, that sounds like Beckett, but I wouldn’t have guessed he’d walk on all fours in human form…’

“Now…the Malkavians are, uh, interesting. There’s something to them. Learning to sort the wisdom from the bullshit can take some work and, uh, not all of them are worth listening to, but, uh, they’re all good fun if you ask me.”

Now that was an interesting clan. It was no wonder Therese and Jeanette (maybe it was Tourette now?) were Malkavian. It made sense.

“We, the Nosferatu are damn good at what we do; no one even argues with that. If you need to know, if you want it found, you come to us. We’re indispensable; not a bad place to be in the afterlife.”

Indeed, Bertram was a source of good information. Still, he also seemed to be quite biased in his information. Perhaps if he could find other Nosferatu, that would be nice. He could relate to them, after all. Quite well.
‘In fact, I’m guessing one of my clan wouldn’t be expected to be like myself,’ he smirked just slightly at the thought.

“I see, that does sound quite lucky.”

“The Nosferatu stick together, pool resources. We have more going on than anyone could guess at. Our web blankets the night.”

‘I’ll really have to be careful not to tell this guy much…he’s oddly loose-lipped.’

“So…are the Nosferatu part of the Camarilla?”

“I’m loyal to the clan, loyal to my primogen, and therefore loyal to the Camarilla.”

“…That wasn’t an enthusiastic endorsement.”

“The Nosferatu are the eyes and ears of the Camarilla, so they take care of us. They value our services…or, uh, don’t want to be on our bad side. Either way, no one bothers us.”

That was a good part of Izaya’s future goal. Not even elders would mess with him one day.

“And what do you think of Prince LaCroix?”

“Ha. What am I gonna say? He’s the boss now.”

Nice and deflective.

“And the guy who decapitated my sire?”

“He’s LaCroix’s iron fist. No one ‘knows’ the sheriff, really, except LaCroix. No one even knows the guy’s name. There’s lots of rumors about him though. I heard LaCroix picked him up in Africa over a hundred years ago. Obviously, they work well together.”

“One more person, then. Can you tell me about Nines Rodriguez?”

“From what I hear, he’s a likable sort, and that’s a problem. Nines Rodriguez is the kind of guy you want on your side and more Kindred go Anarch every day cuzza him.”

Anarchs…that was a new one. He’d have to ask eventually.

“Now your clan, the Toreador, I don’t usually rub elbows with their pretty faces much, but I have seen them work people like puppeteers and that’s admirable. Now if only they’d put their talents to better use than just feeding their egos,” he paused for a moment. “Nothin’ on you, Cupcake, you’re still a fledgling and you don’t seem like them too much from what I can tell.”

‘Hm, an attempted save. Painfully obvious, but it’s time to make nice so I’ll let it go.’

“The Tremere are mages. I don’t have any reason to trust ‘em. They’re creepy and I think they like it that way. But to be honest, I don’t hear much about ‘em. There’s a few here in LA but all in all there’s not many of them.”

True to form, Izaya hadn’t yet heard of them either.

“Lastly, Ventrue get a bad rap if you ask me. Everyone likes to take shots at the man in charge, but when it comes to getting the job done, the Ventrue know how to step up. They can take the heat.”
LaCroix’s clan, for sure. Also, it seemed to be the way Therese behaved on her own.

“Thank you, Bertram – I appreciate that,” he smiled one of his saccharine smiles. “Would you tell me about the sects, if you don’t mind?” He needed to know what Anarchs were.

“Let’s see…well, you got the Anarchs. Yeah, I respect what they do, strenuous liberty and all that jazz, but they’re fooling themselves. Wherever there’s an ounce of power to be had, there’ll be people dickin’ each other over. You think the Camarilla invented that?”

True, that was a good point. Still not quite enough to get an idea of the Anarchs, though. He’d probably have to ask somebody else.

“The Camarilla, it works. When you let vampires run wild, you wind up with Caitiff frenzying in the streets, thin-bloods blowing the Masquerade, and hunters sniffing around. Law and order is the Kindred’s friend.”

“I see…but what is a Caitiff?”

“Caitiff are just riff-raff vampires who don’t know anything about vampire society, don’t know their clan; mutt vampires: what I suspect you were perilously close to becoming if LaCroix hadn’t intervened.”

Bertram was quite opinionated, but he wasn’t wrong about some things here and there. Still, he was going to need a lot more input to complete the picture of things.

“The Sabbat – y’ask me, they make no sense. They couldn’t care less about the Masquerade, and they seem to care even less about themselves. It’s like ‘Hey! Let’s all spread hell on earth so we can feel big and bad – oops! I’m dead! Now how did that happen…?'”

Izaya smirked. From what he’d observed thus far, that did seem to be the case.

“Ah, one more thing. I ran into your boy, Knox.”

“Yeah, I knew you would. He’s a sharp kid, can track like a bloodhound. I watched him for a while before deciding to offer him the job. I had no idea how…eager he’d be to help,” he very openly grinned with amusement. “Not a bad actor, is he?”

Izaya grinned his own sneaky grin. “Well, I…would agree. However, in my case, I was able to pick apart his lie.”

“Aw, shit,” Bertram frowned, obviously disappointed.

“So…what was the point of the whole thing?” he thought for a moment before continuing. “Do you know how frustrating those boxes were?”

Bertram clearly decided to avoid the box question.

“The point?” Bertram asked. He seemed to have assumed that Izaya would already know the answer.

“What happened is that you helped me remove a spy without revealing myself or getting my hand dirty.”

Izaya could help but pout at the idea that he could have been completely used if he weren’t as clever as he was.
Bertram chuckled. “Don’t take it hard, Cupcake. I won’t be the last elder to milk ya for a favor.”

“I suppose that’s true,” Izaya smiled nicely, it was important to maintain a respectful additude regardless of his true feelings.

“Well, you’d better get downtown, Cupcake. Prince LaCroix’s gonna want to hear about this victory, he said. “Get some rest, it’s almost dawn. Tomorrow night there’ll be a cab near that diner waiting for you.”

Izaya bid good night to Bertram, and made his way back to his home, grabbing a snack on the way. That had been valuable.

With any luck, LaCroix would be able to tell him something too. Hopefully.

And didn’t Shizu-chan say that Nines would meet him there? And that Shizuo himself would be somewhere there too?

It would probably be a long night.

~

He’d have to make a place in the deep basement of the museum for the day. The next night he’d have to continue working on this, and leave it to Kaz to run the club and train their assistant manager to be able to run the club for a night or two while they were both gone.

Kaz would meet with Izaya for him, luckily. Though Nines and Jack would be there too, Kaz being there made him feel much better.

Shizuo would be delivering it to Gary per the plan. It’d probably stay there for a while, too. LaCroix wouldn’t have a way of knowing. He had sensed no other Kindred the entire time.

On the upside, they would be able to have good a good chat and maybe visit with Mitnick too.

Gary was the Nosferatu primogen, sort of like the head of the clan that reported to the Camarilla. It was true that the Nosferatu were with the Camarilla on paper, but Gary was much more invested in his clan’s interests. Shizuo admired this, he didn’t care much for being under the thumb of anyone else like it was to be under the Camarilla.

The next night, he’d work on getting into the right storage room, and getting the important item to transport.

‘Izaya…be safe at the warehouse.’

He fell asleep in a little basement room with a smile.

~

**Clan Gangrel:**
The Gangrel are considered the most feral and predatory of the Kindred, and because of their reclusive natures, animalistic tendencies and loose organization, are the least social of the Cainites, preferring solitude to society. They also tend to be extremely territorial and possessive; to enter a Gangrel's territory without permission is certain death. They do have their role and reputation among the Kindred as fierce warriors, but to get a Gangrel to agree to work with others, even other Gangrel, can be a difficult, if not impossible, task.
“Where to?”

He was mysterious in every sense of the word. In his black shades, the taxi driver seemed hidden in the shadows of the cab. The most discerning thing about him was his voice. It stood out due to its deepness. Moreover, Izaya could have sworn it was the same driver who’d taken him to Santa Monica in the first place. Somehow, someway, there seemed to be something otherworldly about him.

Not that it mattered much, Izaya had to go Downtown and told the driver as much. During all of these nights, he’d learned that it was often not worthwhile to question some things.

Besides, he’d have lifetimes to get answers now.

It took longer to get to the Downtown district than Izaya had thought. Then again, he wasn’t as familiar with typical LA traffic as he might’ve been if he were a typical human.

~

It was as he got out of the cab that he felt something wasn’t right. As it drove away, he looked around as he searched for the source of the feeling. Unfortunately, he’d managed not to be fast enough.

He took a bat to the back of his skull.

~

“Let’s drain it.”

“Let’s stake it and leave it out for the sunrise.”

Izaya opened his eyes slowly. His body ached and he slowly became aware of his surroundings. For example, he seemed to be laying on concrete underneath a streetlamp.

Over him were three Sabbat vampires standing over him, the intent to kill practically radiating off of them. The full moon surrounded by dark sky shined down rather brightly as well.

“We’re going to have a lot of fun with this one.”

“Think you could blow up our warehouse and get away with it? Huh, lick?”
Izaya struggled to regain the proper strength in his limbs to get up to move much at all, really. There was an unnamed heaviness that coursed throughout his body, yet he felt sore too. As the Sabbat vampires stood over him and spoke, he could already feel his body healing up. The shooting pain in his head was still present, but even that was lessening as the seconds ticked by.

He could see the three of them standing around him as they spoke, and the small group’s leader seemed to be the one in the middle. Their red eyes glinted in the dark.

“Let’s pull out its eyes and its tongue and its teeth.”

The leader spoke up. “I want its teeth…Camarilla fuck!”

Izaya couldn’t help but grunt when the guy stomped down on his chest. He was so close to being able to move and get himself up.

‘Just a little more…’

He watched on the brink of helplessness as the leader spoke again.

“Boys, I think we could all use a little entertainment…”

As he spoke with cold, red eyes, an open smirk crawled along his face, teeth and fang displayed on the cruel expression.

Izaya heard approaching footsteps not far off. However, he couldn’t help but notice how familiar that face really looked. He knew it was the same kind of look he used to possess back in Tokyo those several years ago. The sort of face that malice itself would fear.

He only used it anymore in defense or when it was well and truly deserved. After all, he’d realized the hard way the true pain such a face could and did cause.

A loud bang sounded out, and the leader clutched at the side of his own head.

“Son of a bitch!”

He’d stumbled a little bit, almost on the ground, before he got up and faced the direction of the footsteps.

“Leave,” came a voice from the shadows. Izaya had, by now, managed to sit up but refrained from drawing any more attention to himself. He was right under a streetlamp and the three Sabbat were still right next to him.

He saw Nines there, still pointing a large Magnum at his attackers.

“There’s three of us, Rodriguez.”

“Yeah, huhuhuh…three of us.”

“Whaddya gonna do?” The three had moved away from Izaya, approaching Nines. “Shoot us?”

Nines simply drew attention to the grenade hooked onto the side of his belt.

The leader scoffed.

“This ain’t over,” he turned, pointing at Izaya, and then at Nines. “We’ll find you, and you too, Rodriguez.”
Nines simply gestured with his head for them to leave which seemed to piss them off a little more.

“You’re both dead! Nobody messes with the Sabbat and lives.”

“…Keep moving.”

The three finally left, running off into the shadows. Nines approached Izaya.

“Trouble sure seems to like you.”

The leader of that previous Sabbat pack of three came running up again suddenly, as if trying to make a surprise attack on Nines. Unfortunately for him, a gun was shoved into his stomach quickly.

“Nice effort,” Nines spoke as he shot the man who fell back and, weakened by his previous head wounds, died and dissolved into the air. “Execution needs a little work.”

Izaya was standing now, unaffected by the sudden death of the Sabbat vampire. One less to watch out for, apparently.

Nines stood before him. “Name’s Nines.”

Shizuo had said Nines would be here…but he’d also said he would be too.

Not that Izaya was expecting anything, of course.

“Thanks for the help,” Izaya was certain he’d have been fine once he’d recovered in order to fend off his attackers, but it wasn’t fast enough. In this case, it was true he’d needed help. Maybe Shizuo had suspected it? That he’d be hunted like that? Continuing, he almost used Shizuo’s real name by accident before waiting a moment and switching to his cover name.

“Zen told me you’d be around.”

“Hm. That’s just what I was gonna say, Newbie.”

Well. It wasn’t ‘cupcake’.

“Well, that makes it a little easier I guess,” Nines paused. “I’ve got some things to handle for now. Why don’t you come see us at The Last Round after you go see LaCroix. I have no doubt that’s the main reason you’re here.”

Well. More or less.

“Pretty much. I think I recognize you from my…hearing, yes?”

“Listen, Newbie, you gotta be more careful out here; this ain’t the ‘burbs.”

Izaya was painfully aware. In his human days in LA, he realized the city was far more dangerous than Tokyo, despite his old city’s supernatural and insane occurrences. Though he found these things to exist in LA too, obviously.

Of course, Nines was at least currently more capable than Izaya was in that moment, and from what he’d heard, would be most valuable to be on his good side. He swallowed his pride.

“Understood, it’s appreciated,” Izaya spoke more quietly than usual, and put on a meek kind of smile.
Nines seemed satisfied. He crossed his arms as he spoke this time. “No doubt you’ll probably end up with some other mission, just to warn you,” he let out a sigh. “I don’t know what you’ve heard so far, but I’ll give you the real story down at the bar. Jack should be there, and Zen too, far as I know.”

Izaya nodded in agreement. No reason to refuse, after all.

“This is a mean existence…stay out of trouble, kid.”

~

Nines had left, leaving Izaya to turn and make his own way through the streets. Trouble was he wasn’t sure which building exactly that he was supposed to go to. Still, he figured it had to be obvious to Kindred, and not to Kine. If he really had to, he’d go to the bar first and ask.

Luckily, he wouldn’t have to.

“Venture tower, huh?” he said to himself. This must be it.”

Switch two letters and you get the obvious clan name that LaCroix was from. The building did indeed expand high into the sky and it dwarfed a rather old-looking library across the street that was gated off. According to the map at a bus stop nearby, the local area had two main areas to the Southeast and Southwest of the tower, led by an easy road that would curve off in those directions. And alleyway on the other side of the library connected them too. It was almost the shape of an ‘A’.

Speaking of the bus stop, the first strange thing of the area was right there. An advertisement, with lights behind it so it could be seen in the dark…unfortunately. It had a yellow background and glow to it with a very bizarre image of a baby’s face on it.

The words “BABY SALE” were printed on it, which led to the inexplicable thought of ‘Even if I were in the market for babies, this is surely not where I’d obtain one,’ Izaya nodded to himself in confirmation. Anyone nearby that was aware or coherent enough to notice, edged a bit farther away from the ex-informant.

Well. First, down to business. He would grab a meal after that.

Ornate double doors opened into a lobby with minimal lighting. It was large, with a very high ceiling and everything was made out of marble and slate. Oddly, there were a few blue neon signs with the name LaCroix, some stationary, and others spinning around closer to the ceiling. Beyond the area of the front desk were a few stairs on either side leading to six different elevators in a group.

Manning the front desk was a familiar looking security officer.

The portly man was seated at the desk with a computer, a neon sign behind him.

Unexpectedly, the portly man recognized Izaya.

“Snack cake? What’re you doin’ here?”

…”

…”

…”

Somehow, it was worse than Cupcake.
The man continued, to Izaya’s chagrin.

“I mean, I gotta admit I’m a little flattered if you’re stalking me but, uh…anyhow, uh, you see where
your little security muffin’s ended up?”

‘He’s quick to accept that,’ Izaya was just slightly unsettled by the fact.

“—Night Shift Lobby Sergeant, hm~? Hehe, you stick with me, cuz I’m goin’ straight to the top,
baby.”

Well, wasn’t this special?

“Mind doing me a favor…moon pie, and buzzing me up?”

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, watch carefully as my dignity flies away,’ Izaya mentally cringed.

“Oh, I’d love to buzz you up, but according to building security protocol 916, I’m going to have to
verify you’re supposed to be here before I can open the elevator,” he went on to say that he didn’t
want to get in trouble since he was new to the position. Which was fair, but he talked a little too
much.

“I’m here to see LaCroix, you see.”

“Would that be, uh, Sebastian LaCroix of the LaCroix Foundation or James LaCroix of Insurrection
Baby Formula?”

That would probably explain that poster at the bus stop.

“…I have little interest in babies.”

“Uh, okay then. Mr. LaCroix – he told me to expect someone fitting your description sometime
tonight. You go right on up.”

Almost there.

“Thanks…muffin.”

“Yeah, uh, you have a good power meetin’ or uh, whatever it is you types do up there. You need
any security, why you just ring the front desk and ask for Officer Chunk. That’s me, ‘case you were
wonderin’.”

“…and what are you a chunk of?”

This might have been a kind of translation he didn’t understand. English wasn’t an easy language.

“Ah, yeah, I get that all the time.”

He did?

“The name goes back to my football days. Uh, actually my fantasy football days…at the station…
Stationarium – that was this office supply outlet mall I used to watch. ‘Hey, you kids, no skating in the parking lot!’ That was me.”

The urge to smack his head against something had never been so powerful, he was certain.

“I see. Well – thank you…honey…bun…”

It was a very forced smile, but Chunk didn’t notice.

As Izaya went up the few steps and toward the only open elevator, he shivered with disgust.

‘Even if I did have an interest in this…Chunk…or anyone for that matter, I sure as hell would not say anything of the sort.

As the elevator ascended to the penthouse floor, he shook his head and made sure to school his face into a neutral state.

Depending on what LaCroix would say would depend on how Izaya would construct his reactions to him. As it stood, he would more than likely be playing the obedient puppet. It was a newer mask to be sure, but one that he’d learned over time to be quite useful.

The elevator arrived, and Izaya stepped out into an incredibly large room. The ceiling had to be about 30 feet high, and the other side of the room was about the same distance away. It was likely constructed this way, he supposed, in case of a supernatural battle. However, the décor suggested no such thing. If anything, it was like walking into a museum for centuries old architecture and even paintings. There was a fireplace on the left side of the room, and a sofa that hand to be hundreds of years old.

He walked down the long and expensive looking carpeted rug to LaCroix, who sat behind a large desk, facing him. The immaculate polished floor reflected most objects in the room. To the left of LaCroix stood the Sheriff, silent and unmoving, and from behind, frosted windows.

“Ah, there you are. I was informed of your presence in the building,” he spoke with the same proper and accented voice that Izaya remembered from his very fun court hearing. “Since you’re here, I’ll take the liberty of assuming you’ve destroyed the warehouse…this is correct, yes?”

Izaya recalled that the man seemed to enjoy his own voice. Likely, he’d need to keep responses short. He stood with his arms behind his back, feet spread a bit, and back straight. More than a puppet, he’d need to behave more like a soldier.

‘This might prove interesting,’ he thought, a mental smirk accompanying it.

“Yes.”

“Most excellent. I had no doubt you’d prove my decision a prudent one. I trust you encountered no…impediments to your progress on account of my personnel?”

Truthfully, he could blame Mercurio and even Tourette if he really wanted to. But he knew he’d need to keep even potential allies and remain on their good side. Though Izaya still didn’t know his exact future plans, having whatever contacts he could have would only benefit him at this point. Besides, he could relate to them.

“None at all.”

“Good,” LaCroix’s expression relaxed just slightly. “You’ve done well, circumstances being what
they were. I will admit, not many in your…position would have overcome such a trial. But don’t misunderstand me, it was no fool’s errand.”

It was interesting how the man spoke. It seemed that he was good at pretending not to know certain things while also lying about other things point blank, and then making it all seem like the truth in one go. On the other hand, he was so good at it that Izaya had trouble determining just what it was LaCroix knew, what he didn’t know, and what he was lying about, though he could make some decent guesses.

“You may yet prove to be a genuine asset. It’s a bit disturbing, the lack of talent within this organization as of late. Tell me, what would you say to doing a bit of reconnaissance for me?”

Izaya would prefer not to ‘have to’ do anything save for his own plans. But this wasn’t really a question, he could tell.

“I would say, ‘Yes, sir.’”

“Very good. Were you in the military, by chance? I was an officer in Napoleon’s ranks, myself.”

LaCroix may not have realized he’d given away his age. Likely, he was arrogant enough to not see the need to conceal it from this fledgling.

“There have been whispers, rumors spreading around the Kindred community concerning the Elizabeth Dane – the cargo ship that was towed into port recently. Have you heard of it?

Izaya nodded. He’d heard the news report on the TV at least once. It seemed that the ship had been found floating out at sea without any crew or staff on it at all.

“The police are investigating the Dane as we speak. Even the Nosferatu have little information on what’s been found. However, the reason the ship has caused such speculation, is because it was transporting an object called the Ankaran Sarcophagus.

“Now, I’m not one to predicate a decision based on mere conjecture, so what I need is fact – and moer importantly, I need evidence that the occurrences on the Dane were not supernatural in nature, and in no way relate to this Ankaran Sarcophagus.”

“Understood. What do I need to do?”

“You have three objectives: One – I want you to examine the sarcophagus for anything unusual; you may sense something peculiar about the sarcophagus. In fact, many Kindred in the city have reported an uneasiness in the air since the Dane’s arrival. Do not, under any circumstances, open the Ankaran Sarcophagus. Secondly – the police have begun their investigation; find out what they have concluded thus far. Thirdly – take the cargo manifest for the ship; I want to find out what else it was carrying.

“The last thing we want is police aware of our existence, so…be careful what you do in front of them. And unlike the warehouse, you cannot wholesale slaughter a ship full of lawmen without consequences. Is this understood?”

‘Likes to hear himself talk, indeed.’

“Crystal clear.”

“Good. Oh, and it has come to my attention that you had an encounter with Nines Rodriguez earlier. The man so does love to throw that cretinous charm of his brashly about. What exactly di Mister
Rodriguez say?"

Izaya was starting to see just why Shizuo and others seemed so reluctant to say much or even be around him too much up to this point. It was clear that LaCroix gathered an obtained information in multiple ways; may as well not make it easy for him.

“Nothing.”

“Hm. How uncharacteristic of them.”

The worst part was even Izaya couldn’t tell from that statement or from LaCroix’s face or body language whether he actually believed that or not. It was likely he’d elected to let it slide and observe. Crafty.

“Now that that’s out of the way, I trust you’re prepared to leave for the Dane.”

Now was a chance.

“Might I ask some questions?”

“I suppose I might be able to spare a few seconds…”

“What of yourself?”

“It’s common knowledge. Was born in Calais, France over two hundred years ago. When I graduated from the Royal Military Academy, I joined Napoleon’s army. It was shortly after Waterloo when I was Embraced by a Belgian noble. From that time onward, I counted some of the greatest Kindred in Europe as my mentors, and worked toward establishing Camarilla presence in new territories. In 1930, I came to the Americas and staked power in New York. Soon after, I headed West to claim domain.”

Izaya went on to ask further about various persons.

“You’ve met Beckett? Yes, he did pay me the courtesy of announcing his presence in my city. He’s lionized in Kindred society – by most. Beckett’s the definition of renowned scholar, but he’s also a lone wolf, and owes allegiance only to his intellectual pursuits.”

“Jack…hmm. The man is a scourge – the physical manifestation of chaos. Whenever he makes an appearance in one’s city, it is only a matter of time before a calamity is attributed to his latest lark… and don’t get me started on his friends.”

He likely meant types like Nines and Shizuo. Jack sounded a lot like the nature of Shizuo that Izaya knew best.

He went on to explain that the Camarilla is a necessity to ensure the continued survival of Kindred, especially in the face of modern technology. As for the other sects, it was quite obvious where his opinion would lie.

One more thing.

“Before I go, do you know anything more of the sarcophagus?”

“All I know about the Ankaran Sarcophagus is what I’ve heard on the news. It was found during an archaeological dig in Turkey and it appears ancient. There could be nothing but dust inside – however, that does not discount the possibility of it containing some Kindred artificat…or even a
mummy.

“In other words, there could be evidence of the supernatural within, and therefore potentially damaging to us. As for it containing ancient Kindred, the Camarilla does not put stock in the actuality of Antediluvians; they’re myths. Don’t let anyone tell you differently.”

Izaya didn’t know what an Antediluvian was, nor why LaCroix would think he knew, but the man was clearly getting impatient by the sound of his tone.

“Thank you. Then, I’ll be off.”

LaCroix made sure to stress the important of the task once more before he left.

~

Izaya was almost prancing as he explored the Downtown region. He’d been there before, but it almost felt like a new place now that he was ‘living’ this new ‘life’. He practically skipped through an alleyway before he realized…not only was this the alleyway that connected one side of the district to the other, without having to pass by LaCroix’s tower, it had also been the one where his Embrace had occurred. As if through protest that he felt affected by this fact at all, he put on his most confident swagger and continued through it. He was broken out of it by the sudden sound of gunshots.

Running in his direction were a few thugs, running past him without thinking. Up ahead was a large African-American man with a big afro, wearing a large yellow jersey and black sunglasses. He put his rifle back down next to him on the ground, and leaned back against the white truck he’d been near the whole time, arms crossed. It took only a quick moment for the guy to turn to Izaya and start talking.

“My man, I saw you coming from down there and I started prayin’ to the Lord to find it in his heart to send you to me and HALLELUJAH if he didn’t come through for me. Welcome to Fat Larry’s truck of mack!”

Izaya could sense an easygoing air from this Larry. He supposed those thugs from before might’ve been trying to steal or attack Larry.

“I am the proprietor and salesman of the month for several years in a row; the ladies call me “Oh, God!”, but you can call me Fat Larry with a F-A-T ‘cause I know I got a weight problem, I just don’t give a fuck.”

Izaya smiled. It seemed this Kine could become useful. Besides, he didn’t call him by any sort of baked good.

“And what is it that you have in the truck, Fat Larry?”

“Now that is a legitimate question, but a better question would be: what don’t I got in this truck? ‘Cuz at Fat Larry’s, my motto is: ‘Everything’s got a price, but I probably know somebody who can get it anyway’.”

Izaya smirked, “Well then, I do anticipate a most impressive selection, my good man.”

“Hahaa- now that’s what I like to hear. But it’s like this: I save my best stuff for select clientele. Now that don’t mean I don’t appreciate your bu’ness, it’s just, you know, bu’ness.”

“I hear you. Let’s have a look, then.”
As he expected, Izaya found a couple of knives as part of Larry’s stock, but there was only one he felt was worth buying, and it was fairly cheap to boot. What he’d not expected was some of the clothing available.

There was a cot that looked so incredibly similar to his own that he barely hesitated in buying it. The main differences were minor and to his liking. It was made most of a sturdy leather for more protection, and had a red outlining. It fit him seamlessly, and he ended up with a matching pair of gloves for a good deal – apparently, Fat Larry had been trying to find someone to wear these. Maybe that was why he’d been hoping Izaya would stop by.

Izaya decided he’d come by again another night, maybe he could have access to the so-called better stuff then.

Before going to the Elizabeth Dane, he decided he’d head to the bar first. It’s not like he was excited to see Shizu-chan or anything though. Surely no one could mistake that.

~

Called ‘The Last Round’, the bar looked exactly like one – there would really be no mistaking it.

‘Well, at least the entrance for it is well-lit,’ he thought, a little gratefully.

Inside, the whole place was actually rather poorly-lit, but it would hardly matter for Kindred. Bar to the left, seating to the right, and there was a narrow staircase, likely for more seating. Sitting casually in a booth, Izaya saw Jack.

‘May as well have a chat.’

Had sat down across from the smiling Kindred.

“Well, well, looky who made it back in one piece. How was Santa Monica, kiddo?”

“You could say I didn’t exactly get to do any sight-seeing,” he said. Which was true, he had found himself rather busy most nights.

“Hehe. Can’t imagine you did. Probably too busy getting’ pushed around by every vampire with a week of seniority over you, am I right?”

“More or less,” Izaya crossed his arms, leaning back. “I did what I had to do; doesn’t mean I liked it though.”

“That’s usually the way the story goes. Same old bullshit politics from when you were alive, huh? Don’t it make you just wanna rip somebody’s spine out?”

Izaya blinked at him.

“What?”

Izaya rose an eyebrow.

“You sayin’ that’s just me?”

Izaya smiled to himself. “No, I quite agree…I’m not very accustomed to playing the good little solider…though I’ve found a bit of educational value to it.”

Jack only laughed. “Well you don’t exactly sound suited for the Camarilla, kiddo.”
“I don’t particularly think so either, Jack. Of course, I’ve taken and given orders in the past, but it’s always more or less been to the tune of my own plans and workings, you see.

“In any case…you know much about the Elizabeth Dane…?”

“Why, plannin’ on visiting?”

“Yeah. The prince is sending me there,” Izaya explained. “I can’t imagine much good to come from it, though.”

“Oh really…?”

That wasn’t hard to notice. “Yes…why?”

“The sarcophagus…did LaCroix tell you about the Ankaran Sarcophagus?”

“He told me as much as he knew, which I assume is as much as he wanted to tell.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I should fill you in on the details. That thing is bad news. Kindred across the globe have been goin’ batshit since it was discovered.”

“He mentioned something about that, but not at such a large scale…any reasons why?”

“The word is, there’s an ancient asleep in there. One of the fathers; one of the vampires that, if you traced your lineage way back, there’s a chance it’d end up with him at the root.”

“And you’re saying he’s been sleeping this whole time?”

“Ancients don’t just nap. They sleep whole ages away. And when they wake up, they’re hungry.”

“And so…he’ll go hunting?”

“It’s more than that, kiddo. Most Kindred think it’s one of the signs of the end – the apocalypse. Every religion has their own version of it…Kindred call it Gehenna, and the way they tell it, it starts when the ancient rise to devour their children.”

“And just how assured is this…destruction?” Izaya was never really one to believe in apocalyptic futures.

“No one knows for sure, really. That’s just what’s been handed down through the ages. The Camarilla denies these ancients exist.”

“An interesting idea, but I’m afraid I don’t really subscribe to hearsay.”

“Well, kiddo, I guess you’re gonna be the one to find out. Hey, good luck! Try not to wake Grandpa Munster and kill the world, huh!” Jack seemed endlessly amused.

“Alright, I think I’ll enjoy myself there~” he smiled. “Now, why would he chose me to go do this?”

“He recognized your value, kiddo. And I don’t mean in a nice reward kind of way – you’re still expendable, but since you did get here, he thought he’d further test your skills and see how good of a minion you’d make; see, he never thought you’d make it back! If Nines hadn’t stood up for you in the courtroom, you woulda been toast right there, man – everyone knows that.”

Izaya was sure he knew where this was going. He had sensed the situation in the beginning, but hadn’t had a lot of time to ponder it since then.
“And so, thanks to Nines…”

“It’s public relations, man, ‘calculated risk’. Ventrue are born in a boardroom. When Nines called him out, LaCroix realized it was time to show a carefully measured dose of Camarilla compassion.”

“So what is it that LaCroix is in charge of exactly?”

“He’s the boss of the LA Camarilla, that’s it,” the distain in his voice was clear. “The facts are like this: The Camarilla need us to buy into their bullshit for any of their ‘laws’ to mean dick.

“Now, tellin’ free-livin’ vampires they need to be ruled is a hard sell, so the Camarilla baked up a play-nicey plan – show everyone how great they are so we’ll all just jump on board.”

“And I would presume it’s ineffective.”

“Kiddo, we’ve lived in California, some of us for over a hundred years, and we’ve kicked the Camarilla’s ass outta town before; seems like every time they smell blood they’re back tryin’ to take over.”

It was a pretty clear picture, aside from one thing.

“Who’s ‘we’?”

“The free-livin’ dead, kiddo. A lotta people like to use the label ‘anarchs’, whatever the hell that means…anarchs. Does got a nice ring to it though, huh?”

“I suppose so. Camarilla sounds old – how about the anarchs?”

“I’m no scholar, kid, but I been around. Seen more and done more than most vampires ever will. I don’t know that our situation’s ever gonna be easy, but some things you gotta decide are worth fightin’ for.”

Izaya thought for a moment. He had trouble pushing away the faces of both his Shizu-chans.

“And is Nines in charge?”

“As much as anyone is. Nines is a stand-up guy. Takes the politics a little bit too seriously, though. Came up during the Great Depression, so his brain’s wired to that shit.”

“I see. It’s an interesting ensemble we got going here between all the sects I’d say.”

Jack smirked, “You bet, kiddo. It’s usually one shit show after another.”

“Anyway, what’s your clan? I can’t pinpoint it…”

It was odd, Jack and Nines reminded him of Shizuo and also himself in some ways, but they weren’t Toreadors.

“Brujah. Most everyone here has Brujah blood.”

He could probably get a little more info on the Camarilla from Jack and that’d probably be about it. His information on all the sects seemed just about complete.

Izaya acknowledged how strange it was – being able to get information like this so easily. Was it just that Westerners tended to talk more outside of the underground realms? It was simply bizarre how easily he could weedle things out of so many Kindred.
‘I’ve always been good at that, but I hardly need to put in much effort…perhaps this is all common
knowledge so they find no risk in telling me. If they have these opinions of theirs known publicly…
that must be the case.’

“So in regards to Camarilla ideals…you disagree with them?”

“Don’t think the Camarilla has a monopoly on those ‘ideals’, okay kiddo? No one is arguing over
that shit, and if they tell you that’s what this fight is about then they’re really givin’ you the full fist,
ya hear me?”

“So that being the case…”

“The Camarilla protects the people runnin’ the Camarilla. That’s it, the end. The rest of them are
bloody gristle for the machine.”

“Then who’s at the top of it?”

“Doddering old dust farts. They might be powerful as all hell but who knows? They’re too afraid to
stick their heads outta their hidey holes, and why should they? This whole huge system is built so
they don’t have to.

“Now LaCroix, he’s got his ambitions of joining that inner circle; he ain’t bustin’ his ass on the
street, that’s for sure. Still, delivering LA into their pocket would look killer on a resume. But to hell
with him, I’ve blast better vampires’ brains all over the wall.”

“Is LaCroix the main problem here or is the whole Camarilla?”

“I’m not sayin’ let’s go torch the Malkavian living under the abandoned hotel because she happens to
be a Camarilla; I’m sayin’ let’s change that shit from the top down.”

Not a few minutes later, Izaya bid Jack farewell after thanking him for his help on his first night. Jack
confirmed that it was Zen who’d asked him to do it. Apparently, he’d owed him a little favor.

‘He’s not forthcoming with his age, interestingly…he’s much older than a lot of the others, no
doubt.’

After chatting a bit more, they parted ways though not before Jack said one more thing for Izaya to
think about.

“No, I know LaCroix ain’t workin’ with the Sabbat…but he sure as hell coulda put word out there
on the street where the Sabbat would pick up on it…they ain’t exactly fine trackers by themselves.”

He got stopped before he could head upstairs. The main standing right next to them began speaking.
He had a dark complexion for a Kindred, orange eyes, a shaved head, and small, gold hooped
earrings.

“Well, if it ain’t the talk of the town; poster child for Camarilla benevolence. What does the prince
have his little bitch doin’ today?”

Izaya smiled under a cutting laugh and made a show of stretching his arms to his sides just slightly.

There was a decently loud thunk that came from the stairs. Sticking straight out of one of the steps
was the kunai Izaya had previously acquired. He’d barely moved when throwing it.

‘Hm, he followed it with his eyes…only just fast enough. I’ll need to improve, it seems.’
“Now is that any way to greet an innocent guest who’s minding their own business…? You see, I was given multiple invitations to come here – I presume Nines is upstairs?”

The man crossed his arms, frowning.

“Besides…I’m not anyone’s bitch,” eyes glinting, Izaya continued. “Well…outside of bed, that is.”

‘Make him uncomfortable enough, and he’ll want to end this conversation quickly.’

The man reacted minimally though he seemed generally displeased.

“Nines is expecting you. Have some manners and don’t wear out your welcome. I’m Skelter. Act up again and I’ll be the one showing your asides to the door.”

Still, he was not behaving aggressively. Skelter seemed reasonable enough and despite his words, Izaya didn’t sense real malicious intent.

“Actually…can I ask your opinion on the Camarilla?”

Skelter relaxed a bit at the question. Likely, he’d sensed Izaya’s passive intention.

“The Camarilla just ain’t necessary. Their rules is just common sense shit. The Masquerade and all that. Sure it makes sense, like the 10 commandments. You know those, don’t you?”

“Certainly.”

“Yeah, ‘thou shalt not kill’, ‘thou shalt not steal’…sounds good, but you and me both know that shit don’t always fly. What if some ‘society’ like the Camarilla comes along and just up and kills you if you break one damn commandment?”

“You have a point,” Izaya responded. True enough, his own Sire had been killed right there in front of them all. Though Izaya felt they shouldn’t all do just anything they wanted, to just kill each other for almost any reason would be absurd.

“Right. See, we weren’t meant to live like that. Man, I followed someone else’s rules for three years in Vietnam, but it wasn’t until after the Embrace that I understood real oppression.”

That sounded deeper than Camarilla rule.

“Why do you say that?”

“You’ve got to understand, Kindred, you’re carrying a six thousand-year curse in your blood. No matter how powerful it makes you feel…that blood is a tangle of chains that’s gonna leave you bound in servitude the rest of your existence.”

That was new. And disturbing.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Your elders command the blood, they control the blood, and the blood listens; you’ll never even hear their call, but the blood will, and it will make you obey.”

It wasn’t the weirdest thing he’d heard. He’d even call it possible – and why not? As a Kindred, it felt like anything was on the table for possibility. It could also be mere superstition. Even so, Izaya had Skelter elaborate.
“This shit stretches all the way back to Caine, man. Nothing we can do. Some ancient sleeping in a tomb half a world away has a bad dream you gon’ feel that shit, like it or not.”

‘A connection here to what Jack was saying.’

Izaya remembered the paintings in the gallery that were about Caine. He was not otherwise familiar, however.

“Caine?”

“Caine, man. Father of all vampires. Killed his brother Abel and was cursed to walk through eternity feeding on the blood on his children. Heavy shit, brother.”

Izaya liked Skelter. He was undeniably upfront, friendly when he got used to you, and he didn’t call Izaya a pastry at all.

Still, he wasn’t sure about all of that. He’d file away the info and think on it himself.

“So…this Caine is from the bible?”

“Shh…keep your voice down…is Caine real? I don’t know. Not sure I want to know.”

“Alright, but what does this have to do with the Camarilla?”

“The point is, with this curse pulling your strings, you really wanna sign away your right to fight by joining the Camarilla?”

‘I need some clarification.’

“But you agree with the Masquerade?”

“I don’t need to bare my fangs to feel good about myself. The Masquerade is a fruity Camarilla label; other than that, I got no problem with it. Live and let live – we got enough to worry about.”

Shortly thereafter, Izaya ascended the stairs. Skelter was saying the same thing that Jack had, more or less. He had some different insights however, and he seemed interesting n his own. Moreover, he was making a positive mark there at the bar with the Anarchs. He had a feeling that was just wanted to do.

At the top of the stairs were a few tables, and a couple of doors labeled as bathrooms. Nines stood, leaning against the wall on the right, just after the bathrooms. There was some space curving around the bathroom area as well, but due to Nines’ position, it wasn’t visible.

“You showed up. Good. Here’s what I got to tell you.”

Straightforward, no nonsense. Nines seemed to be the type who hated to waste time.

“And so you know, I don’t lecture, I don’t rap, I’m no bureaucrat; I’m just a guy out of nowhere came to be involved in something five-hundred times bigger than you and me.”

“Alright.”

“You got a right to know the score. The Camarilla – this is the short of it. They operate a lot like a pyramid scheme. There’s a bunch of these old timers at the top, with God-only-knows what plots in mind. They lose their power, they die.”
It was logical.

“Go on.”

“They sired more to carry out their plans, and lookin’ for a little power, then those Kindred sired for their own schemes and so on and so on and on and on – it hurts my head just thinking about the mess. What it works out to is this: Only a few people at the top have any real power.

“Now the Camarilla claims all of us are members, even if we don’t want to be, which is, of course, the biggest load of horseshit a man ever heard.”

Nines was a decent sort, it seemed. It seemed he was all about justice. Possibly a little preachy, but he was a good man, far as Izaya could tell. Even Kindred seemed to be simple enough to figure out, like humans. Izaya asked for some background from Nines.

“I learned the way of this world during the depression. Bunch of old, rich bastards screwed the country, but did they suffer? No – the little people suffered. You can’t trust the people at the top. The world’d be a better place with ‘em. All you can do is get a group of people together who aren’t assholes, find a place to put your feet up, and make some examples of the quote-unquote elite to keep the rest the hell out. Everyone’s an equal here, the same thing this country used to be about.”

Nines went on to express his incredible dislike for LaCroix and the Camarilla. In summation, it was like what Jack and Skelter had previously said. Though, Nines had a way of putting it that made you want to follow him.

Nines did him one more favor and showed him basic hand-to-hand fighting advice, considering what’d happened earlier.

“Go ahead around the corner here – someone’s waiting for you. I got some business now, so I’ll see you around. Got my eye on you, kid,” he nodded toward Izaya, and walked down the stairs.

Around the corner were a couple of small tables. Sitting at one was a figure who beckoned him to sit. He did so, and recognized the person immediately.

“臨也さん…お指しぬりですね．”

Japanese it would be. Izaya had to admit that although it’d been so many years, Kasuka was recognizable rather easily. For a moment, he wondered why he couldn’t find him before, but then he could tell that Kasuka was most definitely Kindred. Some things fell into place.

“そうですね…幽さん．”

“カズで呼んでくんだい. とにかく, 兄はここに来たくても, 忙しくなってしまったんだ. 失礼ですが．”

“は～さすがにね…ひどいな, しずちゃん. 待たされるなんて．”

“兄と喋りたいじゃないね. 何か質問があったら, 僕は兄に聞いてもらうよ．”

Kasuka was never the type to really beat around the bush. Fine, he’d ask the obvious questions.

“じゃあ, そういったことするぞ．”

Izaya smirked, “なぜホテルで邪魔されたのか? なぜ変なこと俺を言われた?”
“だまされることはダメなんだな、臨也さん,” Kasuka seemed oddly annoyed.

Izaya wore a serious expression. What was the confusion?

“マジだ、カズ.”

It took some time of Kasuka just staring at him the way he always stared at most people before he spoke again.

“決ったんじゃない？そういうんだってさ、兄はお前のことを恋にしてるよ.”

It was Izaya’s turn to stare. For what lasted more than a few minutes.

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Kasuka just stared at him and waited patiently.

~

Finally, Shizuo had accomplished the mission. He’d have to lay low for a while first, however. It wasn’t likely that Camarilla agents or LaCoroix’s men might have found out something, but it was possible. Even with his strength, one didn’t live too long in their society without being quite careful.

He’d stay with Gary and Mitnick for a while before sticking around in Hollywood at their club.

He’d have to rely on Kaz to watch out for Izaya.

~

Clan Brujah:

Largely composed of rebels, both with and without causes. Individualistic, outspoken and turbulent, Brujah hold social change near to their undead hearts, and the clan’s tanks contain some of the most violent of the Camarilla Kindred. Most other vampires perceive the Brujah is nothing more than punks and miscreants, but the truth of the matter is that genuine passion lies behind their polemics.

Antediluvian:

A member of the dreaded Third Generation, one of the eldest Kindred in existence.
Japanese:

Kasuka: "Izaya-san...It's been a while."

Izaya: "Indeed...Kasuka-san."

K: "Call me Kaz, please. Anyway, my brother wanted to come, but I'm afraid he became very busy. Apologies."

I: "Ha~ how expected of him. So mean, Shizu-chan. Keeping me waiting."

K: "You want to talk with my brother, right? If you have any questions for him, I can ask for you."

I: "Well then, I'll do that. Why did he get in my way at the hotel? And why did say those weird things to me there?"

K: "It's made to mess with people, Izaya-san."

I: "I'm serious, Kaz."

K: "Isn't it obvious? It's because my brother is in love with you."
Fifty Romans

Chapter Notes

You may have noticed I cleaned up the tags- yay~

For the sake of ease I'm adding the English along with the Japanese from here on out. I'll get to fixing that with previous chapters some time. I use the Japanese because it makes a lot of sense to me - were I in the situation you can bet I'd take advantage of using a language the people around me don't understand~

As always, I hope you enjoy and there shall be interactions coming up ^^-/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“---変えると決めた訳だったさ…” (-is how we decided to change.)

Izaya had been staring at Kaz for a good number of minutes, trapped in his own head. At first, the phrase spun around in his head and he couldn’t think passed it. Then he moved to anger for a brief time before focusing on Kaz’s face. This was still the ever-serious, non-joking Kasuka. Which led him to a shocked state of denial instead.

During that process that showed on Izaya’s face more than Kaz assumed Izaya wanted, he decided to talk at him. He simply continued to stare at Izaya and tell him the tales of how he and Shizuo had come here and been Embraced. Of course, he knew it was likely Izaya wouldn’t hear it and even if he did, it’s not as though they really needed to hide it much.

Kaz continued with this method until he got a response from Izaya. But in the end…

Izaya ran from the bar.

Kaz watched, almost sad; he’d have to leave the letter at Izaya’s place.

His brother surely owed him for this one.

~

Of course, he didn’t really get very far. Despite everything, he wasn’t really one to run from a situation.

But didn’t everything involving Shizu-chan make everything else change?

He’d only gone as far as the entrance, then turned into the alley right next to the bar that ended up in a larger space behind it, surrounded by fencing and otherwise containing only a dumpster. He curled himself into a ball in the corner that did not contain the dumpster, and thought back on the meeting he’d just had.
Izaya had more or less heard what Kaz had said about his and Shizuo’s Embrace. A good enough summarization, at least.

It was what the meeting he’d had was about. He thought about it further.

Some…surely nonsense about a cat, masks, and most inexplicable, love. Love for him.

‘The hell is this? Impossible.’

The fledgling ran his hands through his hair, staring at the ground just beyond his feet, smelling the stench of the unfortunately close by dumpster and hearing the sound of the city. The sounds of sirens in the not-so-distance reflected his state of mind fairly well.


Help.

How could anyone, nevermind Shizuo, even have any interest in someone like him? Let alone…anything else.

He couldn’t even think the word. Not anymore.

Sure, he’d used it relentlessly back in Japan, back years ago in regards to humans as a whole. Now, however, he thought of the idea of love differently. He’d loved Shizu-chan – little Shizuka…his truest friend and trusted confidant back when the brothers had first disappeared. With her help, he came to view many things differently. She wasn’t the only influence, true, but still…

It made no sense; Shizuo didn’t even really know the him from years ago, let alone who he was presently. He’d never allowed him to see, after all. Never let anyone. It would be better to simply have some contacts, and that was it. Getting too close to anyone was a bad idea, he’d realized—he only hurt people.

‘I haven’t gotten close to anyone in years…but there’s no doubt – I’d still manage to hurt them,’ he thought, cynically. He even knew that it was logically absurd to assume such things. But at the same time, he couldn’t help but feel that way whenever his feelings got stirred up.

Well. There was no proof aside from Kaz’s word anyway and even if it were true…even Shizu-chan would eventually stop…doing something so hopelessly stupid. Besides, maybe Shizuo had somehow found out about his feelings, and was mocking him.

He got up, and stood for just a moment. That had been almost as bad as the hotel. He just had to wait for his heart rate to go down. And his face to cool. And his breathing to slow. It would also be helpful if his limbs wouldn’t shake so much either.

It was still about halfway through the night, so he could probably go check out the boat.

‘Just shake it off, it’s only Shizu-chan. This means nothing.’

~

‘Brother did well in his selections,’ Kaz thought to himself, nodding with a small smile. He looked around the studio apartment.

Izaya’s apartment really was nothing that most people would envy. Indeed, he could see how it was
basically dangerous for Kindred, and likely unsafe for Kine. But Shizuo had picked out some good things for Izaya to protect and improve the place. It was the least that could be done to make it more sanitary and safe for Kindred. No doubt the sunlight would be firmly blocked this way.

Kaz couldn’t linger, however. He’d need to get back to the club after dropping off this letter. Besides, he’d also promised Shizuo he’d pick some things up for him that night.

~

Izaya had made his way back to Santa Monica with the same cab driver bringing him there. It seemed that was the port that the ship was floating out in. He’d need the beach access to get there.

‘But am I supposed to swim out to the damn thing?’

He supposed he would if he really had to, but remaining dry would be a lot easier to deal with—especially if he were expected to be sneaking. Vampire he may be, but a water-absorbent shammy he was not. As it was, it seemed to be raining again in Santa Monica.

Making his way down the stairs and through the stone passageway, he emerged onto the beach. It looked like one of the thin bloods from before was still there, sitting by the make-shift fire there. But he wasn’t alone; there stood an old face, Mercurio, who was no longer torn up and beaten horrifically.

Behind him, the lights of the Dane could be seen in the distance on the ocean.

Mercurio smiled, happy to see him.

“Hey! You, hey, what can I say? You preserved my ass. I truly appreciate you not sayin’ anything, and I want you to know, I take care of those who do me favors.”

‘What he really have been killed…?’

“So for now on, you need equipment, info, you come see me at my place. Don’t hesitate.”

That would be quite useful indeed. Yet another contact he’d obtained.

The ex-informant smiled back, “Well you appear to be doing much better these nights.”

I tell you, that blood you guys got’s an amazing thing. Helped close up a few wounds. A back-alley patch fixed up the rest. I need that beating, though – good reminder not to overestimate my ability. Last time it’s gonna happen.”

Izaya was glad, he’d have a reliable informant of his own in the future, no doubt about it. Hopefully, he would secure his loyalty in the future.

“So what’s the latest news that you know of?”

“Oh, uh, well… I paid a visit to our… mutual acquaintances up on the cliff there early this morning. Without their lead man, they were still all jittery. Poor bastards, OD-ing’s a painful way to go. Especially when your kneecaps are on the floor next to you,” he smirked, and Izaya matched him. “What can I say? Payback can be a bitch like that.”

“They certainly deserved it, Mercurio.”
They exchanged parting words, and Izaya pressed onward.

Only just a bit offshore was a speedboat, sitting on the beach. ‘So this is it, then.’

Getting in and starting up the motor, the boat took him straight out to the Dane in just a few short minutes. Luckily, the problem of getting up the side of the ship was also solved; a long rope ladder hung over the side just enough for him to leap and grab it, climbing upward.

It took a little time, climbing up rope ladders was usually easier said than donw, but he reached the top railing and swung over onto the deck. The ship was decently large, and this would have been the top deck. It was definitely used exclusively for transport as it seemed this was one of the few if not only parts of the ship where presumably workers and crew would have walked around on.

Now, with the railings to his left, the only way further across the ship to his right, and up ahead, a police officer.

Who had just made eye contact with him.

‘Shit.’

But it turned out to be advantageous…the man seemed to think he was supposed to be there, somehow. The officer called out to him in a whisper.

“Yo, pally, over here,” he was slightly crouched, and waved his arm, beckoning to him. He wouldn’t be able to spend too much time before morning, so hopefully this would yield a good result.

He was a typical looking officer, nothing outstanding in any way.

“Ah, for chrissakes! Tell Jacobson if he plans on making editor-in-chief, he’s gotta start working with me. I can’t keep getting him these scoops if he’s gonna send high school journalists who don’t know enough to wear something that would blend in.”

Either LaCroix had set this up, or, it was a sheer stroke of luck. Either way, Izaya had no complaints.

“I’ll have you know these are quite professional at my place of work, sir.”

The officer scoffed. “Gezz. What kind of Woodstein don’t think to at least show dressed up like an investigator…a coast guard guy…somethin’?!? Didn’t you ever see Fletch? What, are they just handin’ out those diplomas nowadays?”

Perhaps another route.

“My clothing should be no issue. They do come off, you know.”

“Take it easy, their, pally, this is still a badge you’re talkin’ to.”

‘Hmph, the other so-called officers could have fooled me…”

“Fine, down to business, then, yes?”

“Alright, look, I got you a copy of the initial report, and I can get you into the cabin, but you gotta make yourself real scarce after that. Anybody catches you, I don’t know you. And no goddamn flash photography, brainchild.

“Hold up a sec,” he handed over the report, then spoke into his radio. “Heinz to Marsh, Heinz to Marsh. …Marsh they need you up in the bridge, over.” He put it away again before speaking to
Izaya once more. “There, the security room’ll be clear.”

“Alright, got it,” the guy was a bit of a prick but now wasn’t the time to act up.

“Head down these stairs next to us and stay low. When you get toward the other side down there, wait for me to call off the guy guarding Gangway A right over there. As soon as he leaves, get your ass moving, and DON’T let him see you. I’ll give you a few minutes but don’t dilly-dally. In and out, ‘k?”

Behind the officer was a sign on the wall illustrating that Gangway A was again, to their right.

“Don’t forget to stay out of sight – if anyone sees you, you’re on your own. Take the stairs up to the security room, there will be a computer in there. The password is Lighthouse, all one word. You gettin’ all this?”

“Of course.”

“Now get a move on – and do tell Jacobson I get double my usual for this one.”

Definitely a prick, this guy.

Izaya turned to the right to view what was ahead. There were two small stairways. One to his left and right. The officer, Heinz, apparently, stood by those steps on the left, that indicated Gangway A was beyond them. Izaya moved to the stairs on the right which had a sign indicating Gangway B. He went down them, and saw that the mechanism controlling the anchor provided much cover so that the officer at the other end of Gangway A couldn’t see him. The ship being rather large, also meant that the anchor and its machinery also would be.

He may have been following the route for Gangway B, but he didn’t actually see anything ahead that would lead anywhere – just a wall. He moved a long a little farther, and could see the officer blocking the only way ahead – the opening for Gangway A.

While he waited for Heinz to get the guy away (looking for a viable excuse, maybe?), Izaya had a peek at the police’s initial report.

The summary stated:

Despite strong evidence of amazing physical violence, not a single body has been found, no survivors have been located, and there are no signs of large-scale theft.

“Heinz to Anderson, come in Anderson. Check this out – I just saw a Baleen Whale!”

That as the best he had?

“Yeah?” This Anderson sounded intrigued enough, and Izaya both watched and heard him walk over to Heinz, leaving the gangway behind him unguarded. Time to move.

He snuck into the narrow gangway, and saw two officers ahead, facing the other way. From the looks of it, they were watching the deck. From what Izaya could tell, the deck itself was massive.

However, on the right side of this narrow hallway was a door. A door which was already open by some miracle. Inside, was just a square room with a high ceiling. There were a couple more doors and a stairway leading to a catwalk up above, which seemed to have one door. The door above would be first, since there seemed to be a time constraint on it. He knew this since it said on it ‘security room’.
Inside was some machinery, a computer, and another table with a pack of papers on it.

The paper pack was obviously screaming to be looked at.

And as it turned out, it happened to be the cargo manifest.

‘Perfect.’

The only other thing he was supposed to do was check out the sarcophagus itself. But the officer mentioned to get into this room and get onto the computer. There had to be a reason.

On the computer, he entered the password and saw a few interesting things. Not only was the ship’s horn and engine controllable from here, but there were cameras to view the deck, and it seemed there had been a captain’s log left behind.

The log spoke of an archaeologist having been on board who was there to do further research on the thing. It also spoke daily of crew members going missing, eventually finding pools of blood on the upper and lower decks, and eventually it ended with an eerie message that the sarcophagus looked as though it’d been opened and the final log had the captain desperately typing that the ship must be haunted.

Once Izaya enabled the deck cams, the scene became clear. There were numerous officers guarding all along the deck and several by the sarcophagus. Indeed…it looked as though it had been opened since there were bloody handprints that were seemingly emerging from the opening.

‘Done and done.’

Finally, he could get out of there. He even had some time to spare before the sun would rise.

In order to sneak back out to his speedboat, he’d need to find the actual Gangway B route – it had to be somewhere around, otherwise what would be the point of that sign? It only made sense. The officer who had been guarding Gangway A was back, so that was a no go.

Turned out Gangway B had just been very blocked by both sides. Upon getting through, he saw it’d all been blocked off, making it look like some secret passage…but it was easy to see why. Blood and even some entrails were left behind, smeared and spattered all over the walls. There were fragments and even chunks of bone littering the ground. Torn off hair and flesh were strewn about, and even bits of clothing – most of it uniforms – were laying around, some of it looking attaching to some of the gore. No one had even attempted to clean it, and the smell would no doubt permeate the walls and floor for years to come. Izaya pushed his face into the crook of his elbow as he did his best not to step in anything. It was horrifically difficult not to, however, he did manage it thanks to his precisely cultivated agility.

Making it through the other side, and sneaking back to the rope ladder, he nodded to the officer who’d helped him, and then vaguely wondered if some random journalist would show up after him or not. Fortunately, it was an easy ride back to shore.

What he couldn’t have known was that he had obtained inaccurate information.

For what he’d observed and read were, in fact, rather outdated.

~

“Evenin’, cherry pie!”
‘…fucking…damnit…’

Izaya predicted a fair amount of pain every time he came here. Which he predicted would be more times than was really acceptable.

“You back to see Mr. LaCroix again?”

“Indeed, I am,” he smiled as sweetly as he could possibly manage.

“Mr. LaCroix told me to keep an eye out for you, coffee cake. Said to send you right up,” Chunk smiled.

‘Yes…I’m sure he did.’

“Uh, you know, I got a break in an hour and a fresh box of Krusty Creams in the back…how ‘bout on your way out we, uh…heh heh?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, dearest pie…but I do have many urgent matters to attend to afterwards, I’m afraid…”

“Aw, that’s okay, cupcake,” Izaya flinched harshly, though Chunk took no notice. “I’ll send ya right up. Lotsa people here to see Mr. LaCroix. Nice guy. He seems a little…different though. I wonder if he’s…ah, that’s his business.”

“So you’ve been working hard, I see,” perhaps he could get more information on these other people.

“Ah, you know, I’m keeping the undesirables out, and the innocent safe and secure. I’m the thin blue line that separates the crazies from the hardworking decent folks. Yup, as long as I’m around, Mr. LaCroix’s got nothing to worry about.”

That had been both unhelpful and inaccurate.

“I’m quite certain he appreciates that you’re here to protect him, …pudding pie.”

These exchanges might one day be deadlier than the sun.

“I must be going now~”

With a word of farewell, Izaya was up to the elevators, and one of them opened – the same one in the corner. Upon reaching the penthouse floor, he saw several people standing around LaCroix’s desk in a kind of half-circle.

“I’ve said all I need to, for now.”

It was then that they all turned, facing Izaya, and walked passed him. Only one of them seemed to notice him at all as they walked by to the elevator – obviously a Nosferatu, he was wearing what looked like…a bartending outfit? This man looked at him, seemed to recognize him, and then winked, of all things.

Once they’d all left, LaCroix addressed him.

“I don’t have time for a monologue. Give me the…bullet points of what you saw.”

Strangely, LaCroix looked like he was paying full attention.

“Everyone on board was massacred. No survivors.”
“And the Ankaran Sarcophagus – what did you see?”

“There was blood all over the floor and throughout the ship. Handprints indicate it was opened from within.”

“Opened? …Let’s not jump to conclusions. Give me the manifest and your notes, I’ll sort this mess later.”

Was that a hint of worry?

…Yes. Yes, it was.

“You might have noticed when you came in, the parade of malingering mollycoddles filing out.”

“Indeed. Who are they?”

“They are the primogen – the city’s clan elders – a worrisome bunch devoted first and foremost to the security of their own skin. Which is why they were here. It seems Alistair Grout…the Malkavian primogen, has either forgotten HOW to answer the phone…or is missing.

“The Sabbat’s appearance has put the primogen on edge. Grout’s mansion is in the Hollywood Hills. I need you to pry Grout out of whatever crack he’s crawled into and have him contact us.”

“Certainly. Will there be anything else?”

“No. Very good, then. Your demeanor will get you quite far in this city.”

Izaya mentally smirked. How could he not?

“Now, about Grout: as I said, Grout is the Malkavian primogen. His behavior and home are…eccentric, to say the least. He’s developed a paranoid bent lately, so you may have to check under every bed in the place for him.”

“Before I go,” he adjusted his jacket with a pause. “I’d like to ask more about the primogen.”

“They are the representatives of the clans, though more often than not, they represent their own best interests. They stay close to power, but they lack the backbone to lead. Be thankful you don’t have to deal with them, at least for now.”

“Understood. Then, I’ll be going.”

“When we hear from Grout, you may come back. Until then.”

Before Izaya could leave, LaCroix spoke one more time.

“Oh, and to show my appreciation for your dedicated service to me, I have secured a haven nearby – the Skyline apartment building. I hope it’s to your liking.” He handed over a key which had a 4 written on it.

“It’s most appreciated, sir.” Damn, but he was getting good at this.

From there, he got on the elevator once more and left the tower.

~

“You look way different with blond hair, Zen,” Mitnick would have never seen Shizuo with
anything other than dark hair. “Gotta admit, it suits you, though.”

“You can call me by my real name, you know,” Shizuo had just begun bleaching his hair out. “I’ll go back to it from now on, I think. Friends will know, and enemies would have no clue – confusing the hell out of people…sounds fun.”

He couldn’t help but smile fondly. Everything reminded him of Izaya these nights.

Mitnick shook his head, holding back a laugh. “You know how deep you are, right?”

“Painfully,” Shizuo was quick to respond, half defensive, half exasperated.

“Maybe when you’re done stinking up this place with bleach, you should do something about that,” he smirked.

Shizuo looked over at him between newly bleached locks. He considered it, eyes glinting.

“Maybe I should…”

~

Izaya hadn’t really expected there to have been yet again an intruder in his apartment.

Had he just received a new one? Yes, that was true. But it was nearing sunrise and he didn’t want to sleep in a new place without being able to check it out properly. Moreover, he was becoming rather tired. Playing the good little soldier for LaCroix required few words, and yet it was utterly exhausting.

Upon reaching Santa Monica, he dodged the rain, the weird man with the sign, and a couple of Shiki’s men and finally got into his dingy apartment where there had apparently been an intruder.

It was obvious as there was a letter sitting right in the middle of his well-made bed.

~

He had to spend a considerable amount of effort to push the letter away from his mind. A very very…considerable amount.

There’d been a riddle at the end of it, of all things. A riddle from none other than his Shizu-chan. In English, no less and Izaya hadn’t been able to solve it. It was that, or he had simply…willingly denied the knowledge from entering his mind. Regardless, he had not figured it out.

Not yet, anyway. Naturally, he couldn’t be bothered with such a…trifle matter at the time. He was tired, after all. There was no reason to rush himself. He had to consider his self-preservation above all else, didn’t he? And that meant doing these mission until LaCroix either got tired of shipping him off somewhere or if LaCroix slipped up somewhere and Izaya got to have some fun.

Either was bound to happen eventually. Meanwhile, there was no need to think too hard about anything else, riddle or otherwise.

And that was why he was in a cab, arriving at what was indeed a mansion surrounded by a back-pointed fence in the Hollywood Hills the following night.

Exiting the cab, he found the front gate opened already.

‘That’s one less thing to deal with.’
From the outside, the whole place looked quite old and even run down – yet it was obvious that it was a home with many rooms. Even so, it resembled more of a haunted house than anything else. They had haunted houses and even haunted hospitals in Japan, so Izaya was familiar enough with that.

He did get an odd feeling from the place as it was.

Approaching the house, someone else had come out from the front door, crossed the front porch, and came down the sidewalk, stepped in between the overgrown grass and the occasional weed.

It was Nines.

Or was it?

When he approached, Nines seemed…overtly surprised. Nines didn’t strike him as the incredibly sly type, but this was…odd.

“You! What are you doing here?”

It looked like Nines, and sounded like him, and yet…there was something strange about him.

“...How’s it going, Nines?”

“No.”

Izaya crossed his arms, one brow raised. He was confident in his English abilities; thus, he was confident that Nines had just made no sense at all. What was going on here?

“That…wasn’t really a yes or no question…”

“You should get out of here. This place is bad news. Uh…pardon me.”

Nines pushed passed him and simply walked away from the house and Izaya.

He’d had Nines voice, but for Nines, or for anyone really, he’d spoken very oddly. That would be one of least bizarre things he’d come across that night.

Inside, there was a square room – the entire thing screamed Victorian décor, aside from the floor which was large black and white squares, found commonly in kitchens and diners. It was also a bit grimey. Otherwise, everything just felt…abandoned in a way, and old in multiple ways. Aside from the musty air, wall lights, dust and grime, Izaya was alone in the room.

Actually, no.

There was someone else, but they didn’t seem…human. They were panting harshly in a corner, clutching at their face. Red hair stuck out every which way, and until Izaya got closer and saw the face, there seemed to be an odd black mask on it. He had made himself fully visible and obvious. Even then, the…creature(?) moved slowly as it went through the task of recognizing his presence.

Suddenly, it attacked in almost the blink of an eye. All it did was roar and growl at him – swiping with a knife, and with its free hand.

It was easy to defeat as it didn’t seem to have any normal cognitive function. The only question for Izaya now was why the place was only getting weirder.
The other door opened up into what was a hallway with the same dizzying flooring and couple more of the very same creatures – standing facing walls, and harshly breathing. It was bizarre that they looked exactly the same as the first one.

After making his way down the hall (the doors on the side were all locked), the one at the end wasn’t, and opened up into what appeared to be a library. It was a two-level room, books lining the walls on both levels in book shelves. On the first floor, some shelves were separated by wall lights – 3 of them. There was a creature standing in front of one them, pulling down on it. It seemed to actually be a switch. Oddly, the creature kept on cackling to itself as it pulled down each time, though nothing appeared to be happening.

It noticed Izaya eventually and was subsequently defeated.

‘It’s not my fault that poking it in the shoulder apparently means just provocation,’ he thought, smiling to himself.

Now he was presented with a riddle, according to the piece of paper laying on a short bookshelf. It seemed to imply that the three wall lights should be pulled in a specific order.

Izaya sighed. It wasn’t hard, but it did remind him of the letter he’d gotten last night. He couldn’t help but think about it again.

~

He’d left the letter until the last possible minute to read. Going through his usual routine before sleeping, he got in the bed, and unthinkingly pulled his knees up to his chest; a ‘keep away’ and closed up position. He took a few extra moments before opening it up with slightly trembling hands. His eyes read the English over and over again.

Izaya,

I’m sure you might have heard all of this from Kaz. On the other hand, it’s entirely possible that you ran from him or something like that before he could tell you. In which case, I asked him to drop this off at your place.

Everything I’ve written to you and said to you since your Embrace – I meant every word of it. I know your stubbornness probably won’t accept it, but it’s the truth. I care for you very much, and I don’t want anything to happen to you. As I’ve said, I know you rarely if ever need help…even so…if you’ll allow it, I will be there for you always and keep you safe.

I’m sure I’m making no sense. I know this isn’t anything like our usual encounters used to be. But over these years…ever since I saw you with that cat, I’ve watched you. I’ve seen who you are, who you were, and who you pretend to be. And it’s everything I want.

We’ll meet again soon. By that time, I hope you’ll have an answer to this:

I stand before fifty romans, nothing remains save for five in the middle of the sea, you will be next.

Shizu-chan
Izaya remained standing in front of the wall light riddle inside Grout’s mansion. Inside of his distracted mind, he’d accidentally gotten lost in his thoughts, standing there on his own, in the large yet roomy library as he stared at one of the wall lights, thinking.

A riddle like this would not usually take such time for him to solve.

Similarly, Shizu-chan’s riddle should not take him such time either…neither should have his answer to it.

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Primogen:

The primogen are the assembled elders of each clan in a city. In theory, primogen represent their clans among the political body of the elders, but in practice the primogen are more often an ‘old vampires’ club’ and an incestuous nest of treachery and favor-currying.

Chapter End Notes

By the way:

If you follow the story I beta for/co-author for, we swear it is in-progress! (The pain and motivation drain of writing something really long and then losing it all).
Izaya was still thinking in his own mind as he walked about the circular library, not making an effort to figure out the current riddle before him. No one else was around anyway; he could take his time. On a small table was a very old-fashioned and large tape recorder. It was almost unnoticeable since it fit in well with the general style and décor of the room and most of what he’d seen thus far.

Perhaps there was a hint on it to help him concentrate. He pushed the play button, and the voice of an older man began speaking.

Another unfortunate casualty to tide of time: Insane asylums. I lament their loss not only as brokerage houses for the breadth and depth of human psychoses…but also I shall mourn the disappearance of that particular environment present only in an insane asylum. That palpable atmosphere of blistered brains and churning bowels…the odiferous mélange of freely flowing bodily humours…that gently rolling cacophony of distant sobs and screams…the muttered cursing of perceived enemies and the blissful gurgling of the lobotomized…like a newborn babe discovering the sky. I shall still find test subjects as surely as I find bloody sustenance in the night…but this climate, I fear, may never be replicated.

Not at all a hint. It did give Izaya a good idea of what this Grout was like, however. He supposed the man was certainly Malkavian, but he was certainly different from Tourette. He walked back to the wall lights and picked up the piece of paper with the original riddle on it:

Perception at once shapes the Mind and rules over Time. Time, however, erodes human Perception and then in turn warps the Mind. The Mind is capricious, having various effects on Perception, Time, and the Mind itself…with harmony, progress is made.

‘It’s straightforward enough, but which is which?’

Upon further inspection, there were small pictures engraved underneath each one. They represented time, perception, and mind. Eventually, he pulled perception, then mind, then time. He heard something open from the previous hallway over.

‘This is going to be a huge pain in the ass, isn’t it…?’

Returning to the hallway, he noticed another recording device that he’d passed by previously.

It is quite peculiar the happenings I’ve been made to witness from my supernatural longevity. I’m thinking of one unfortunate phenomenon in particular of unique interest to my station…both as a professional and as a sufferer of this vampiric condition. It seems the stream of time has begun to erode the moorings of my chosen course of study…for the methodologies that gave birth to
psychology are slowly disappearing.

I find myself in an era that overlooks the physical component of psychological pathology time and again in favour of the sophistic practices of Freud. Phrenology, dactopindalism, and the rest of the old guard is fallen by the wayside...its champions all silenced in death with my unique exception. Would that I could make my voice heard again although it may be suspicious should I return to popular medical discourse fifty years after my apparent death. No, better that I continue my studies into the psychosis in secret.

One day may I hold up my own cure as validation of the methods. I am confident no cure for my conditions or that of my beloved wife lies within our figurative minds waiting to be unlocked by the correct combination of memories recovered from our childhoods. And I'm most certain that it has nothing to do with the relationship between myself, my parents, and my genitals. Sorry, Sigmund, but I choose to stay my course. In time, too, may your star fade and disappear.

One of the other doors in the hallway was now open. Inside was a very large room, again with several doors, and much of the lighting was red. The most obvious thing was a stairway leading up into the ceiling – abruptly cutoff. There was something to that. For some reason, there were also various tables on their sides and upside down strewn about the room.

The only wall light in the room that wasn’t red, seemed suspicious – alone on one of the walls and brighter than the rest. Izaya decided to give it a pull. Lo and behold, the ceiling opened to reveal the completion of the stairs upwards.

At the top were two creatures that attacked immediately. And almost just as immediately, Izaya disposed of them.

The room opened into a larger one that seemed to look like a very tiny ballroom. There was yet another old recorder on the table nearby.

Often I reflect with great regret on the missed opportunity that was my infector. Had I been conscious after the attack I could have stopped the orderlies from locking her in the roaming pen. What I would give for just one interview, a few simple questions of the plague-ridden woman who met her end that dawn. Of course there is no guarantee she would have been any more helpful than my current crop of test subjects – mewling wretches! Few could be called ‘enthusiastic’ – given the nature of the tests...I cannot expect the same fervor from all but a modicum of cooperation would be appreciated – animals! The one called ‘John’ went so far as to gnaw off his arm and escape into the floor boards like some feral rodent. I still hear him scurrying about at night, he must be making an atrocious mess in there.

It was interesting in a way; once upon a time, Izaya could have related to this man. He had done his own experiments on humans if it could be called that, though not really to learn – more to simply observe. And it wasn’t ever your typical scientific sort of experimenting either. Just his own twisted logic and manipulations. Even so, perhaps Grout had eventually stopped his own madness...then again, maybe not. Moreover, he could understand the desire of wanting to interview the one who’d turned him. The man had said ‘you’ll be great’...just what did he mean? And he’d been looking near content by the end that he was going to be receiving a final death. It seemed as though it were some kind of plot – but Izaya didn’t see any hints of such since then. Truly, it was bizarre. Somehow, he’d figure it out one night.

The only way to proceed from there was a stairway leading downward. At the end of the stairs, right across from them was a sofa with a very obviously dead body laying upon it. It didn’t even smell any longer. The body simply lay there as though it were a tired zombie.
Izaya pushed play on yet another recording – so far, no hints as to Grout’s whereabouts on it, though it did seem as though the man rarely if ever left his home. Wherever he was, he had to be in here somewhere.

*My studies proceed at a languid pace. I’m mired in a foul ennui as my wife’s illness advances. My subjects grow restless without proper supervision...but I cannot pull myself back from this black depression. How many nights I’ve wasted now gazing from the tower walk, pondering the frailty of existence.*

Proceeding forward, there was a circular staircase leading upward, and indeed, here was what could only be described as a tower walk. The other side led to an identical staircase that he had to take downward. Oddly these were metal and black, hung by chains from the top. Following this were more staircases leading downward, eventually opening into a large room, with all green lighting – giving the room a creepy sort of feel to it. More creatures lurked here, immediately lunging toward Izaya, but they were nothing he couldn’t handle. Any minor scratches they got in on him healed quickly anyway.

There were more overturned tables here and a few doors to try opening.

With two of the doors, Izaya huffed, annoyed. ‘Of course these lead back to that red room near the entrance...why wouldn’t they?’ He quickly turned back to the green room with hopes of real progression. The door opposite the one he’d come from opened and led to a room with a couple of chairs, a fireplace, a mirror, and a recorder.

No…it wasn’t a mirror. There was a creature in this room standing right in front of it (which he’d decided to drain the blood from), but not one in the so-called mirror. There had to be a solution around the fireplace to make his way through. Meanwhile, he played the recording.

*After decades of solitary study into this affliction, I have learned that it is by no means mine alone. Indeed, the city is home to an entire society of similarly afflicted individuals with whom I’ve only recently made contact. They are an understandably standoffish sort by and large but I have been able to confirm with them that the condition is indeed vampirism which apparently comes in a multitude of strains...each with a spectacular set of symptoms such as invisibility and even a sort of lycanthropy.*

*Through numerous official interactions with the governing body of this secret society I have concluded that their fundamental understanding of the vampiric condition is woefully lacking and mired in suspicion and pseudo-religious dogma that would make a Turk balk for its strictures. Indeed, they seemed impressed with my studies and the eloquence with which I was able to present them. Apparently, the typical suffer of my particular strain of vampirism is far from the vanguard of the King’s English. So impressed were they that they even offered me an office in their government…a rather high office by the sound of things. I believe I shall accept.*

*If nothing else, it should provide a lofty vantage point from which to observe the breadth and epidemiology of the afflictions so that I may move more expeditiously toward a cure.*

Upon prodding and probing the fireplace, there were three wooden protrusions – all of which could push inward. The fireplace seemed to be fake – it slid to the side to reveal a room identical to the one he’d been in already, save for the recorder and creature. The opposite hallway led to stairs going upward, and then a large door which opened into the second story of the circular library room.

It was carpeted in red, had a trap door leading back down to the first floor, and otherwise, bookshelves lined the walls. There had to be a secret passage here too.
There was also another recording and another riddle to be solved, written on a yellow legal pad.

…Chaos, like the Mind, can be understood only through the scientific process. Order, however, is only as good as the Perception thereof. Time is the Key that links the two and bears witness their ebb and flow…

There were three wall lights to be pulled here. Chaos, Key and Order. There were callbacks to the riddle he’d solved back on the first floor as well. As he thought about it, he started the recording.

_I have accepted the role of ‘primogen’ for clan ‘Malkvian’…the dreadfully winsome label applied to the particular strain of vampirism I suffer. So named for some supposed vampire father figure of old…more poppycock grown from a backwood culture that seems interminably drawn to childrens’ tales and the fiction of Victorian romance when it should concern itself with the science behind their suffering. No matter, for I have taken this office for no greater reason than to advance my research._

_I must make mention, however, that even among my would-be peers in this governing body of vampires…the level of paranoia and superstition is frightening! Their intelligence is not the question, no, indeed, as they courted me for this appointment…I had to suspect that their overtures were hand-tailored to what must be my obvious infatuation with reason for the Devil would do well to have such honey-tounged tempters. Even so, I could not help but notice the dressing of language these vampire leaders chose for their siren song. Whether it is born of habit, from addressing their unwashed ill-educated subjects…or from their own deep-seated beliefs. Their linguistic flourishes belie a faith in superstition over the providence of empirical reason that must be an all-pervasive theme in this society of darkest night. Damn it all, now I’m doing it, too!_

Most interesting. It was the kind of superstition that Izaya was now dealing with as well. The only governing sort he’d met so far was LaCroiox…he did seem to match up with the descriptions well, however.

Izaya decided to try a very simple solution to this new riddle – and why not? He pulled on the Chaos wall light over and over again. It was Chaos, after all. And it did work. Several shelves to the left and on the first floor, one of the bookcases swung open, revealing a hidden passageway.

This went down another flight of stairs, though now there was a stone theme, making it seem like the secret passageway it was. In the new room, several red shafts protruded from the ceiling, and they all crackled with visible blue electricity. In order to get through, Izaya found himself performing a few acrobatic feats, and pulling a few levers until all of the electrical currents were shut off.

And what lay here, beyond everything was a simple lever. It would obviously activate something, yet it seemed a bit anti-climactic. Upon pulling it, the sound of a door opening came around from floors above.

This tunnel’s continuation led to a door that opened up to the very first hallway, which led back to the red room. However, now the largest door in there was open. He had to be close now, finally. Heading across the room and through the door which leads down a set of stairs and into a square room lit red; Two different rooms, and stairs going down to the left. The room on the right was partially boarded up- several creates shambling about inside. Next to it and the room straight ahead was another recording.

As the recording played, Izaya found medicines, packs of blood, and various instruments of torture in the room ahead, including a grungy chair with metal cuffs on it, caked in blood.

_As I expand my dealing with the vampire government, I have encountered a disturbing new symptom of this affliction. Frequently, in conversation I will hear voices emanating from other_
vampires. Voices that are not their own, but which seem to have insight into their lives beyond what I could gather from simple conversation. These voices seem to echo from deep within my fellow vampires and I cannot be certain if this symptom belongs to my strain of illness or theirs. The voices are varied and inconsistent. I dare not mention this symptom to my vampiric peers for they have proven themselves true predators to whom I could be loath to reveal any sign of weakness.

Indeed, these voices have counseled me against confessing their presence and until I can confirm their source, I will listen. The information the voices have given me ranges from curious to frightening. The latter case is especially true of one powerful vampire whose name I shall not commit to recording in the interests of self-preservation.

So, the Malkavian voices had begun to kick in. It was only after this Grout had opened himself up to the community, that they’d surfaced, interestingly.

‘Could it be possible that it was due to the social interaction that this symptom came about…? How interesting~’

Pushing onward down the stairs, Izaya was led through green-lit zig-zagging hallways that had pouncing creatures, various cell doors with the remains of who-knows-what, and the stench of rot and mold. At the end of it was a dark room with a single red light shining upon an old body that had apparently fallen from a wheelchair. Only partially decomposed, it was a great offense to both Izaya’s visual and olfactory senses. Still, there was a set of metal bars coming down from the ceiling – the way out. Climbing it was a delicate operation as it was unsteady and felt as though it could collapse at any time. Fortunately, it was no troublesome task for someone with Izaya’s abilities.

Emerging into another green room, this one had multiple grandfather clocks (for decorative reasons?) and a few stables randomly placed. Upon one was another recorder.

The voices have increased in frequency and direction as of late. They have begun to stay with me long after conversation has ceased and are serving as quite a distraction. I fear others are beginning to notice my preoccupation at the vampire gatherings. I’m thinking again of the particular vampire of whom I spoke previously who I dare not name for my growing fear. If the voices are to be believed, then my caution is warranted for they speak of his blackest crimes both past and future. More than once I have seen the suspicion in his eyes and heard the distrust in his voice when speaking with me! The fear must register on my face as it is all I can do in these moments to keep from crying out in chorus with the voices!

There was clear panic lacing Grout’s voice now. ‘A paranoid bent’ so said LaCroix. But…was that really the case?

Proceeding beyond the door in the room led to stairs that continued upward where there was a recording waiting. From the contents, it seemed to have been the most recent one.

I am no longer safe – I know it! The voices have proven themselves authentic, and I have withdrawn from the vampire society entirely. My absence will no doubt draw attention, but I could no longer hold my fragile composure around the ravenous eyes of my vampire peers, especially not around him! The voices compelled me to make what I fear is a Faustian bargain. But I had to, for their demands are constant and merciless. I have secluded myself within the mansion. I know he will strike out at me. He will go to any length to achieve his ambition, and he knows that I know! I have taken precautions to protect my beloved wife. A cure will have to wait until our immediate safety is guaranteed. The mansion was constructed with safety in mind, but at that time I was not privy to the full range of vampire capabilities! The voices echo in the twisted corridors of my psyche…dark whisperings of a macabre and formless menace the approach of which portends an end, an end to all of this!
Throughout all of the recordings, there were certainly words and even some grammatical structures with which Izaya was unfamiliar. Even so, one thing was painfully clear – this Grout was surely insane. That aside, the man himself was nowhere to be seen. Moreover, the final recordings made it clear that there was someone Grout found threatening. However, there was no proof as of yet that there was someone deserving of such fear – Grout’s voice had illustrated such unease and anxiety in those last couple of recordings that the idea of such a threat surely seemed very possible.

He would simply have to find this Grout himself and ask. Or at least do his damndest to make the man tell him who this person was. Izaya did have his own suspicions.

Heading up a few more steps and through a door, Izaya saw a woman standing inside of a class case, immobile and seemingly asleep. Or was she even real? It was hard to tell. Right next to him, a gramophone stood – this was new. He could see that the door on the other side of the circular room was locked with metal bars covering it. Izaya decided to wind up the gramophone. It played an odd sort of swing jazz very slowly – giving the tune a creepy feel to it. It caused the glass case to turn, which lowered the metal bars from the opposite doors.

Finally. On the other side was a large room, fairly barren of furniture. The room was just so large that even though it had all necessary bedroom furnishings and then some, it still seemed a bit empty. There was one thing that surely did not belong, however. On a smaller bed in the room, all sheets and covers were removed. Two stakes had been shoved through the metacarpals of the hands of the remains…which were laying there rather conspicuously. There was a wooden stake stuck between two ribs and it was driven further, into the mattress. The feet were chained down with another stake. Only vampire remains looked like that before they would become dust.

‘Grout. It has to be.’

From the next room over, came a loud blast – like a small bomb had gone off. It seemed to have shaken the whole house. A loud, accented voice sounded out from that next room as Izaya pushed open the doors to see that he was on a balcony overlooking what was now more or less a pit of flames.

“Grout, lay low and be cleansed by the flames!”

Izaya smirked, “I invite you most graciously to try making Grout do that!” The man looked confused. “He’s quite dead, you see~”

“Grout is dead? …Hmph. Pity it could not be by my hand! No matter – soon your self-made kings and false prophets, and all who bear the mark of the beast will be washed from the earth for the coming of the Lord!

‘Who the hell is this guy?’

“As you burn, tell them it was Grunfeld Bach who sent your damned soul to that lake of fire! All agents of Satan shall return to whence they came!”

Some kind of hunter then. Just great. He even sounded eerily similar to the shouting man from Santa Monica.

‘Just what I freaking needed,’ he thought, realizing this was all steadily becoming more complicated. Nothing he’d found here signified anything good.

And still, he continued.

“Let this righteous display serve as a promise to all who serve the archfiend LaCroix! I’m coming for
you, LaCroix! By the power of the Lord, I will cleanse your black soul!"

‘Great, now he’s talking to someone who isn’t here…’ he massaged the area between his eyes, feeling the annoyance emerge. Not that it mattered much as Bach ran out of sight from across the balcony. Izaya would have to find another way out from this upper floor, as the ground level was rather quickly being engulfed by the flames. Sadly, there was no other way to get to the other upper floor side than to jump down, avoid the flames the best he could, and find a way back up to that other side.

At the same time, as he was trying to maneuver through the mansion now on fire, more creatures seemed to have crawled out of their holes. Even worse, they kept lunging for Izaya who could only dodge since these creatures were also on fire. Part of this dodging and running required the loss of some of his knives, unfortunately. It wouldn’t be a big deal to replace them, but still.

Finally, he’d gotten to the upper floor, ran through hallways where the fire hadn’t reached yet, and found a room with a window facing the front yard where he’d started. No big deal to jump from the second floor at all.

He walked out of the neighborhood out to a much busier street and hailed a cab. The flames could now be seen from there. His timing had been just about perfect – he’d gotten out before he could be trapped and all the while escaping before any authorities arrived.

~

“Listen, my girl down at Club Confession – name of Venus Dare – she askin’ around for someone with skills to – well, I’ll let her sell you. I’ll give her a call, recommend you, if you’re interested…?”

Izaya had returned downtown after Grout’s mansion. It would be getting light out fairly soon, so he decided he’d head over to his new apartment. Not before, however, replenishing his stock of knives. While he was picking out new ones at Fat Larry’s shop, said man must’ve gotten the idea Izaya would be up for some kind of task for someone, considering his purchases.

‘If nothing else, I can probably get more money with whatever task it is. If not, at the very least it might be fun.’

Izaya agreed, “Sounds like a good time,” he stretched a little, making a show of being tired. “I’m afraid I wouldn’t be able to make good on that tonight, however. If you talk to her, make her aware it’ll be another night.”

That agreed upon, Izaya put away his new knives – some even had lovely black blades before he headed in the direction of the new apartment. This actually took him past Club Confession, which seemed looked as though it were an old church on the outside – with a gothic style. The windows let out only a bright red light. It looked as though they were starting to close up, however; patrons were starting to file out of the entrance both alone and in pairs.

Not far beyond the club were the Skyline Apartments.

~

It wasn’t hard to disable the camera for apartment 4. It was equally simple to get into the apartment and ensure that there weren’t any other cameras or microphones within the apartment. It was easy to see to it that the place was protected by the sun, since there were no windows at all.

What was not so easy was the wait.
Izaya entered the building, immediately noting a grunginess to the place. It was painted a warped blue and the fluorescent lights buzzed loudly. There were a couple of windows, a few seats, a fake potted plant, an elevator, and a guard standing by a door – presumably a basement – just whistling to himself. Constantly.

It seemed the elevator was the way to go. The buttons were labeled one through seven so Izaya gave the four a push. On that floor, there wasn’t even a hallway, it was simply a small room with one door – which his key fit perfectly into.

The immediately noticeable thing was the huge fish tank built deep into the wall to the immediate left. It gave off a blue glow, and there were several fish in it. Izaya found himself enjoying it and smiled.

Aside from that, it had a similar feel to his old place in Shinjuku. The living room was fairly large, and furnished, complete with a tv. The kitchen was right behind it, a normal sized one and nothing odd about it. There was a larger dining table next to that on the left side – just beyond the fish tank. A small bathroom was beyond it. On the right side of the room were stairs leading up to a sort of balcony. It extended to lead into a small room overlooking the lower level and included a computer and stereo.

The final thing was a door along the balcony. It opened up to a small bedroom which included a bathroom and closet. There was a dresser, another fake plant, a rug, and of course, a bed about twin size.

But there was one thing most noticeably obvious in the entire apartment – it was the most noticeable and attention-grabbing thing there.

It sat there on the bed with a drop-dead smile.

It sat there with happy eyes and shaggy blond hair.

It sat there in a black muscle shirt and dark blue jeans.

It sat there hunched over, as though it’d been waiting for a while.

It was Shizuo.

““Izaya.”

All Izaya could do was stand there by the bedroom door.

‘He always catches me off guard like this,’ he frowned. It was time to maintain a semblance of composure.

““Well…if it isn’t Shizu-chan.”

～

Shizuo stood up, and walked to lean casually against the dresser, his eyes on Izaya the whole time.

“So…do you have the answer for me?”

Izaya simply stood there, taking in the situation. He rattled off the riddle’s answer almost robotically. It was easier than allowing himself to feel anything regarding the subject matter.
“Firstly, ‘I’ stands alone at the beginning of the phrase, and the ‘you’ will be at the end of it. Fifty romans refer to roman numerals, and fifty is ‘L’. Nothing means ‘0’, five roman numerals is ‘V’ and the middle of the word ‘sea’ is an ‘E’. Now all that hard to figure out, naturally.”

“I knew you’d figure it out, yeah,” Shizuo ran a hand through his hair. “But I won’t ask for your answer to that yet,” he said this with a wink, just for a response.

He got one in the form of a red-faced flea.

“Also…as I’m sure you know; the sun is coming up by now,” Shizuo rubbed the back of his neck. It seemed convenient but he didn’t actually plan this.

“Mind if I crash here?”

~

Anarchs

Vampires who reject the rule of the Camarilla. The Anarchs once held Los Angeles as a "Free State" until the Camarilla returned. They still control Hollywood and some areas in LA. Anarchs are vampires who reject the Traditions of Caine and the dictates of the elders who enforce them. Ironically, elders grudgingly afford Anarchs some degree of status, due to the anarchs' ability to obtain power in spite of the elders' opposition. Anarchs are also respected for their passion and drive, which few elder Kindred, mired as they are in their age and dissatisfaction, can muster. Ultimately, however, most Kindred see Anarchs as jackals, scavenging their unlives from what slips through the elders' fingers.
I'll Wait

Chapter Notes

Well...I tried my best ^^;

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Izaya was incredulous, even now.

Shizuo could say he loved him until he was blue in the face, not that it could occur anyway, but still, Izaya knew he would never believe it. It simply made no sense at all and regardless of Izaya’s own feelings, it didn’t matter; there was no way Shizuo loved him as it was simply too ridiculous, even for the stupid protozoan.

But…he wasn’t stupid, was he? ...No. He seemed annoyingly perceptive, in fact, if the letters were anything to go by. Thinking back, it may have even started back in Tokyo considering their last meeting there. Even so…it was a foolish thing to do. Those who cared about Izaya would surely only end up getting hurt or worse and history had proven that. Besides, for everything he’d done in his life, he didn’t deserve love of any kind, let alone this – and that was assuming Shizuo was even correct about his own feelings anyway.

The two were still standing in the bedroom, Shizuo just staring at Izaya, waiting for some kind of a response. Izaya hovered nearby the door as if he could make an escape of some sort despite there obviously being nowhere outside of the apartment to go now that the sun was up.

The more Izaya thought about the situation he was in – the more he continued to internalize the thoughts and the feelings, the more control over himself he lost, which became apparent rather quickly.

“Just what the hell do you want from me?!”

Shizuo’s eyes widened for just a moment in surprise. The outburst was a little bit of a shock. But he quickly let that expression slip away in place of a confident and sly one.

Walking forward a few steps to close the distance between them, Shizuo responded. “Ah…what I want from you? Well…”

Even though Izaya had backed up into the door and fumbled for the handle, Shizuo was quick to reach him and take that hand, pinning it at the wrist to the door above the flea’s head. He gently tipped Izaya’s chin upward with his other hand, forcing Izaya to look at him. Izaya’s other hand came up to grab that arm in a vain attempt to pull it away.

“…that would be…”

Shizuo leaned in towards Izaya’s face, then beyond it, until his mouth was mere centimeters away from his ear. Shizuo finished his sentence with as much breath in his voice as he could gather.

“…everything.”
Izaya failed in holding back a shiver.

Before he knew it, he’d been fully pressed up against the door as his breath came out in rapid pants in response to the mouth that laid siege on his neck, trailing down from the ear with small nips and licks, pausing in spots that made him illicit the loudest moans and sighs. Izaya began to squirm under the touches until a body pressed in against his own, while a knee pushed its way between his legs.

Izaya closed his eyes as he couldn’t help but melt enough to release Shizuo’s arm, and the attached hand wandered down to his waist. It crept underneath his coat and shirt and Izaya’s body couldn’t help but push forward into it without his permission.

The other hand stayed, still gripping Izaya’s wrist a little tighter now, as Shizuo’s forehead pressed against his own. He opened his eyes to see the golden-colored pair staring into his own, pupils dilated and smoldering.

Izaya couldn’t think long enough to understand how it had gotten to this point. ‘He always manages to shake me entirely, damn Shizu-chan.’

Those eyes closed as their lips connected. It should have been obvious; they’d been so close they were breathing the same air. And yet, Izaya still managed to be surprised. Another trademark of their interactions.

Izaya had a free hand. Maybe ‘free’ wasn’t the right term as it seemed to be pulled by an invisible string to grip the blond hair at the back of Shizuo’s head though it neither pushed the head towards him nor pulled it away. That was when the tongue came out, looking for an entrance, but Izaya was stubborn as his mind started to clear up a little and he didn’t grant entry.

Of course, that was when the hand under his shirt went downward instead, brushing a hip bone and moving around to the back. This was followed by a squeeze. Always surprised by this man, Izaya gasped at the touch.

It was a brief second, but Shizuo didn’t need any more time to deepen the kiss and explore his flea’s mouth. Izaya involuntarily shuddered at the sensation of a tongue roaming around the top of his mouth, the teeth, and prodding at his own tongue.

Although the moans they both let out couldn’t be easily decipherable as to who’s was who’s, it was enough for Shizuo to press in even closer.

This meant as well, however, that Izaya could feel a certain pressure pushing into his thigh and it was then that his mind cleared up immediately and almost jarringly.

‘No no no this isn’t…there’s no way I could—’

He pulled back as far as he could which wasn’t much and managed to tear himself away just a little from Shizuo’s hold. They both paused for a moment, staring at each other. Izaya with incredulousness, and Shizuo with concern.

“Are you alright?” Shizuo asked, expression morphing into worry.

Izaya took a moment before he could answer.

He tore his eyes away and answered with as much conviction as he could gather, which turned out to sound clearer and steadier than he thought he’d manage.

“I just…” he started and faltered. Still, Shizuo was patient and waited for him.
“It’s…I…I can’t,” Izaya responded. “I just…can’t. Not…yet. I think. It’s…you’re…I can’t.”

Granted, it still wasn’t exactly clear nor did it convey exactly the emotions and the thinking that Izaya wanted to say, but with Shizuo’s response, it didn’t seem to matter.

“That’s alright,” he stated, as though it were the most obvious thing in the world. He backed away from Izaya, giving him a bit of space for himself. Then, he took Izaya’s right hand like one would a princess’ and knelt down on the floor.

Bewildered, Izaya looked down at him in confusion before Shizuo kissed the hand in front of him gently. He maintained eye contact, however.

Izaya looked away, face reddening to the extent that he himself could feel the heat of it as it traveled to his ears as well.

“I’ll wait forever.”

Izaya immediately looked back at him.

“What?”

“We have an eternity, you know. No matter how long it takes – I’ll wait for you. Forever.”

Izaya’s bones then decided they would attempt to mimic a gelatin mold to the best of their abilities and the red in his face certainly did not dissipate.

“I understand your reluctance, your uncertainty…and that’s fine,” Shizuo continued. “As I said…I will wait for you for however long it takes. I promise to be on your side, always.”

“How do I…what?”

Izaya let out a shuddering breath and stood there, staring at Shizuo for a few minutes as if deciding something.

“F-Fine. But you’ll someday know how dumb you are for saying all of that and thus, you will change your mind,” Izaya pulled his hand away and crossed his arms, pouting to conceal any and all feelings that he’d clearly been displaying.

Shizuo only smiled at him.

Izaya pouted more and Shizuo laughed, getting up from the floor.

“I can take the couch, if that’s alright with you.”

That was right, the sun was most certainly up by now.

“Tch, are you really that moronic?”

‘That stupid protozoan.’

Shizuo looked at him, puzzled.

“You’ll get sick that way, stupid Shizu-chan, and I am not going to let you get me sick with your Shizu-chan cootie germs.”

Shizuo tilted his head, a grin spreading across his face. “Well you didn’t seem to mind these…cootie
germs very much earlier, flea.”

That actually shut Izaya up quickly with the added bonus of making him blush again.

“Well…a-anyway, it’s fine if we…both use the bed…just this time!” Izaya put his hands on his hips and tried his best to look threatening. “Got it?” The thing about that was he almost never had any issue with intimidation. When he put effort into it, people either ran away screaming, or simply really wanted to. But he couldn’t make it work this time.

And that was how he ended up with a certain ex-bartender’s arms wrapped around him as they lay there on his bed…just so they could both fit on it, of course. Surely, there were no other reasons for that at all.

“…love you…” came slurred from Shizuo’s mouth as he was obviously falling asleep.

Izaya’s head was tucked was tucked under Shizuo’s, and his scent was strong and comforting. Not that he’d acknowledge such a thing; Izaya had his pride even inside his own head.

A whisper, “I know.”

Soft snoring came from above his head, but it only served to help Izaya be lulled to sleep, as though it were the comforting sound of ocean waves. The warmth had nothing to do with it. Neither did the legs that had wrapped around his own. And it certainly was not comfortable either.

No, not at all.

“I’ll wait forever.”

Not at all.

As for Shizuo, well…he’d merely ‘forgotten’ to mention to Izaya that their kind didn’t get sick.

~

Izaya couldn’t believe himself.

‘How could I just go along with all of that?!!’

He punched the pillow on that lay innocently on the bed, though it did smell like Shizuo. Sitting up on the bed, he was partially wrapped up in the sheets alone. He was upset with himself that he had basically just accepted with little pause what Shizuo had said and done. But it couldn’t be helped, right? The whole thing was so unexpected that it was perfectly reasonable, wasn’t it…? He hadn’t had the opportunity to make conscious decisions…had he?

It took a while before he could get himself to move, but eventually, he did. He’d have to go report to LaCroix tonight (what the hell had Nines been doing at the scene acting so oddly, anyway?), but after that, he’d take it easy and do whatever he chose – there were a couple of things he had wanted to look into so he’d make do with that, perhaps listen to the very…odd radio. That’s what he’d do, even if LaCroix did have him go somewhere else – it would wait.

As Izaya got himself ready for the night, the contents of a note that lay on the nightstand floated around in the back of his mind.

My Dearest Flea,

I know you’re not entirely comfortable with me, and that’s alright; I understand. This is why I left
before you woke up – I know you’ll need your space for a little while.

I’ll be with you again soon, call it a hunch. Don’t forget that if you need me, I will be there to help you whatever your task may be.

And remember that you’ll always have me… I am yours.

Love,

Your Shizu-chan

～

“Hey there, snicker-doodle!”

Izaya flinched – it just couldn’t be helped. “Ah, nice to see you...blueberry…doughnut.”

As sad as it was, Chunk didn’t notice Izaya’s desperate struggle to think of a new term of endearment. And really, that was all Izaya needed.

“Uh…I don’t think Mr. LaCroix is expecting you, but I’ll buzz you up.”

“Thanks always, sugar pie!”

With that one, Izaya almost ran into the elevator since it was near impossible for him to not start laughing – so he got it out of his system on the way up.

As Izaya approached the desk, LaCroix had an irritated look on his face.

“The primogen still haven’t been contacted by Grout. I thought I made it clear that you were not supposed to come back until we had heard from him.”

Izaya grinned, and held up his hands with a shrugging gesture. “If the primogen wish to hear from Grout, they’re going to have to hold a séance, you see.”

“Grout’s dead?!? What?”

Interestingly, although LaCroix’s voice held a modicum of appropriate panic, his countenance and overall tone of voice gave it away – Izaya could see that he was not actually shocked.

‘This must have something to do with the bizarrely behaving Nines…’

“Yes, indeed. Also, who’s Bach? Why does he love fire so much, and why does he hate you so badly?”

“Bach! Every time I think he’s lost the scent…so, Bach killed Grout to draw me out.”

“Hm~ well, Bach seemed unaware that Grout was dead – his surprise appeared quite legitimate.”

“Bach is a hunter. They stalk and kill our kind to appease their God. But like many mortals, their so-called faith is nothing but a conduit through which the quench their killing urge. Who else would have killed Grout?!!?”

Izaya sensed a trap. There were too many suspicious things and too much opportunity for him to speak freely. This was definitely some kind of set up. LaCroix wasn’t that good an actor even if he was a few hundred years old.
The only way to find out more now was to run straight into it.

“Well…it is the case that I saw Nines Rodriguez leaving the mansion.”

“Look at me, LaCroix’s voice went quiet, and deadly serious. “Are you sure it was Nines Rodriguez? Because if it was, the consequences…do you know where this might lead? Do you really have any idea?”

Yes, he did. Izaya’s mind had figured that out quickly enough. It was too obvious, if anything.

“No, not really. But I’m also not sure it was him, anyway – he was acting rather bizarrely and he also didn’t make any sense, not even grammatically.” He said this in the most carefree way possible. There was only person who could shake him, into showing anything he didn’t want to show, and this was not that person. Which was why playing dumb was simple in this instance. LaCroix had such confidence that if Izaya played his cards right, he just may be able to trick him into not seeing Izaya as any sort of threat – he could trick him into thinking that Izaya could be fully manipulated and be turned into LaCroix’s pet essentially.

“It means…under most circumstances, I would call a blood hunt on the murderer immediately. However, the anarchs of this city may interpret such an action to be a declaration of war. I do not want a war with them. This decision will take some time.

“I need to confer with the primogen on this. In the meantime, I’ve come to a decision on the Anakarn Sarcophagus, and I believe that for the safety of the inhabitants of this city, we need to place the sarcophagus under Camarilla protection, until its contents can be confirmed.”

There could be only one reason LaCroix was telling him all of this.

“You’re becoming quite indispensable to me, so – out of all my available personnel, I’m going to entrust the retrieval of the sarcophagus to you. It has already been quietly delivered to the Museum of Natural History.”

“I’ll go quickly.”

“The manifest from the Dane shows there was a small box from the same dig on board, but it was listed as missing. Keep an eye out for it, it may have been overlooked. It’s crucial that we get the sarcophagus in our possession within the next few hours.

“Here are the keys to the museum. The sarcophagus should be in an examination room of some sort. There’s a small security staff on site, but I don’t want a massacre. Mortals are just as easy to deceive as they are to kill.”

Izaya smiled, “Understood. I do have a question first, however.”

LaCroix sighed. “One or two questions is fine, that’s all.”

“What did you mean by ‘blood hunt’?”

“A blood hunt is a death sentence. When one commits a high crime against our society, a blood hunt may be called. It is then the responsibility of the city’s Kindred to bring the offender Final Death.”

“I see, I see~ That sounds it can be a fun time~” LaCroix rolled his eyes with impatience.

“And how does Bach know you?”
“My history with that family dates back to Bach’s grandfather, who pursued me into Africa, where I killed him. Bach’s father tracked me to London to meet his death. And now Bach and the Society of Leopold have followed me across America. They never learn.”

“The Society of Leopold?”

“Witch hunters – an anachronistic holdover from the Middle Ages. They are inquisitors whose fanaticism has convinced them that their triumph over the supernatural will save mankind and secure them a cushy spot in heaven.”

“I see. Thank you for that. Then, I’ll get ready to go.”

“There is a degree of immediacy attached to this task. Work fast. And, as on the Dane, you are not to open the Ankaran Sarcophagus for any reason. Excuse me.”

Izaya left, avoiding Chunk’s glance along the way at the entrance.

~

So much for his previous plan. Being unable to control his own life was finally beginning to get to him. Even so, it wouldn’t due to strike against LaCroix. Certainly, not for some time longer and not without help. It was true that he was just a fledgling but it was also true that he was quite an impressive one – despite still being rather new to everything, even he could tell that most fledglings and even other Kindred would at least struggle to do the things he did. He credited his human life for that. If he were to take on LaCroix, he’d have to be able to take on the hunters, first of all. As much as LaCroix had demeaned them, the fact that they’d chased him around through generations meant that they were some threat. Really, it seemed LaCroix had been heading up this kind of job for a while…it was possible he’d gotten too accustomed to having others do the dirty work…there was a chance that he might be able to take him on; naturally, Izaya hadn’t forgotten how close he’d come to being permanently killed by LaCroix.

However, before heading out, he’d stop back at his place to stock up on knives and supplies.

~

“Alright! Honey, I got the last of the groceries! I just need to close the trunk.”

SLAM

“WHAAooooowwww!”

*

“One more nail, and this birdhouse will be good as new.”

THUNK

“Ooohhhhh!!!”

*

“I’m sorry, sir. This dressing room is for women only.”

*

“You don’t have to let this happen to you. Hi, I’m Dr. Fred Tuck. Don’t let your penis interfere with the quality of your life anymore. I have performed over three hundred sex changes in my career, and
not one of my patients has ever asked for their tackle box back. Come to Tuck’s Sex Exchange in the
next month, and I’ll give you a free estimate. Don’t let your piece interfere with your peace of mind.”

“Tuck’s Sex Exchange: Located on Beverly Drive. Look for the sign with Toothy, the Surgical
Saw.”

*

Izaya remembered why he had stopped listening to the radio.

Though he had to admit that Toothy was a cute name for a saw.

He decided to turn his attention away from the radio, and his gazed lingered on the note from earlier
for longer than he cared to admit.

~

Shizuo was hunched over at the edge of the roof of the museum.

He had a feeling he’d be the one sent here, and it was a correct hunch.

He watched as Izaya arrived in a cab, more or less discreetly around to the back.

He watched as Izaya climbed up gracefully as only he could do, up to the top level of the museum.

He watched as Izaya reached the top entryway and opened it with a set of keys and entered.

He sat back, and waited for a while before deciding to follow him.

~

Oddly enough, these upper floors seemed to be shaped as rings of narrow hallways with connecting
doors to the more inner rings heading toward the center. With a key found here and there, it was no
problem to navigate, although there had been a very annoying prank standing there.

A small-sized raptor (as raptors go) stood there around one of the curves of the immediate hallway,
with a note posted up next to it. Not the worst prank, truly, just not very creative, Izaya thought.

He wasn’t the only annoyed one, as the note said:

Damned funny! You scared the crap out of the cleaning crew. Now would you put the damned
raptor back in its exibit? Oh, and don’t leave your keys lying around or Marshall will fire your ass.

Apparently, this prankster also had the easy-going habit of leaving his keys around the area.

Which did come in handy, as Izaya did find some laying on the floor not too terribly far away and it
did get him through other doors.

This led him to the main hall of the museum, on the floor above the ground level. It was a beautiful
and elegant kind of building, really. It seemed to be very old and the ceiling was quite high up. The
floors were obviously polished to shine even in the dim lighting. Down below could be seem a large
T-Rex exhibit with a Pterodactyl hanging from wires above. There was a walkway on this upper
floor, crossing the way. Avoiding the couple of security guards that were there patrolling on the
upper level, he even pounced on the pterodactyl, using it to get closer to the ground while remaining
unseen.
‘That’s true skill,’ he thought, wanting to twirl one of his knives in his hand. On the main floor were a couple more guards, but that was nothing he couldn’t avoid entirely. Including what had to be the main entrance, there were several other doors around the perimeter, some he had to unlock himself and others he could easily sneak into.

One was simply a bathroom, other doors led into offices and a security room where he got another set of keys, and learned that the sarcophagus was supposedly down in storage until a well-known doctor in the field of study could arrive to examine it. The set of keys was for a room connecting to one of the offices – leading to a downward set of stairs. It had been accompanied with another note about someone leaving their keys around, though it seemed to be regarding someone else. It was a strange number of people having key issues.

The basement level floor area began with a square surrounding a security room. With his abilities, Izaya could see that there were a few cameras here and there, and the hallways branching off of the square. Oddly, there were red and green lines printed onto the floor. Both in the square and then each going down the other hallways.

‘Bizarre.’

But then, what wasn’t bizarre anymore?

Izaya would first have to get by the security guard in the square, then disable whatever cameras he could before proceeding. The cameras seemed to swivel about, so he would just have to avoid their gaze before he could get into the security room. This didn’t prove hard, it just took some patience. As for the security room, that just took quietness as he snuck up on the guard and fed from him until he passed out. From there, he only had to hack a couple of passwords to disable the several cameras within these hallways.

He headed down the red stripe hallway, which ended up passing by a couple of rooms that seemed to be for research, though upon breaking into them, he didn’t find anything of use. One room that seemed to look like a swanky break room with cushy chairs and lovely décor had a note with a code on it. Izaya memorized it though he didn’t know what it was for; one never could be sure. A computer in the room turned out to have the password of ‘ihatemyjob’, revealed a message about Dr. Johansen once again and how they would show him around the museum before seeing to the sarcophagus.

Leaving that room, he dodged a couple of walking guards by keeping to the darker corners, and checked out the green stripe hallway. This one, like the last one, would eventually come back around to the main square, however, there was also a secured door with a place to enter a code in next to it.

‘These poor humans – this is far too easy.’

He got through the door, and saw an active camera down at the next corner. He’d have to wait again to dodge it properly. Making it passed that, there was a security room at the end, separated by a window. Right beyond it was another door. He crawled along the ground to avoid a security guard’s gaze, and opened the door. Beyond it was a corner with the hallway proceeding to the right. The difference with this hallway was that there were mechanisms on either side of the wall moving up and down, and occasionally shooting electric currents across to one another. Immediately to the left was a power box on the wall. It, to, was sending out electrical currents as well as sparks – the reason was obvious – a screwdriver had been driven into the device by someone. It might have been the reason that the electrical security wasn’t constant.

After a few fancy feats of acrobatics, Izaya made it to the other side. There was one door that left to the security room – unneeded. The other door immediately to his left led into what was clearly
exhibit storage. No raptors, though. He made his way through the very dimly-lit room, large boxes sitting on hay were behind fenced-in small rooms.

‘I’ll have to hide somehow. Maybe I can send the sarcophagus ahead with a truck and just…wait it out here. Should be fine.’

There had been a problem already, he knew. He’d seen the time on the computers, and noticed increased activity in the museum above—like a changing of shifts. He had taken too long and the sun will have begun to rise already.

One more door. It had to be beyond there.

Indeed, it was – a long, rectangular crate sat near the middle of the small room. Or, at least, it must have previously. All sides of the crate were taken apart from each other and scattered around the area.

And the sarcophagus?

Gone.

Shit.

A voice sounded from behind him.

“I can’t understand why someone would go through the trouble of stealing a box with a very ancient corpse – this city’s not THAT dull.”

Izaya turned, seeing Beckett – the one he’d met after blowing up the warehouse. A historian, apparently.

“Ah, hello, Beckett. What brings you here?” It was time to get some info for this situation…he’d need it.

“I’m an archaeologist, so I thought I’d indulge in a quick study of this Ankaran Sarcophagus everyone’s so riled up about. My guess, from what I’ve read about it, is that it’s a mummified Mesopotamian king. I needed confirmation.”

“Would you happen to know what exactly happened to it?”

It seemed not, per Beckett’s response. “Since it’s missing, I’m inclined to believe it was stolen, or intentionally misplaced, if you like. Clearly though, it’s not here.”

‘Thanks for that, detective.’

“So you had no chance to examine it.”

“Oh, I really wish I had. All this speculation about the sarcophagus containing an Antediluvian and a portent of Gehenna is making me cringe. These are the kinds of ridiculous, superstitious assumptions I came here to debunk.”

He was certain someone had told him of this before, but…it couldn’t hurt.

“Gehenna?”

“Armageddon, doomsday, the end of all Kindred. It’s a common facet of most mythologies – fear that the world will end. Many believe Caine and the Antediluviens will return to consume or destroy
all Kindred. I wholeheartedly disagree.”

“And…antediluvians?”

“No one I know has ever met one, but each of the clans and their bloodlines supposedly trace their origin to an original vampire – an Antediluvian. Some swear these grandsires still exist into the present. But then, Kindred and kine believe a lot of strange things.”

He asked about Caine next. He’d heard about it from that guy Skelter before, and also on his own, but Beckett was proving useful with very factual information.

“Caine is the biblical first Kindred and founder of the mythological First City – Enoch – a place where Kindred and kine coexisted. I believe Caine’s a figure concocted to personify the transition from nomadic society to agrarian society. That myth, like most, has been twisted by time.”

“And why don’t you believe in Gehenna?”

“As I said, many cultures have the fear of some form of apocalypse. Kindred believed in these stories when they were human, and naturally carried them over into Kindred myth. But it doesn’t take a supernatural act to cause widespread destruction.

“Humans and Kindred are just as capable of managing their own destruction as a deity. A self-realized Gehenna warrants more vigilance than a god-induced one, don’t you agree? Such is my argument…which so frequently falls on deaf ears.”

“What are these so-called signs of Gehenna?”

Beckett smirked. “What prophecy doesn’t have vague, apocryphal signs? Let’s see, the usual ones cited are the appearance of thin-bloods, Caine sightings, doom, gloom, that route.”

Beckett’s humor was almost comforting. Izaya decided this was likely a contact he could trust when it came to information. Moreover, he knew a lot of interesting things.

“This is some fascinating information…how long have you been studying these things?”

“For 300 years I’ve been trying to determine the function of our existence, the Kindred’s role in the world. I’m not content to attribute it to some act of supernatural, biblical vengeance. We exist…for a reason. And if it takes another 300, I’ll figure it out. Any thoughts?”

Izaya shrugged, a humorous expression with a false smile on his face. “Monsters. Horrific mutations of humans. I don’t see any other reasonable explanation at all~” What else could they be, really.

“Yes, I’ve heard that theory before. It certainly seems plausible, but there’s little proof to support it. Still, it’s a better explanation than a divine sentence for manslaughter.”

Fair enough.

“Regardless…I’ll be living this life to its fullest.”

“Life’s a splendid thing to indulge in…pity we’re dead. Well, my work here’s been stolen into the night, think I’ll do the same.”

“Where do you plan to go? As I’ve seen, the sun has come up by now.”

“I do have my ways…”
And true enough, Beckett walked back out of that room, and then back to the security hallway. Izaya had not found anywhere to go and hide. Beckett must have known a place on his own. Truly the lone-wolf type, he’d gone quickly.

Izaya settled himself inside of one of the fenced-in storage areas. Luckily there were no windows of any kind so he’d have no issue with that. A large burlap covering sat against the wall – Izaya decided and to get under it and do the same until he could fall asleep. If a worker actually did find him, it shouldn’t be hard to talk his way out of it if he had to. It was bound to be a long day.

~

Shizuo had been hiding in one of the darkest corners of the room.

He knew the sarcophagus was gone.

He’d known it for a while, in fact.

The museum’s communications were behind, and they’d been covering up what had happened for some time now – and the media did not yet know still.

How had he known the sarcophagus was gone?

Shizuo was the one who’d taken it.

But he was there this time to watch over Izaya, and that was just what he’d do. It was unfortunate that everything had taken too long and that Izaya’s timing had been off, meaning he couldn’t leave on time to beat the sun.

Well, there was only one thing for it.

He waited until Izaya stopped shifting under the burlap cover, indicating he was probably sleeping.

And lifting the material, it seemed he was sleeping, his knees bent so that he would stay up against the wall. Shizuo crawled underneath the cover himself, and sat right next him, cross-legged to wait out the day.

After an hour, Shizuo began to get a bit sleepy himself.

After another couple, he fallen asleep as well.

An hour more, and he felt a pressure on his shoulder.

Looking over, Izaya’s head had found a home there. It seemed he’d slumped over towards Shizuo in his sleep.

He smiled. How could he not?

Perhaps Izaya was instinctually trusting him just that little bit more.

He laid his own head on top of Izaya’s, and escaped into sleep once more.

~
**Antediluvians:**

According to the few fractured accounts of their doings, Antediluvians possess virtually godlike power. According to Kindred legend, there were 13 original Antediluvians, though some have allegedly been destroyed. Their eternal struggle, the Jyhad, touches all Kindred, and innumerable layers of manipulation and deception make the plots of these Ancients almost imperceptible. Officially, the Camarilla does not recognize the existence of the Antediluvians or Caine. It reasons that these vampires, if they ever existed at all, have long since suffered the Final Death, and those who allude to them are publicly derided. Unlike the Camarilla, the Sabbat recognizes the existence of the Antediluvians, though it rabidly opposes them. According to Sabbat propaganda, the Antediluvians pull the strings of the entire world, and it is this malignant control they oppose. They see the Camarilla as pawns of the Ancients, and oppose its members politically as well as physically.

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading as always! :D
Thanks for waiting! Depression is a bitch, so it was quite the sluggish challenge to pump this one out. Just a heads up, it may be a similar or longer wait time for the next one as well.

In the chapter, there's some Russian which I know almost nothing of. Luckily, with great thanks to Lexis_Blake for her wonderful assistance with the Russian~!

Thanks for reading and bearing with me~

“Wake up.”

In his muddled mind, Izaya could tell there was a presence right next to him. But it wasn’t cause for alarm. No, instead, it was warm, comforting, and made his current position of sleep more bearable. Izaya didn’t know what the voice had just said, just that the voice had spoken. He just knew that the voice was the one providing the little comfort he had at that moment, and he didn’t want it to leave him.

Instead, he was slowly being pulled into consciousness by that presence moving him, and then the growing absence of it.

~

Shizuo hadn’t slept much, but it was fine. In fact, he considered the lack of sleep well worth what he’d gotten. Not only had he ensured that Izaya wouldn’t be caught by any staff during the daytime working hours, but he’d gotten to spend that quiet and peaceful time there, sitting with him.

Eventually, Izaya had fallen into Shizuo’s lap, in fact. Shizuo didn’t move at all until he could be certain that the sun had set for the day. Doubtless Izaya would have gotten a more comfortable sleep that way anyhow. It didn’t matter that Shizuo managed to feel flustered for a while from their positions. Nope. There was not a blush dominating his face for a good part of the day, either. Indeed not.

He pulled Izaya back to a sitting position, trying to nudge him awake a bit.

“Wake up.”

It didn’t seem to be working very well. He could tell the ex-informant was waking up, but it looked to be quite the process.

‘He must not be resting enough,’ Shizuo frowned with some worry.

Izaya was stirring, just really slowly.

“Get some rest, flea,” he whispered.
He left after pressing a whisper of a kiss onto Izaya’s nose.

~

Izaya had been perfectly lucid.

Or, he had been once he been sat up. Really, he just wanted to see what Shizu-chan would do. Yes of course it was Shizu-chan, Izaya would recognize that scent anywhere.

It could have been that the other time they’d slept in close proximity to each other had been a fluke and that this time Shizuo would actually try to destroy him.

Call him paranoid, but now there were even Kindred who wanted him dead so despite the things Shizuo had said before, he still had to be careful.

‘I can’t just…give up,’ he thought to himself. If he gave up his heart for good…the thought was terrifying, after all. There was a reason he’d always been a loner and Izaya would never deny his cowardice.

He would, however, deny the dusty pink color that had spread along his cheeks if anyone had been present to ask about it.

Izaya closed his eyes and gathered himself. He had some things to attend to.

Just as soon as he controlled his breathing.

~

“Peanut Blossom!”

Izaya could always count on Chunk for a jarring pet name to bring him straight into reality.

“Ah, ‘scuse me, uh, startin’ ta doze off there…whew, I need to get a guard animal of some sort to alert me when folks come in. Maybe one of them chimps like on that show Ape Detective. Ha hehe he, that monkey always gets his man!”

“That would quite the grand idea, my…praline…pancake,” Izaya used everything he had dredge up a smile. “Would you mind sending me up to LaCroix?”

“Yeah, sure thing, patty melt!”

Izaya didn’t know who Patty was, but he was becoming increasingly confused at the things he was being called. Also, for his own part, he’d started relying on television ads that he remembered of all things to come up with pet names at this point.

“Thanks, coco-butter pop!”

He didn’t even know what he was saying anymore, and Izaya decided it was simply far too early in the night to know what he was saying anyway. He’d have to fix that on his way up.

~

Just across from and outside of one of the tallest building in the area, a woman headed to her midnight shift at work stopped for a few brief moments to stare in wonder at a nearby light pole. It was hard not to notice, after all, the light was very obviously shining in another direction where it should be able to reach.
Once she’d noticed that, it was easy to see the cause.

At first, it looked like something had careened into the pole, as though someone had hit it with their car and drove off. But no, the location was too high up for that.

Well, there had to be some reasonable possibility for it that she simply couldn’t think of. Nodding at the thought, she continued onward down the street.

~

It’s not that Shizuo had lost his temper. No, losing his temper would’ve meant strolling right into LaCroix’s place and strangling the human guard. Instead, a light pole had met a slightly unfortunate fate.

Not like Shizuo wanted to be called any other pet name besides the one he already had, even if it was from Izaya. There was nothing to be jealous of, and yet…

Well. It was obviously nothing, really. There couldn’t possibly be anything between those two. Still, something about the way the metal morphed and twisted in his hand had just felt a little too cathartic.

It didn’t really matter anyway; those names were…frightening.

~

Tonight, LaCroix was turned away, looking out of one of his windows. Noticing Izaya he turned around to face him, the moon shining into the room and across his face.

“The folly of leadership is knowing that no matter what you do, behind your back there’s hundreds certain that their own solution is the sounder one, and that your decision was the…by-product of a whimsical dart toss.

“I pronounce the blast sentence and I soak the critical fallout. I make the decisions no one else will. Leadership…I wear the albatross and the bull’s-eye.”

“Surely there are many of those who respect you,” Izaya responded. It was probably true.

“I’ve had my fill of sycophants. I need adjutants I can trust.”

“What is it you want to say, sir?”

“The blood hunt on Nines Rodriguez for the murder of Alistair Grout will be called. Rodriguez’s execution is only a matter of time. I have lit the fuse – if a war ignites, it’s my head they will sharpen the pikes for,” he brought a hand to his face, shaking his head with resignation.

“At least I can rest easy knowing that you, my most promising attendant, has relieved me of one encumbrance tonight. Do you need assistance bringing the sarcophagus up to my office?”

Izaya hesitated. This wasn’t about to be very fun.

“Well, ah, about that…” Izaya ran a hand through his hair, as if to prepare himself. “It would seem that it had been stolen.”

“Stolen…?!?"

“STOLEN?!? How? Who would…?” LaCroix looked frantically around the room as if the culprit would magically appear before him if he looked at the correct spot.
“Oh…Gary. Gary - you treasonous maggot! I should have anticipated your treachery, sewer rat!”

Before Izaya could ask, LaCroix elaborated.

“He’s the Nosferatu primogen. The Nosferatu were responsible for finding out where the sarcophagus was taken after the Dane, and for getting the keys to the museum. They were the only ones who knew! It’s obvious to me now…my mistake.”

“So-“

LaCroix’s explosive anger cut him off.

“I want him found! I want him…found,” here, he calmed himself. “The sarcophagus could be…exploited…causing who knows what catastrophe to this city. If it were to fall into the wrong hands…”

LaCroix looked at Izaya expectantly.

‘God dammit.’

He was about to sign himself up for a load of trouble, he knew it.

“I’ll find Gary and the sarcophagus.”

“The Nosferatu lurk in the filth below the streets of Hollywood, but not even I know just where they hide. Hollywood is, unfortunately, lacking in any Camarilla loyalties.

“Hollywood’s Baron is an anarch named Issac. Issac’s more civil than the anarchs downtown, but…nonetheless, he wears his mistrust of me on his sleeve. He may know how to contact the Nosferatu. Then, find Gary and get him to talk. That sarcophagus could be used against us. Do not come back until you have it. Now, I must announce the blood hunt – and bear the brunt of all consequences.”

LaCroix turned to his guard, the Sheriff. “Escort him out.”

~

Izaya felt that there had really been no need for that, but whatever. It meant he didn’t have to think up for pastry pet names to get by Chunk.

He’d head to Hollywood, fine. But he wanted to do something else first.

Fat Larry had mentioned a woman needing assistance with something. What was it – Venus Dare?

At least doing something of his own choosing before heading out to Hollywood would make him feel more control of his own un-life.

He knew where the club was, he’s passed it enough times going to and from his apartment. He remembered thinking it had been a strange sort of cathedral. And perhaps it used to be. But now, Club Confession was exactly that – an LA nightclub. In fact, it was right across the way from the Nocturne Theatre – the abandoned place where his trial had been.

From the entrance, the music was immediately audible and the inside of the place was decorated with a red theme that complemented the old gothic church theme well. There were even chains and some cages overhead that contained dancers. Down in the center was a dance floor, booths lining the walls. Immediately to the left, there was the bar run by two bartenders – one had to be Venus.
She had short black hair, heavy magenta eyeshadow, and a crop top that was obviously designed to flaunt cleavage. And Venus had plenty.

Before he could greet her himself, Venus spoke with a very slight British accent, oddly enough.

“Everybody comes in here’s got to have a shot, house rules. Inhibition’s the first thing to go. Two more of these and you’ll be telling me your nastiest, dirtiest stories. I am your beat priestess and it’s time to confess.”

“And who will I have the pleasure of speaking with?”

“Venus was her name, cutie. Got anything you want to confess, love?”

“My life was completely obliterated not too long ago, for one thing.”

“Mmm…sounds serious. I’m going to need details so I know whether to pour a Hail Mary or a Highway to Hell.”

Well this should be fun.

“It used to be that I ran with the Japanese Mafia, controlling all of the information in many parts of Japan…and now I find myself doing a lot of assassin sort of work.”

Kind of truth, kind of lies. Why not?

“Ah. Also, Fat Larry sent me.”

“Ah, so you’re who he meant. Oh, yeah? I’ve been waiting for someone like you to come in here. You see, I’ve got this situation that’s gotten a little out of hand and I need someone to inform some people that they won’t be getting paid this month. Intrigued yet?”

“Certainly. Do continue.”

“Well…the parking lot next to the Empire Hotel – couple of guys, Russian accents, bit thick. I need you to tell them Venus doesn’t have their money. That’s it.”

“And just what would be in it for me?”

“Free drinks on the house, for a week.”

Figures. “I’m afraid I don’t…partake.”

“You want cash? Whatever, I can do that. Question is: are you worth it?”

“I certainly am,” Izaya smirked. This could be fun. “I’ll do it.”

“Hmm…I’d expected you’d bite. Empire Hotel, tell them I’m broke. You can run, right? Never mind…just try not to start any street fights, alright? These guys are connected. Anyhow, a lot of people have yet to confess to the beat priestess. Later, darling.”

“Oh…I just hope someone does something they’ll regret~”

Stifling a giggle, Izaya practically pranced out of the club.

~
The hotel proved to be very easy to find – it was just a bit down the block from Izaya’s apartment. It was lucky he didn’t usually have to spend much time in going places. Usually.

The parking lot for the hotel was very obviously on the side of it, with security gates for parking, though it didn’t seem to be operated by anyone as the security booth was unmanned. In the lot were only a few cars, apparently not too many were staying there at the time.

He walked through the gates, and weaved between a few cars before seeing three men dressed in black, standing against the brick wall of the hotel. They were clearly not hiding the fact that they were armed.

The man in the center was a veritable grizzly sort. Tall, buff, and with a face that did not likely change its expression from the mix of pissed off and constipated – it fit the descriptor well.

“Confession bitch send you?”

“That she did, good sir.”

“Money, where is money?”

“I’m afraid she does not have it, friend.”

“No money?”

‘Might as well try something fun.’

“I know you desire the fish, Grizzly…oh, but look, your friends are salmon.”

The man’s expression went slack, and his eyes became unfocused.

“Salmon…salmon…”

What then commenced was a three-way gunfight as Izaya slowly backed up and got out of the way. Even if something were to hit him, he wouldn’t be seriously hurt, or at least not for long. Still, that would be a waste of time, so he got around the corner until the shots stopped.

The three men had ended up killing each other.

Izaya skipped back to the club after pretending to swipe dust away from his clothing as if he’d just cleaned up.

‘Alright, I can admit these powers are quite…convenient.’

~

“What??”

‘I guess she can’t hear me.’

“I can’t hear you – let’s talk in my office!”

It did seem to be louder in there since last he’d been in there.

Izaya followed her to the office. The pathway ended up being through a door behind the bar, up some steps to the upper level, out another door, and around the twisted balcony that went around the entire room and was held up by chains before reaching a door in the wall that led into a larger room
than he’d thought there would be.

All in all, it seemed like quite the needless procedure, but it couldn’t really be helped.

They entered the windowless office and Venus turned around quickly.

“Well, you certainly did better than my bouncer did; poor dear can’t turn his neck to the right anymore. Already had a call from Boris – wasn’t too happy about tonight, son of a bitch…” She tossed her short hair back with irritation. “Say…how would you like to get into the club business, hmm?”

This could be useful.

“I’m listening…”

“Well, to start this club, I had to take out a significant loan from a king bastard by the name of Boris, and every time I haven’t been able to make the monthly, plus interest, the bastard takes what he feels is a suitable late fee.”

“Alright.”

“I’ve got a club to run, so I’ll be blunt. I refuse to…fuck…that fat, misogynistic old man one more time to hold on to the club. So, I need someone to eliminate him. Do this, and I’ll make you a silent partner.”

“…what’s the catch?”

“Boris is high up in the Russian mafia. Does that make a difference?”

A difference? If anything, it might make it more interesting. Boris had been on his and Shiki’s radar in LA; they were trying to gain territory, and the Russian mafia was proving to be one of the more troublesome factions in the city. This man was actually one of the many humans Izaya had kept his eyes on previously when they were working hard to establish territory. Unlike a person such as Dennis, a small fry, Boris was a bigger fish. A rivaling mafia, was, after all, not really anything they would want to have to shake a stick at if they couldn’t help it. Not for the time being, anyway. Though with the yakuza’s loss of Izaya, they were probably still struggling to maintain the territory they had, let alone expand it.

In any case, since Izaya did get information on Boris previously, he was aware that there was nothing particularly special about him. ‘King bastard’ was a suitable term for the man. Not only was Venus under his clutches this way, but so were various other women as well. One might argue not to get oneself mixed up with such a group in the first place, or to not borrow money you don’t have, but this was ultimately an unreasonable expectation for all people to follow through with. In Izaya’s opinion, this ‘late fee’ was simply unacceptable despite any circumstances.

Besides, if he could take out Boris, he’d feel like he’d be helping out his old crowd. It was hard to admit, but he felt as though he owed them that much…even though they might be after his head at this point due to a possible betrayal on his part.

“He’s human, yes? He’ll be dead by sunrise, I guarantee it.”

Venus smiled.

“He’s at the Empire Hotel. Always has a few of the fiercest bully boys standing around trying to out-sneer each other. He’s got a short temper, and more than likely he’s been drinking for the last four
hours. Here – key to the penthouse level.”

She handed him a card key, and he took the long route from her office out of the club.

~

Izaya made his way back toward the hotel again. The task should be easy enough. It would be beneficial to multiple groups of people and even to himself. Upon finishing the task, as a silent partner of the club, that meant he’d receive some decent money from Venus frequently. It’d still be far cheaper for her in comparison to owing Boris. In this way, she’d be another contact for Izaya as well. Like she’d been saying when they met, she’d doubtless heard many, many stories and information. It was liable to be a mix of useful and unneeded information, but it helped Izaya already to look forward to the future. He’d be able to get back into his old line of work again faster than he’d originally thought.

The lobby of the hotel was about as fancy as he’d expected. The marble floor was polished, and the staff were well-dressed and smiling, though some of them looked obviously uncomfortable with it. Izaya couldn’t fault the place for cleanliness – the place was surely quite clean. The furniture was immaculate, and the decorative rug and curtains were well chosen. Likely, the entire place would reflect this.

The elevator only went up to the 5th floor without a room card of any kind. The top floors, including the penthouse, would require a key card which he did luckily have.

Upon exiting out into the top floor, there were several doors to choose from. Two were ahead and upon peering through those doors, he could see it was a large center room, almost like some kind of gathering or a ballroom. The problem with it was that there were numerous men inside, looking as though they were guarding the room. Though the strange thing was, Izaya couldn’t see anything or anyone that they could be guarding.

Otherwise, there was a door on each side of the room Izaya was in. They’d both ultimately lead to the same area it appeared, so it didn’t matter which Izaya chose.

He went through the right door with the key card and crept passed a few rooms, one marked laundry, with nothing or anyone of use inside.

In one room were a few men standing inside of it, watching television. They had the news on. Apparently, a huge creature had washed up on shore. It seemed to be a mystery as to what it was, aside from it apparently being some sort of huge octopus that even marine biologists were unfamiliar with. Following the hallway, he saw where the other path from the left door met up with where he was. In a room labeled maintenance, he could see a vent he’d be able to fit through. Why not crawl through it? Upon doing so, it led into a dark bathroom, and he found it attached to not just a guest room, but a very large proper bedroom. The advantage to this was that there was a single man standing in the room, back to Izaya.

He hadn’t had the chance to eat yet that day, so now would be the time. As it turned out, the man had some decent quality blood as well. He shouldn’t need to eat again that night.

Exiting the bedroom, there was a tall man standing right outside a larger room, and he seemed to be guarding it. Izaya could see that inside was a smaller man in comparison, sitting at a desk. It was definitely an office, though far larger than was likely necessary. The man stood there, despite Izaya being fully visible and not hiding at all. But then, upon his approach, he started speaking.

“Стой там! Who the hell are you?”
“Stand there!”

Yet another advantage Izaya possessed – the Russian language.

“Я должен поговорить с вашим товарищем. Позвольте мне войти, пожалуйста.”

(“I must speak with your comrade. Let me in, if you please.”)

Izaya’s request was met with some resistance.

“Я ничего не знаю о запланированном визите.”

(“I know of no scheduled visit.”)

“Детали вашей некомпетентности меня не интересуют. Позвольте мне пройти, или, я уверяю вас, ваш босс будет очень недоволен.”

(“The details of your incompetence do not interest me. Let me through, or I assure you, your boss will be most displeased.”)

That was enough. The man turned around and opened the door, leading the way inside. He stepped off to the side as the man, Boris got up from the desk and spoke.

“Что это? Какого черта? Почему ты впустил его сюда? Who the hell are you?”

(“What is this? What the hell? Why are you letting him in here?”)

A switch to English – why tip off the…victim to his lingual abilities.

“I have some business with you, Boris.”

“Well? Spit it out before Dima blows your head all over wall.”

“This is quite sensitive proposition I have for you…it may be best to send him out.”

“You want Dima to leave? Why would I allow that?”

“This could get embarrassing for you. I’m just looking out for you, Boris.”

With surprisingly only slight annoyance, Boris responded.

“Okay, okay. Выйди, Дима.”

With that, Dima left after being given the order.

“Very well…happy? Now spit it out. Make this quick, eh.”

“Venus sent me.”

“Is that right?”

“She wants the club.”

Boris snarled, “Scum! Stupid spoiled child. I give her so much, and she spits in my face!”

“She believes she…has more than paid for it.”
“Oh, so you are boyfriend, eh? You sit in house I pay for, eat chocolate I pay for, and talk about how you going to cheat club I pay for from me? You are spoiled little boy.”

‘Oh, please. This is going to be far too easy. Besides…I’ve worked my ass off my whole life, dammit.’ Izaya smirked.

“Я прошел мимо твоих охранников, и могу с легкостью убить тебя, мой друг.”

(I made my way past your guards, and I can take you down easily, my friend.”)

Boris was definitely surprised by his usage of Russian.

“Is that so? I tell you what, little boy. How can we come to an agreement? I maybe get you to do something for me instead.”

“Now what would that be?”

“You go back over to stupid club. You find ungrateful little girl there, and you kill her! …I pay you. I see she trust you. For you to do this, it will be easy.”

‘Very interesting. He’s hiding his nerves rather well, for a human. Likely he’s encountered this before. But I have my own reasons – I’m not just some hired assassin. This guy would pay once and give me little else. Worse, I’d likely be actively sought after and I can’t just have that~’

“Hmm…so sorry, Boris, but no deal.”

“You will get nothing from me. Go tell that bitch she can pack up little club. Her name is coming off it. Get the hell out of here, go!”

Izaya made his way over toward the door, but sat down in a plush chair in front of it instead, crossing his legs, and examining his nails, seemingly without a care in the world.

“Hmm…perhaps you misheard me, Boris. That would be a shame, so I’ll just have to repeat my intentions: Call off the debt. Now.”

Of course, it would end with weapons being pulled – he’d half expected it. Boris did not seem off guard either, especially as he almost casually drew his gun and began to aim it.

Which was more than enough time needed for Izaya. His speed with knives had already been incredibly fast even as a human. Now, it would probably be considered completely unmatchable which meant Boris didn’t even get the chance to properly aim the weapon at him before a knife found itself lodged completely in his chest.

In the same instant Izaya ran forward to catch Boris’ falling body. It wouldn’t do to call attention to what had just happen by allowing the sound of Boris falling to the ground to attract the attention of Dima and other guards.

Izaya lowered him to the floor silently. Boris was now gasping and choking for air. Izaya pulled out his knife and held it to Boris’ throat.

“In your last moments, you can feel free to think of me – and how you should have simply cut your losses, friend…goodbye,” with a full-fanged smile, Boris’ eyes widened as his throat was effectively slit. The blood began blending in with the red carpet before becoming a darker stain, spreading outwards rather quickly.
Izaya took his time, cleaning the knife off with Boris’ clothing. Some of it had inevitably gotten on Izaya, but it was nothing he wouldn’t be able to get off later. Searching the room, he grabbed a money clip of $200, and an expensive looking ring. Now, it was time to go.

It was the seventh floor up, which meant it was now a height that wasn’t too tall for him to jump. Too much higher than this and he wouldn’t be quite willing to risk it. But pushing his limitations would be fun…besides, he’d heal quickly enough. He didn’t have his life to lose.

As expected, the window he’d chosen did open, and he would bother trying to close it behind him. Outside, it was clearly still the middle of the night and he waited until the few people who were outside in normal human visual range to leave the area.

Once it was all clear, Izaya jumped from the window, and did manage to land on his feet. It did hurt some, but the pain was subsiding already. He managed to move himself over to the nearest alley and rested there for just a few minutes. It would likely not be much longer before that guy Dima realized something was wrong.

After a few more moments, Izaya walked back over to the club, though not before checking the window he’d jumped from for someone peeking out of it. That would not do, after all.

Finally, he made his way into the club, though he stood against the wall in a darker corner to allow himself to heal more before making himself known to Venus. The jump hadn’t been even close to fatal, but it was a bit of an injury.

Finally, he made his way to the bar again. It was still too loud, and Venus couldn’t hear him. They went up to her office once more. Once they got there, Venus spoke first.

“Boris?”

“Dead.”

“Is ‘at Boris’ blood?” she motioned to the smudge on him. “Guess we’re partners, then. If you only knew what I had to do over the years to keep this lace open. Tell you what, partner, come in every few nights and I’ll give you your cut. Here’s tonight’s.”

She handed over $300. ‘Not bad if that’s from a night or two. Not bad at all.’

“Now, I’ve got some money to make us. I’ll hold your share of the profits, so don’t forget to drop by and scoop them up once in a while, hmm?”

Izaya smiled, “You will doubtless see me again and often, don’t worry. Goodbye, Venus.”

They made their way back down to the bar. As Izaya was leaving the club, he could hear Venus beginning to shout to the dance floor.

“I don’t see enough sinning out there!”

~

Izaya stopped back at his apartment to clean himself up a bit. There were still a few smudges here and there that he would like nothing more than to wash off of him. The radio was once again, playing some bizarre kind of commercial.

“You live.
You die.

And sometimes…you get brought back to life.

*Thunderclap* Raaaaagghh!

This Fall…

‘I’m afraid I can’t see too well these days. Do you think you could go to the nearest village and pick me up a loaf of bread?’

‘BREAAAAAADD GOOOOOOOOOD.’

The new horror RPG…

‘BREEEEEEAAAAADD!’

‘Oh, I can tell you where the bakery is, stranger. But before I do, would you mind picking up my little girl from the lake?’

You are the monster………or are you?

‘If you wanna enter this bakery…you’ll have to defeat me…and this torch!’

Frankenstein: Breadlust. Coming soon to a PC near you.”

Yet again, another strange commercial he just couldn’t quite grasp.

~

He’d taken the cab out to Hollywood, despite only having a bit of time left before sunrise. He still had some energy left and wanted to check the place out before heading back for the day.

But it was almost the same second he’d stepped out of the cab and was looking at the 24-hour convenience store that there was a guy in sunglasses approaching and stopped right in front of him.

“Ain’t seen you here before, and if I haven’t seen you, neither has Issac, so that’s your next stop.”

It wasn’t long before Izaya was more or less herded down to the end of that street. He passed the 24-hour store, an internet café, a restaurant, as well as a motel before reaching what seemed to be a jewelry store.

He was told to go down the alleyway right next to the building and into the door at the end. Inside was a high-ceilinged room decorated mostly red and green. The large desk had two computers on top of it, and there was a large screen television up on the wall. Behind the desk stood a man with greyed hair.

“Good evening, neonate…Isaac Abrams. I’ve been expecting you. Seems the wooden soldiers of the Camarilla shuffle in a little too often these nights. That baby-faced, two-bit prince LaCroix got something to say to me?”

“I’m looking for the Nosferatu.”

“Very courteous of you to stop by. All Kindred that enter my domain are expected to introduce themselves. It may seem like an outdated formality, but it serves its purpose.”
“What purpose would that be?”

“It gives me the opportunity to personally welcome visitors to my domain. It also helps to establish an understanding in advance, so that there are no unfortunate accidents while they are in town.”

‘A veiled threat…interesting.’

“So what kind of ‘understanding’ are we to have?”

“Call me old-fashioned, but this is my barony, and as is tradition, a token of respect must be paid.”

Izaya raised a brow in response.

“What I want is a simple exchange. Last week I paid for a certain item – a movie – and this evening I got an email saying that the seller is ready to deliver it tomorrow evening. Therefore, I’d like you to return tomorrow night and pick up the tape in my place. Not so difficult, right?”

“No, it does not sound difficult at all. My only issue, however, is that I believe the sun will rise fairly soon – but it would likely take too long for me to get back to my lodgings, so I find myself in a bit of a difficult position currently.”

Issac frowned for just a moment. “I see. Well, two of my childer run a club together here. During the day, the close the place up tight and are willing to allow anyone with lodging needs to temporarily stay the day there if needed. Usually the two of them sleep at home, but occasionally one or both of them will be there as well.

“Tell you what. You come back to me first thing tomorrow night and I’ll give them a call at the club and let them know you’re coming to stay there for the day, alright?”

Izaya nodded in thanks, and agreed with that.

It was true, he had perhaps a half hour, maybe, before the sun would rise. He’d intended to leave Hollywood sooner, but hadn’t expected to get rounded up the way he did.

He approached the club he was told about, The Asp Hole.

‘Someone needed a better hobby when they named this place…’

It looked like the club was in the process of closing as the last few employees were preparing to leave. The décor was almost all blue, though it was soothing to look at in preparation of relaxing or sleeping.

There were two stairways that seemed to lead up two a sort of second floor on either side of the building. Next to one of them stood a familiar, tall, blond with his arms crossed.

“So…you need a place to crash, right, flea?”

That smile would be the Final Death of him.
Baron:

An anarch 'prince'; a Kindred who claims a domain but is a member of the Anarch movement.
Here we are~! Earlier than I thought - hooray motivation. (But really, I'm trash. Probably.)

As always thank you so much for reading~! For the ending definitions, if they haven't already, they're likely going to start repeating, just an fyi. :)

“Why?”

“Unfortunately, we aren’t from one of the clans with the ability to read minds; you’ll have to be more specific, Izaya.”

An amused smirk.

At this point, it’d really been the only word Izaya could bring himself to say. It’s not as though he possessed a limited vocabulary after all. No, the limiter lied with the situation at hand. The situation being that Shizuo was there, in the same building as he was. They hadn’t spoken since their last… encounter, after all. Izaya was supposed to have gathered himself together properly by the time they’d inevitably cross paths again. Problem was, that hadn’t yet occurred. Izaya had busied himself instead.

Now, here he was.

Shizuo had gestured with his head for Izaya to follow him up the stairs. It was either this, or spend the night in the sewers with the probability of being caught by sewage workers and then dragged out into the sunlight.

‘Dammit.’

Upstairs to the left was a room serving as an office. To the right was an expansive seating area overlooking the lower floor. It seemed that here had been a few cots set up. But no one else was there – not upstairs, not in the whole building. They were alone.

“Kaz and I offer sanctuary to anyone finding themselves in need of somewhere to crash until the sun goes down. It’s pretty much always a fledgling in need, so Issac sends them to us,” Shizuo sat down in one of the circular booths. “We all know how rough it can be in the beginning like that. Fledglings have the highest mortality rate of us, after all.”

Izaya sat on the other side of the table. They both sat in an awkward silence. Or at least, Izaya found it awkward. Shizuo looked like the epitome of comfort on his part - arm draped over the side of the next booth, leaning back and lighting up a cigarette, all while saying nothing, just looking at Izaya expectantly.

Izaya asked his question and Shizuo responded.
‘Since when did he learn to respond in such a way…damn Shizu-chan.’ Still, he pretended not to hear the response.

“Why did you come here?”

Shizuo raised a brow in confusion.

“If you…care for me, as you say, then why did you leave Japan?”

Izaya crossed his arms and his legs as if to brace himself for the answer.

“I didn’t know.”

It was Izaya’s turn to look confused.

“I only realized it when I’d already gotten here,” a nostalgic sort of grin crossed his face. “I know I said this years back, but I really did appreciate you looking for my brother. I knew they would be selfish motives, but whatever the reasons were, it felt as though I had some kind of ally. Despite the months passing, you never gave up.”

Shizuo pulled a nearby tray to put out his cigarette.

“Long story short, I made friends that helped me learn some of their skills so I…” he paused, looking for the right words. Izaya was watching him so closely, after all. “I kept track of you.”

“Ha~~? I didn’t know you were actually such a stalker, Shizu-chan,” Izaya smirked, satisfied to be able to get a barb in. It reminded Shizuo so much of the old days when Izaya would smirk at him like that. Now, it was just sexy.

“N-not like that!” Shizuo almost panicked. “It’s just that…I kept track of my friends too – I do still miss them. But I couldn’t have known that I also wanted to know your movements as well.” With a sigh, he continued. “I figured that I just wanted to know whether or not you were wreaking havoc in the city and hurting my friends or something. Really, it was curiosity…and I couldn’t have predicted that you were looking for me too…quite fervently, I might add,” he smiled at Izaya.

Izaya couldn’t help the pink blush that rose up to his cheeks. It was true, after all.

“When you came around to LA, I wanted so badly to just let you find me and I’d simply explain everything. Or I’d even say nothing at all, and just listen to you speak. I just wanted to meet with you again even one last time.”

Shizuo ran a hand through his hair, and broke eye contact – a little embarrassed himself. “Instead, I found myself going by another name and changing my hair just in case you got close to finding me…”

Izaya leaned back in his seat further, looking down his nose at Shizuo.

“You don’t make any sense, you…you stupid protozoan.”

Shizuo looked back up, not expecting that response.

“It makes no sense. How did you suddenly just…come to feel that way?”

It was a fair question, though couldn’t be answered easily.

“It wasn’t long before I left. Especially during that last month, I knew I had no reason to chase you
around, throw things...after all, I knew I was going to be leaving. That helped me notice that there were plenty of times when you were actually nearby, just watching. Observing. So, I tried to observe too,” he rested his elbows on the table, slumping forward a bit. “You know I don’t like violence, right? Well...I didn’t like that it was usually the immediate response I’d go for upon cross paths with you so...I wanted to try to figure out how I might have a civilized talk with you just once before I’d leave for good.”

Indeed, this was something Izaya had no idea of. He nodded in response, a silent indicator for Shizuo to continue.

“Well...it was on a day that it’d started raining in the afternoon. I was wanting to say goodbye that day, but then...it was just you in the rain but then you picked up a cat. I watched as you took care of the thing and even bought it some things and found it a home.

“But what stood out the most was that smile on your face.”

Izaya didn’t remember this too specifically – it wouldn’t have been the first time he’d done that after all. But...a smile?

Shizuo hunched over further and rested his chin on his linked hands – he was that much closer to Izaya.

“I’d give just about anything to see you smile that way for me...I didn’t know it at the time, but as I watched you from here, I came to realize how much I wanted you.”

Izaya still couldn’t believe how Shizuo managed to say things like that with a straight face. On the other hand, his own face grew redder and redder.

“Really, I came to appreciate the fact that I don’t have to breathe anymore,” Shizuo made sure to keep eye contact. “When I’m not with you, it just hurts too much, you see.”

Was it the heat of summer coming into play? Yes, that had to be the reason that it seemed to be getting too hot in side. Izaya’s hands gripped at his arms, wanting more information but also wanting to escape from this conversation that was taking an uncomfortable turn. He gulped noticeably, wanting to remove his jacket from the heat but worrying that it might give the wrong impression, he decided not to.

In reality, Izaya knew how he felt now. There was no denying it any longer. Even so, the thought of just...letting go, and falling to the place where Shizuo apparently was, was just far too terrifying. Besides, Izaya was not a good person – this was obvious, so why did Shizuo not seem to care? Yet another thing that made no sense.

“You do know that I’m a horrible person, right Shizu-chan? You haven’t forgotten what I’ve done before, all of the things I did to you. What I did to...Shizuka...did you know? I destroyed her life, literally. I’ve even killed,” his mouth was set into a frown, his eyes narrowed. He just wanted Shizuo to remember these obvious things and come to his senses before it was too late – before Izaya found himself giving in. “So just...realize how terrible I am...that I’ll inevitably destroy you! I’m poison; so just...just keep yourself away from me and...you’ll have a much better life.”

What Izaya didn’t notice was that his voice had begun shaking and tightening with held-back tears. And that he was shaking just slightly as well.

Though once he did notice, he was quick to get up from the table. It did little good, however. The sun was out, he knew, and aside from that, Shizuo had moved to stand right in front of him anyway.
A hand rose up to grasp his chin, and it tilted his head until he was looking straight into Shizuo’s eyes.

Shizuo ran his free fingers just under Izaya’s eyes, wiping away the small tears that had gathered there.

“You’re not poison, flea,” Shizuo spoke with conviction. “You used to be a pain in my ass, you used to torment me, damn near. But... you’re not a bad person. You acted with the pure curiosity of a cat, you wanted to learn more and more the inner workings of humans. You simply didn’t care about the consequences.” Shizuo searched for something in Izaya’s eyes and he seemed to have found it. “I see it distresses you now but I forgive you for those times, Izaya... still, I know you’ll still keep running from me. I have no doubt. But like I said before, that’s ok. I will wait for you.”

By the time Shizuo finished speaking, Izaya had calmed down some. It just was... nonsensical. How could the idiot still insist on these feelings he apparently had? And what was this about forgiving him? How...

Shizuo moved, one arm encircling Izaya’s waist and the other creeping up the back of his neck, to twist itself into his hair. Shizuo rested his head over Izaya’s, and said ex-informant couldn’t help but rest his head against the broad chest belonging to the arms of the one who held him so close, like he was ...precious.

Izaya’s hands reached around Shizuo’s back, fingers practically clawing into his shirt.

Izaya took a breath, then spoke.

“You know, I... looked for you for so long. Up on that stage, on my first night... I thought I’d die for certain for just a moment but I didn’t think – I didn’t realize that it meant I really would never see you again.” Izaya’s fingers gripped just a little tighter. “At the beginning, I just wanted to know... my enemy had changed drastically and then up and disappeared just like his brother. I had to know what happened. It was quite the situation and yet I, of all people, knew nothing and I couldn’t let that stand.”

Shizuo took the moment of pause to nuzzle Izaya’s hair.

“But... more than that, after more time, I came to notice just how much I... thought about you.” Izaya closed his eyes, knowing his face would be beet red and he shoved his face further into Shizuo’s chest. Shizuka would be rejoicing, he knew... well... assuming she’d forgive him for killing her.

Somehow, the words were just tumbling out. Shizuo just had that effect on him.

“And I came to notice how they weren’t thoughts of hurting you or anything... but they were anxious ones, and it turned out that I didn’t want you hurt or dead, you see.”

He took another breath. He just knew he’d regret saying all of this.

‘What am I doing...?’

Despite everything inside telling him not to, Izaya continued. “But that last time we’d met... you smiled at me. You hugged me... even thanked me,” Izaya bit his lip before continuing. “In watching you before that day, I remembered your kindness to others, and how peaceful you always were... since I wasn’t there in front of you. But I even tried to cut you that night, and you didn’t care at all. You reacted nothing like I thought you would... so...”

A pause.
"How could I not become completely fixated?"

Izaya struggled and pushed until Shizuo let go of him.

"Can you explain that one, huh?"

Shizuo simply looked at him, eyes roaming his Izaya’s half-embarrassed and half-helpless expression.

“All I know is that when you left Japan…everything felt wrong.”

Shizuo took a step closer again, but didn’t touch him.

“I asked Shinra, back then, to tell me more about you. I think the question shocked him into actually answering me seriously. He said, more or less, that you’re actually more human than anyone and your heart so fragile that if it were to be filled with love, it would break…so you chose to avoid the emotion.”

Izaya looked off to the side. It was actually a fair analysis, and sounded just like Shinra. It was especially fitting of his previous self as well.

“Izaya.”

He looked back to Shizuo who had begun smiling that smile at him.

‘What the hell am I supposed to do against that?’

“After my embrace, I found myself with even more strength than before,” he started. “Though that may be the case, I won’t break you.”

Izaya’s brows furrowed. What was this moron saying now?

“I know you aren’t up to trusting me yet. That’s fine. I only hope that someday you will. You’ll trust that I’ll never disappear from your life like that again. That I won’t allow myself to die or leave you any other way, because I know…I can see that it would hurt you.”

He stepped just a bit closer, bringing a hand up to Izaya’s face.

“And I can’t bear the idea of hurting you.”

Izaya closed his eyes against the words, how was he supposed to react to this? He was having enough trouble trusting all of the things Shizuo said in general, let alone trusting him for anything like that.

“Even if you hurt me, even if you hate me…even if you try so hard again to bring ruin to my life I will not give up on you. I’ve seen you at your worst, and I’ve seen you at your best. As I said, I was able to observe you in Japan. Watching you with Shizuka had to be the most precious thing I’ve ever seen…and then what happened to you after she died…I could hardly take it – knowing you were in such pain. From high school up until now, I’ve seen you kill, help, hurt, and heal. I know you well at this point, my flea. I won’t be waverin in my feelings for you…understand?”

Izaya managed a small nod. He had a feeling he’d been pushing away his own feelings for some time now.

‘I can’t. I won’t say it.’
“I love you…don’t you forget it, Izaya.”

Izaya bit his lip. He just couldn’t respond.

“I’ll ask for your response someday. You don’t need to even think about it for now. You’re still in a tight spot with LaCroix and I know you’re busy. That’s why I’ll take you to Gary myself tonight… alright?”

Shzuo dropped his hand away from Izaya’s face.

“Be sure to get good rest here. I’ll be in the office.”

“I will find Gary myself,” Izaya responded, feeling his usual self returning. He was always resembling gelatin a bit more than himself whenever he interacted with Shizuo these nights. But he had to push beyond that.

“I’ll do this on my own, in my own way, got it Shizu-chan?”

He would not depend on such direct help of anyone else, least of all Shizuo. He’d get this task accomplished himself by his own merit.

Shizuo looked at him for just a moment before nodding, smiling at him just a little, and then turning away with a whispered ‘sleep well’ on his lips.

He took only a few steps away toward his office when a quick pair of feet came up from behind him. Izaya’s hand grabbed onto his sleeve firmly.

To his own surprise, Izaya was following a gut feeling. If stopping Shizuo from leaving was surprising, what he did next was even more so.

Shizuo turned back toward him, and Izaya took the opportunity to grab onto Shizuo’s shoulders as he stood on his toes for just a moment.

But just a moment was long enough.

Shizuo found a pair of shaky, warm lips covering his own. So hesitating was it, that it froze Shizuo in place. Izaya’s eyes were closed but he could see the tension in his face as though he was incredibly nervous. He probably was.

Shizuo found his hands on Izaya’s hips before he even realized it. Kissing back with urgency, he was surprised that Izaya was letting him. Well, he’d let him before, but this felt different. Izaya’s arms came up to circle his neck, pulling him closer down.

Shzuo kissed him again, and Izaya responded. But all too soon, it just wasn’t enough.

Izaya felt the slight nibble at his bottom lip. It was so slight that it sent shivers down his spine and his mouth opened to let out a trembling moan.

Of course, Shizuo was not about to let that chance slip away.

Feeling Shizuo’s hot tongue pushing into his mouth, Izaya shuddered and couldn’t even push back with his own. The tongue took its sweet time roaming around Izaya’s mouth, counting each tooth and pushing at Izaya’s tongue. Izaya reflected that it was a good thing they didn’t need to breathe because he’d have run out of breath at this point.
Finally, Shizuo withdrew, but wasted no time in pressing more kisses onto Izaya’s cheeks, his nose, forehead, chin, and even his eyes. It was as though he was afraid Izaya might dry up and evaporate at any moment. He moved to Izaya’s ear, earning a whimper and he let out puffs of hot air into it. More than that, Izaya had tilted his head off to the side, and knowingly or not, had granted Shizuo access to his neck.

Despite not having the need to breathe, Izaya’s breath was coming out in heavy pants as he felt the slight nibbles and kisses trailing down his neck though he didn’t expect the bite at the junction of his neck and shoulder. He let out a muted moan as Shizuo licked and nibbled at the spot, it seemed he was determined to leave a mark.

He should’ve expected that.

Shizuo withdrew, looking into Izaya’s clouded eyes.

He pressed a long kiss to Izaya’s forehead.

“Sweet dreams, Izaya,” he began walking back to the office.

Izaya’s face was even redder than it had been before, if that were really possible. He tried to cover his face with one hand in embarrassment. Nevermind that he’d known just what he was getting into.

Izaya made his way over to the cots and just as he was about to choose one, he heard Shizuo’s voice once more.

“By the way,” Shizuo called out. “That smirk of yours is sexy as hell.”

That was true, but a blushing Izaya was adorable and Shizuo loved seeing it.

Izaya couldn’t help but be taken aback as Shizuo smiled at him, and gave him a wink as he disappeared into the office.

Izaya was left to lay on one of the cots, wondering how the hell their interactions kept ending this way as he completely ignored the fact that he was the instigator this time.

‘God damn protozoan…’

Shizuo had left a mark on his neck.

Sleep would be a challenge.

~

Izaya woke later the next night than he’d meant to.

This was apparent when he briefly woke up but was stuck in a kind of sleep paralysis which he barely recognized in his sleep-fogged mind.

He knew there was some reason to be annoyed, but his brain just refused to process what his eyes were seeing.

Shizuo, on the other hand, was very satisfied with the situation.

They needed to open the club soon for the night. Employees were starting to come in and prepare for the night downstairs. Just a few minutes before it would be time to officially start up for business, Shizuo had slowly and gently picked Izaya up. He smiled softly as the sleep-dazed Izaya nuzzled
against him. He was carrying him like a bride, after all.

He carried him (none too quickly) into the office and placed him onto the comfiest chair the room had as the music from below quickly increased in volume and became audible from below.

~

Izaya finally awoke, only to see a smirking Kaz.

Kaz gestured at what appeared to be…breakfast? Several blood bags were sitting on the desk among several papers and near a computer.

It had been a little while since he’d had something to eat, that much was true. He greedily drank up a couple of them before turning back to Kaz.

“Thanks for the lovely meal, but I’m afraid I’ll have to dine and dash, Mr. Brother of a Monster~”

Kaz merely smiled at him.

“兄さんの腕の中に抱かれてもらったそうだ,” that smile couldn’t be less innocent if he tried. “そこで気楽になってよかったな．”

(“It seems my brother was holding you in his arms, I’m glad you could get comfortable in them.”)

Izaya froze, his immediate response dying on his lips. He knew well that he couldn’t deny it – he hadn’t even been conscious enough to stop it even if he’d wanted to. He could only remember it just slightly, but it was enough that Izaya knew it was true.

“Ah~ no fair catching me when I’m still waking up, hmm~?” Izaya was, truthfully, a bit annoyed.

“Do understand that it is not recommended that you spread such information to anyone else at the expense of your immediate safety.”

“Oh, I do understand all of the implications of committing such actions, Izaya-san,” he crossed his legs, leaning back – not at all threatened. “Isaac-san has been informed that you’ll be arriving…post-haste.”

Izaya scoffed, but made his way out regardless…careful to avoid the busy-looking Shizu-chan.

Kaz thought to himself, ‘At least with him around things are not liable to be boring – that’s for certain.’

~

“This evening I got an email saying that the seller is ready to deliver the movie. Unfortunately, it looks like he’s become a bit paranoid all of the sudden.”

Issac had waved him inside quickly when Izaya had arrived. They exchanged pleasantries and then Issac got down to business straight away.

“Won’t meet me in person, won’t drop it off, won’t even answer his phone. Says he’ll send the location of the pickup to a computer in the nearby internet café tonight. You see where I’m going with this?”

Yes…it was pretty clear.
“Go to the Ground Zero internet café, look for a directory named ‘Josefk’ and use the password ‘Kafka’. There’ll be an email in there that will specify a nearby location. Meet the contact, pick up the item, come back. Not too painful, right?”

“Indeed, it should be simple…with any luck.” Izaya wasn’t feeling too hopeful – most things he had been tasked with doing did not end up being simple. But maybe, somehow, this would be different. “Then, I’ll get going right away.”

“Excellent. In the meantime, consider yourself a welcome guest in my barony. Welcome to Hollywood.”

~

The internet café was dingy, and generally did not appear to be well-maintained. There were probably about 20 to 30 computer terminals set up, all of them with decent-enough privacy walls erected between them. The carpet was stained in many places, with cans of soda scattered around the tables and the floor. A couple of drink machines were in the large room, and even a TV set up to play video games was available.

Izaya sighed. He was going to have to search through each terminal to find the one he needed. He only hoped that this would be the worst of this task.

He went to one terminal against the wall. The only thing in the logged in account were a few emails.

‘Ah, silly humans – they don’t even know to log out of public computers~’

It seemed this account, UcutieU had gotten a few responses recently from the same person. It wasn’t the account he needed, but Izaya was bored.

Hi. I am Ayako. Let’s English practice. Your homestay how it is? America must be so COOLEST. You are in Hollywood? Are you in a movie?

Love, Ayako

Present, Kenta and I ate okonomiyaki of Yokohama. That extremeness was tasty. What is eaten in America? Does they eat the Japanese food? I must investigate.

Bye bye, Ayako

Are Americans have long legs? Are you date American boy? Is the image sent? It is happy.

Ayako

‘This kid was definitely using a translator,’ he thought. ‘There’s no other way it’d sound like that.’

Frowning, he moved on. There was one terminal that was opened up to a database of information on local celebrities.

Another machine was again opened up to someone’s personal email – this one was more amusing. The user’s email seemed to be ‘2Pacula’. This was actually password protected, but easily hacked. It was apparently ‘shizzle’.

This ‘2Pacula’ seemed to have gotten a few emails from his friend ‘Sethiroph’.

Dud3, my Prussians totally rushed your Francs last night in Eurocraft. Playing tonight? Also, that girl that sits next to me in science talked to me today! She totally wants me to do her.
No, dud3, your mom!

YOUR MOM!

PSYCH! Your mom.

Another email came from someone else, ‘Thrillho’.

What are you doing to me, 2Pacula? I said cover me, not die like a little bitch. One more fubar and you’re out of the clan!

His friend emailed again:

Hey, if you haxxor the code in the new game, you can unlock clan Chocula!

Izaya merely shook his head. American teenage boys were not a subculture that he was readily familiar with. They did sound like they would be very fun to mess with though.

Finally, he’d found the right terminal, and entered in the password.

‘Meet me behind the Fast Buck’.

And so he would.

~

Passing what looked like a convenience store called Red Dot, the Fast Buck was a check cashing place, right next to the Asp Hole, and across from a place called the Sin Bin. Izaya only hoped he wouldn’t have to go there – it sounded like a filthy establishment in multiple ways.

True enough, next to the alley that led behind the building, was a guy standing there next to the brick wall, obviously very tense, with hands in the pockets of his hoodie.

The area was hardly lit, backdoors darkened and the alley seemed to widen in the darkness. Still, Izaya could see well enough to know that the man standing there was shaking despite the warm temperature.

Izaya approached him casually, hands in his own pockets and grin spread across his face.

“Well, hello there.”

“Y-yeah? What do you want?”

“Oh – not so friendly, I see. A shame you have something I want, I trust. You have the tape, right? Isaac sent me.”

“Ye- yeah. I-I mean, what? Who the hell is Isaac?!? I don’t know anyone named Isaac. Get lost, dick!”

If possible, the man was even more anxious. Now it was at the point that he was almost shouting, which wouldn’t be very helpful to either one of them.

Often times, when humans were frozen with fear, they had a tendency of settling down.

Izaya narrowed his eyes, annoyed and impatient. This human was being difficult and Izaya didn’t know why. It must’ve had to do with the tape but it made no sense – just what would be on the tape
to cause such a reaction? If it were supernatural in nature and it was bring spread around among the kine, someone would doubtless be in hot water. But on the whole, humans were quite desensitized in these modern days. Just what could possibly be on it that would legitimately have a grown man shivering in fear just possessing the item?

“Then perhaps I could let Isaac get wind of the difficulties I’ve had with you? Would that be preferable?” Izaya asked with a saccharine smile. “Or, perhaps, instead, I could merely…convince you to hand it over?” he shrugged, almost lazily. “I, for one, would prefer the latter option – more fun for me.”

Upon receiving no response other than the man’s continued nervous stance, Izaya pulled out knives, one in each hand, and proceeded to twirl them around quickly. Once the man’s eyes were fixed on that, he threw the one in his right hand so quickly that the human didn’t catch it. Instead, he was staring at the knife in Izaya’s left hand as he tossed it up in the air by several feet, and caught it without looking over and over again, a serious expression on his face as he started at the human.

“U-uh…”

‘Ah, he’s trying to speak now.’

Izaya helpfully pointed out where the other knife had gone – lodged into the ground between the guy’s feet.

Almost in a panic, the man spoke once more.

“A-alright, s-sorry, sorry.”

Izaya tilted his head, waiting for him to continue, though he stopped playing with his knife.

“It’s just that…I mean, something is…I just want out of this whole thing. I don’t want anything to do with that damn tape.”

Izaya’s eyes narrowed further. “Why? What’s on it?”

“I – I don’t know. I mean, when it comes to video, I’ve seen everything – and I do mean EVERYTHING – but this thing, it’s sick. I-it can't be real, but…it is! I know it. It’s real and it scares the hell out of me.”

Izaya frowned. This had to be the reason Isaac was after the tape in the first place. The situation reeked of supernatural interference. “Just how bad is it?”

“Oh, you have no idea. It’s disgusting…that girl…the things that are happening to her. It just ain’t right, man. It just ain’t right! And now…something’s wrong…something’s after me. I swear to God, something’s after me!”

Izaya sighed. “Come on now, pull yourself together.”

“Every place I go…wherever I look, I see things. In the shadows. My phone rings, I hear something breathing on the other end and…Shit! I’m out, man…I’m out of this whole thing!”

“Okay, okay, fine. Just hand it over.”

The man stood back, walking backwards toward the alley that would lead back onto the main street.

“I don’t have it! I stashed it someplace. Look, you need to find Ginger Swan’s.”
He moved in an unnatural way, as though his limbers were stiffened to the point that he couldn’t move properly. He was starting to get hysterical, breathing heavily, and Izaya could see he was beginning to sweat.

“Huh?” the man looked all around. “What the hell was that? Oh shit! Did you see that?”

He hadn’t.

“I’m getting the fuck out of here!”

He ran around the corner to the alleyway. Izaya heard his footsteps abruptly stop, a scream, and then a few loud metal clangs.

He made his way around that corner. The only metallic thing in the area was a manhole.

If one were to go down the ladder into it leading to the sewers, they’d find what remained of the man which were only bones, blood, and some flesh here and there.

This tape business was a bigger deal than Izaya thought.

~

The Jyhad:

The secret, self-destructive war waged between the generations. Elder vampires manipulate their lesser, using them as pawns in a terrible game whose rules defy comprehension.
Jeez, but did this one take a while...

I'm not too thrilled with it, but, here it is~ Sorry for the wait!! I hope to get the next one out much sooner but you know, we'll see.

I will do my best :3

Thanks for reading!!

Fame at your fingertips!

Ginger Swan:

Swan, a name synonymous with beauty and glamour to this day, was a great celebrity of the late forties and early fifties. Her credits included such movies as “Gilded Hummingbirds” and “When No Means Yes”. After her passing in 1954, she was interred in the Hollywood Forever Cemetery Mausoleum.

There in the internet café, Izaya checked out the terminal that listed a number of past and present celebrities in the Hollywood area – the man he’d met had said Ginger Swan, and she was one of the names on the list.

This meant only one thing, however.

‘Time to take a lovely stroll through the local cemetery~!’

Maybe there would be something interesting to find.

~

The cemetery was located behind a line of businesses, and part of it was on a hill. Every gate surrounding it was locked up tightly for the night. It took a little bit of time, but one side of it was bordered with a cement wall. One section of it turned out to have loose cement blocks. Izaya pushed out some of the blocks which made it so that he could crawl through the hole, and made his way through to the lines of graves.

It was not altogether a very large cemetery and he could see a rather large mausoleum at the other end of the grounds. There was a long path stretching through the area which split off a few times, going through a few different areas of the groupings of graves. The only real oddity was a small structure that looked as though it were a small one-room building. The exterior was lit thanks to a couple of hanging lanterns nearby, and there seemed to be two doors on different sides of the building he could enter from.
This was not the mausoleum, and Izaya knew it perfectly well. However, his curiosity had always been on the higher end.

Immediately upon entering, a human—no, a ghoul who had been sitting on a raggedy-looking sofa, shot up and was standing, holding a gun. It wasn’t pointed at Izaya, however. The ghoul was dressed in dark colors and was mostly unremarkable in his appearance.

“Whoa there – might want to think about knocking next time, I damn near blew your head off. Thought you might be a zombie.”

Everything made sense until the zombie part.

‘I know this is a cemetery but come on…really now…’ he thought.

“Why would you think I was a zombie?”

The man made an expression that looked as though he thought the answer was obvious.

“Who else would be waltzing in here in the middle of the night?”

The so-called answer did not help at all and Izaya was about to demand something clearer than that when the ghoul spoke again.

“Name’s Romero…I’m the caretaker here. Well, that is, I don’t exactly keep people from getting in, although that is part of my job. No…you see, I’m here to make sure nothing gets out.”

‘This must have something to do with these zombies he’s talking about…this better be good.’ Even though he’d been the one to cause this interaction, Izaya was feeling impatient – partially due to his confusion over the zombie matter, and he absolutely despised being confused.

“Just what do you mean by that?”

“See it’s like this: every night ‘round this time for the past…oh, several months now, the dead’ve been getting up with an itch to stroll down Hollywood Boulevard. Nobody knows why, but they’re working on it. ‘Til they figure it out, they needed a volunteer to patch the problem and I stepped forward. Problem temporarily solved, the baron’s happy, I get to shoot zombies and guarantee I get my blood for another month. I’ve carved out a nice niche here.”

“So all you do is shoot zombies?”

“Shoot them, blow them away, frag them – whatever the situation calls for. Sometimes I throw in chopping and dicing just to mix it up.”

“No idea why they rise?” The man seemed maybe just slightly too gleeful about his work.

“Who knows? Vampire necro-hoodoo, toxic waste, solar radiation – the important part is: they continue to rise up, and I get to put ‘em down. Everybody’s a winner.”

“It must be quite fun~”

“You’re telling me. Far as I know I’m the only person around Hollywood who considers marksmanship an art. A lot of the stiffs around here used to be asshole celebrities too. Bonus. I love my job, what can I say? By the way…”

Hey – you wouldn’t be interested in watching the place while I go handle some business, would you? I’m not supposed to leave or it might end up in a zombie holocaust or something. Like one
time, these goths snuck in…wooh, wasn’t pretty.”

Izaya considered it. “What’s in it for me?”

“Let’s see…if you can’t shoot straight, I can probably fix that. And I’ve got quite the arsenal – I can probably let one piece go. We’ll work something out when I get back.”

It could be fun.

“What do I have to do?”

Romero stopped for a moment, and was looking at Izaya as though he were seeing him for the first time.

Izaya had a bad feeling about it.

“Uh, you know, I know you’re technically dead and all, but…goddamn, you are one striking looking piece of ass! Where were you when you were still breathing, huh? I don’t suppose you’d still be interested in a little, uh – “

Izaya was really tempted to agree.

Not as much as he’d expected, however.

It’s not that Romero was handsome or particularly attractive in any way, nor was Izaya feeling particularly up for it either. No, it would just be a very easy way to mess with Shizu-chan. The reaction would be priceless, no doubt.

But…

“All I know is that when you left Japan…everything felt wrong.”

It was the same. It would feel wrong.

Playing with Shizu-chan like that.

‘It feels completely wrong.’ A dull kind of ache made itself at home deep in Izaya’s chest. His head lowered for his eyes to stare at the floor. His mind too cluttered all of a sudden to answer the ghoul in front of him.

What had started as a vague bad feeling in the back of his mind had begun to spread throughout his brain, blocking out most other thoughts.

Somehow, he had gained Shizuo’s trust. He had gained his love.

And he couldn’t betray it.

“I will be there for you always...”

“...love you...”

“I’ll wait forever.”

Izaya unconsciously raised his right hand, holding it over the spot where his heart was on his chest. His face tightened and hand clenched into a fist.
“...I am yours.”

So be it.

“So sorry, but you’ll have to...get your fill...via a different method.”

“No, huh? Well, that’s what imaginations are for. So, anyway — “

“I’ll be back in about five minutes. If you should see any zombies in that time, you need to put them down. Now, they’re dead, so you’re either going to have to hack them up good or shoot ‘em in the head. Just don’t let them bite you.”

Odd. Possible consequences?

“Why, do you turn into a zombie somehow if they bite you?”

“Naw, just hurts like a bitch.”

Oh.

“Alright, fine. Five minutes. You’d best return in that time or else I’m simply going to leave~”

“Fantastic. Only one rule – nothing gets out Keep ‘em away from the front and back gates. Here, this might come in handy. Back in five.”

Romero handed him a small shotgun and left out of one of the doors. Izaya took a moment to look it over, but remembered where his knives were on his person as well.

What ensued were five minutes-worth of zombie shooting. A surprising number of them had decided to shoot up out of the ground and start meandering toward either gate. If he let them pile up, he’d see them vaguely pushing at the gate as one force. However, he never allowed it to get that bad. The gun did come in handy to an extent. Although he wasn’t the best shot there was, they did tend to explode when he hit them, and that seemed to do it well enough. The more stubborn ones (the ones he had trouble shooting) were taking down by his own expert knife work.

Upon his return, Romero seemed more or less impressed. Enough so that he gave a few tips on aiming guns, especially shotguns – and it did prove helpful.

‘Well, this wasn’t a total waste of time, then.’

Bidding Romero goodbye, he proceeded to the end of the cemetery where the mausoleum resided. It was larger than Romero’s shack by far, and the entrance to it looked like an entrance to an expensive household instead of what it was.

Inside, the place was unkempt; dusty, and filled with spider webs. The walls were lined with what looked like separate compartments. One for each person, presumably. There was even a hallway, allowing one to go off to the left or right, and there were a few small rooms separated by a low-rising gate with more compartments. In one of these rooms was it – a compartment marked Ginger Swan. It was about time too – it’d taken far too long to find the thing.
Inside of the compartment was a battered looking video tape. The labeling was cheap and worn. The logo on it said “DMP” and Izaya could just make out “Devilspawn Fleshfeast” on it.

This couldn’t mean anything good.

~

Upon entering the back of Issac’s store, the man himself was looking like he’d been waiting.

“You made good time! Hand me the tape.”

“Here.”

Izaya handed it over.

“I didn’t doubt you’d find this…and I apologize if I seemed overly imperious before – a reflex action – I get a lot of young blood in here forgetting their place. I’ll assist you as reasonably as I can with your task, but first…this tape. I’m in a hurry to find out what’s behind all the hype, so…get comfortable. I do have a feeling that whatever’s on here may be of use to both of us.”

Izaya sat in one of the chairs, and faced the TV monitor on the wall.

The video was taking place inside of a house, looking old, trashed, and with a distinct lack of upkeep. What was worse was that the furniture, the walls, and the floors were all some variance of red. Whether it was the décor or just from blood was hard to differentiate. Fly tape hung down from the ceilings and flies were visible in the air.

The main subject of the tape, however, was a woman who came running up a set of stairs, clearly running for her life. Behind her were three…creatures. Three monsters, chasing her. Their heads did not clearly show a face, but they had mouths. They were grey and scaled, and ran on two legs…or were they arms…? The monsters lacked torsos and had only arms (legs?) that protruded out of the head. On top were spikes lined down the head. The mouths were wide open, with large, sharp teeth.

They were making heavy, panting sounds as they ran after the woman – claws clacking against the floor.

As she ran, through various large and barren rooms, looking for some kind of escape option, the woman was whimpering and screaming now and again – just barely staying out of the monsters’ grasp.

The camera was always in position just ahead of the woman, seeing her from the front and following her from room to room. The creatures growled, panted, and roared behind her – limbs outstretched as she barely escaped between rooms each time.

In the final room, she was able to close the door behind her, and she caught her breath, pushing her weight against the door.

That was when, on the bed in the room, there were two more monsters. The unfortunate woman was exhausted, and couldn’t turn back to the door on time – the monsters were too fast. They both tackled her into the corner and onto the floor. The camera began to fade to black, and spurts of blood came shooting out from the corner, the woman herself becoming covered in it. All that could be heard was the sounds of dying screams, tearing flesh, chewing, and squelching.

After the fade out was complete, it showed a logo stating, “Death Mask Productions” as the panting sounds could still be heard.
Issac turned off the TV at the point. Izaya was affected more than he’d allow anyone to believe. It took him a few moments to gather himself and shove away the nausea.

That wasn’t good special effects…it was real.

“It’s more disturbing than I was led to believe. You can understand my concern now, can’t you?”

Izaya didn’t beat around the bush. “That was sick…why the hell did I need to see that?”

“It just so happens that around the time this snuff film started circulating that the Nosferatu have made themselves scarce. I tried to elicit their help in tracking down the source, and for the first time in all these years, I was dismayed by their absence.”

“So you’re thinking this tape is involved with their reclusiveness.”

“I assume it does; otherwise it’s awfully coincidental. And those creatures, I don’t know how many professional FX houses could pull those off. There’s a problem though in that the film is incomplete – the first half is damaged so we cut in part of the way through. We’ll need a complete copy.”

This was turning into a much bigger pain in the ass than Izaya predicted…maybe he should’ve gotten Shizu-chan’s help. It was a bit late now, though, and there was no way he’d go crawling back asking for help.

“So…where can we get a full copy?”

“Behind the spit-shine gloss of the Hollywood dream factory, there’s another city churning out a vile by-product for the furtive consumption of a debauched audience. I have no doubt the film’s found its way to another smut peddler. I’d ask around.”

The very last thing Izaya wanted to do was go talk to a smut peddler. Well, perhaps the last thing was being chased by those monsters on the tape, but having to talk to a smut peddler was a close second. It wasn’t so much that Izaya was disgusted by smut or anything. No, he was just certain he was going to be disgusted by the person themselves. He had a very good feeling that he’d be right on the money with this assumption. He couldn’t even put it off either; he’d already seen a place that should fit the bill not far off.

Passing the internet café, the hotel, and the convenience store, Izaya made his way down the road until he found the place was after: The Sin Bin. That sign was lit up in neon green and another purple one in the shape of an arrow said ADULT XXX.

Doubtless this was the place indeed.

Like nearly every other establishment he’d been to in this city, the place was dingy on the inside, dirt shown against yellow walls among the nearly countless shelves of porn. Apparently, there was also a stairway down to see “live chicks”. To the immediate right was the sales counter, a man standing behind counter. He was balding on top but had a pony tail in the back and he was red-nosed with a typical porn-stache…and an awful blue leisure suit.

Izaya didn’t get the chance to make nice.

“Hey ya, hot pants!”

Great. This was worse than cupcake.
“Uh…hi. And who are you?”

“The name’s Flynn. I’m the proprietor of this here establishment. Anything you want, you can get at the Sin Bin. “Depraved” ain’t a four-letter word here, you know what I’m talkin’ about?”

‘Time to gather information.’ He needed whatever information that might be needed in order to drag out the exact things he was after.

“So, do tell me about this establishment of yours.”

“The Sin Bin? Oh, we’ve got filth of every flavor. Just tell me what makes your bits tickle, honey. I’ll set you right up.”

That was a new one too. ‘Does he think I’m a woman, or does he just not care?’

Well, it didn’t matter.

“Really? Tell me about some of your…products.”

“Man, we got everything you’ll ever need. Softcore, hardcore, gay, straight, farm or furry. We got shockers, shiverers, self-lubricators and strap-ons. Chains, crops and canes are in the back next to the triple-ripples. Like I said, we got it all.”

These nights, Izaya encountered more and more things that even he would consider too much information. However, if Flynn really had everything, then he’d have to have heard of the tape at least.

“Certainly sounds like it…I do have a few other questions.”

“Yeah? Whaddya want to know?”

“Do you know of Death Mask Productions?”

“Those guys? Yeah…yeah, I heard of ‘em. Why do you want to know?”

“I may be in the market for some of their products.”

“Really. You a cop?”

Izaya smirked and let out an amused chuckle.

“If you knew me, you’d rather prefer that I was.”

Flynn still looked hesitant, but spoke anyway.

“Allright, listen. I’ll tell you a little bit, but if anyone comes askin’, you never heard it from me. They produce only the most hardcore video. I’m not even talkin’ black market here, more like black-hole market. Not the kind of product you want to get mixed up in.”

“Just what kind of stuff do you mean?”

“Uh-uh, for it, man. I don’t even know what the hell you’re talkin’ about. Huh? What? Who are they? …Seriously, get the hell out of here.”

‘Poking a little too hard for him, hm?’
Izaya leaned forward a bit. “Rest assured, I’m a collector. You can tell me what you know.”

“O-okay…look, all I know is that a guy calls on the pay phone down the street every once in a while. He’ll say something like, ‘The moon is a terrible mistress’ or some creepy shit like that.”

“And then what?” He was getting close now.

“And then all you have to say is, ‘who walks the night with demons of dread’. Supposedly, you’ll be told where to meet the guy to pick up product. I don’t know for sure, I, uh…never tried it. It scared the shit out of me.”

“Alright, then. I appreciate the info. Best not walk home alone tonight,” Izaya smiled sarcastically, getting ready to leave.

“Hey, wait…look, you might as well know this. Word on the street is that they didn’t even make the video. They’re just distributing it. No one even knows where it comes from. I’m telling you, man… whatever you’re in, get out of it now.”

“I’m afraid I’m set to stay, Flynn. Do take care.”

It was interesting – that wasn’t as unpleasant as he’d expected but then, in all fairness, most of the conversation was on a topic that even the smut peddler himself was scared of. True enough, it was quite disturbing.

There were a couple of pay phones on the outside wall of the convenience store, though still a little ways from the entrance to the store.

Izaya took a few minutes to wait there near the phones, hopefully one of them would ring so that he wouldn’t have to wait and just stand there for too long. Not that anyone was paying attention, but still.

He wondered how Issac had come to know about the tape in the first place.

He wondered what his sire had meant with the few words that he’d said when they’d met.

He wondered just who had replaced Kaz with this new, smug-sounding one.

He wondered why he’d allowed Shizuo to worm his way into his heart.

That was when a ringing phone broke through his thoughts, startling him just slightly.

No one else was around, luckily. He didn’t really prefer the idea of someone overhearing.

He picked up the phone. “Hello?”

A deep voice responded. “The moon is a mysterious mistress…”

“…who walks the night with demons of dread.”

“The Luckee Star motel. Room 2. Don’t be long.”

“Oh…I’ll be there.”

~

The Luckee Star motel didn’t have many rooms, and was in the shape of a U. Izaya passed through
the main room without looking at the employee who had rushed in from the back room but then retreated back to where the radio was playing, seeing Izaya striding through quickly. It was likely that visitors came through all the time without renting rooms of their own.

Through the door on the other side was the U-shaped, two-floor area containing rooms. The center had a pool but despite it being summertime, it was not filled. From the looks of its condition, it was for the best that it wasn’t filled.

There were, oddly, no rooms on the first floor, just a few rooms that might’ve been offices or janitorial rooms. Upstairs, room 2 was easy enough to find, and it was unlocked.

Upon opening the door, Izaya froze for a moment. ‘Well, lucky me…’

It was a small room with dark carpeting and grimy stripped wallpaper. The back of the room seemed to turn to make space for a bathroom. There was otherwise just a long dresser with a key card on it – it turned out to be for the back room of the internet café, like an employee’s only card.

Otherwise, there was nothing remarkable about the room. Unless you counted the overturned bed, a floor lamp that was flickering and broken between the bed and a nightstand – creating an effect of a flickering campfire in the corner of the room. There was also the fact that the bathroom door had been broken off and flung into the bathroom. Not to mention the splatters and handprints of blood all over the walls of the entire room, and smears of it in the bathroom. All in all, the oddest thing about it was that there were no bodies anywhere to be found.

It was like a scene out of one of those crime dramas or documentaries.

‘Like a responsible person, I should probably tell that employee about this.’

It wouldn’t do to allow the mess to remain there, no indeed.

Descending the stairs, he briefly wondered why the place seemed to be so barren. It was in Hollywood, after all.

The man at the desk actually had an interesting reaction; interesting in that it was quite unexpected.

“Wait, room 2, you said?”

Izaya nodded. He’s explained that the room looked like a massacre had occurred inside and in all likelihood, one actually had. Which did prompt him to consider the idea that he might be getting desensitized by everything he was seeing.

“Oh, goddammit, not again,” the man let out a long sigh and rubbed at his face with frustration. “Of all the inconsiderate…what are these people thinking?”

He then proceeded to dig out cleaning supplies from the back room, and thanked Izaya for informing him of the mess.

Izaya resolved not to stay at this place unless he really really had to.

~

Izaya stood outside in front of the Internet café.

‘Was this really a good idea…?’ he thought, feeling hesitant to enter. He decided it was all Shizu-chan’s fault. If he weren’t so…Shizu-chan-esque, then maybe he would’ve had a better way of
finding the Nosferatu than this.

With a sigh, Izaya entered and made his way through the computer terminals, weaving around chairs that were inexplicably toppled onto the floor. He made his way to the back room, there was almost absolutely nothing in the room, save for a couple of tables with empty coffee cups on it.

However, through the next door, which had required his key card, was a set of stairs to the right, and that’s all there was. Unfortunately, when he started climbing the stairs, a create, exactly like the ones from the tape, broke through the door at the top, and descended upon him.

The monster had the advantage of the high ground, but Izaya had knives. Luckily, it took only two or three slashes, backed by his vampiric strength to take the thing down. Even luckier, he had managed to evade the monster’s sweeping attack with its claws. The only potential issue was how quickly these things seemed to move. The monster fell in chunks on the stairs, blood now staining them. A little had gotten on Izaya as well.

‘Sometimes it just can’t be helped~’ he told himself, faking a nonchalant attitude in his own head.

The truth was that the creature had appeared so suddenly that Izaya felt a little shaken. If he weren’t a vampire, he would’ve had much less chance of escaping that encounter in one piece and thought scared him a little.

Through the door at the top of the stairs was a large room again in the shape of a U, which had various cameras set up to apparently take video of scenes in movies. Around the whole room there were several sets of what looked like living rooms or bedrooms. It was obvious what was being filmed here. What was more obvious was the four monsters that were in the large room, and they launched themselves at Izaya. It wasn’t too difficult, however, to fight and kill them as they mostly came at him one at a time. It was still harder than the first one he fought, but still, it wasn’t so bad.

Izaya waited to move to the next area for a few moments to help his mind catch up to what was happening. It was obvious that the tape was likely somewhere here and also that he’d have to fight more of these things for sure. Though meanwhile he did also notice that one of the sets was simply a dirty mattress next to a dumpster, and another had a red backdrop, bright lights, fake plants and a fake zebra, of all things. Just standing there innocuously. He decided not to contemplate on it.

The next door brought him back downstairs to the first level and he could see through windows to a fairly big square room where there was a man standing, looking at something on the table. From a vent behind him, before Izaya could move, a monster jumped on him and proceeded to tear him apart.

Izaya tried to get into the room, but the door would not unlock, would not be broken down, and the windows also refused to break. He’d have to go around the outside and end up going through the vent most likely.

A monster suddenly tried to get him from behind, but it would find its attempt unsuccessful.

The next door had DMP scratched into it and there were stairs leading down to a basement level. The room was dark, with water dripping from the ceiling. Two more monsters attacked, and Izaya defeat them swiftly. He did get scratched a little bit, though that was already healing p, being a relatively minor injury. There were a few beds here, already surrounded in blood. Around the corner, there was a man crouching next to some boxes in fear. He got up right away upon seeing Izaya.

“Oh, Jesus, man…what the – what the fuck is going on up there? D-dead, everyone s-slaughtered…oh, oh go – sh-sh-shhjh. Do-do-don’t make any noise… th’ll – they’ll hear us.”
Nothing but questions for this guy. “Are you with DMP?”

“Yeah, yeah…uh, I mean, no, uh, f-uck it! Yeah, I’m with DMP. You 5-0?”

“No. Now answer me this, what the hell is going on? Those are the same creatures on your tape.”

“Yeah, yeah, I-I know, but… we didn’t make that shit. Uh, one of the guys stole it… f-found it in the creepy house in the hills. We just copied it and put our names on it. Worse than anything we ever did…worst thing I ever saw!”

Izaya furrowed his brows. He was so close. “Where is this mansion?”

It was too late. Immediately, a creature pounced onto the man all too quickly, and another attacked Izaya. He fought them both with more minor scratches, but it was too late for the human.

Around the next corner, there was a vent near the ceiling. He jumped up to grasp the edge and pulled himself up into it. Crawling to the other side was fast, and it turned out to be the room he’d seen before that he couldn’t get into.

The only thing he could find in the room aside from the corpse from earlier was the tape he was looking for. It had the same title written on it, but Izaya still hoped that perhaps it would randomly be something else. Anything else.

~

No luck. Izaya brought the tape back to Isaac’s place, explaining that the monsters on it were real.

“Then this is no doubt the work of a fiend. Let’s see the beginning – there may be some insight as to the motives of this.”

The beginning showed the woman walking up to the front of a house, ringing the doorbell, but finding the door unlocked, and walking inside of a dark mansion. The doors swung closed behind her, and from the way she struggled to open the door, they’d apparently closed. From the camera’s point of view, three monsters could be seen lurking around some pieces of furniture and boxes in the same room. The woman crept slowly along the wall until she found a light switch. But upon switching the lights on, the creatures ran at her. She ran to the only direction she could, stairs leading upwards. From there, the video went the very same way that the other tape had. Izaya looked away toward the ending but the sounds themselves were still disturbing. The creatures he’d encountered had sounded the very same when he’d fought them at the internet café.

After a moment, Isaac spoke, almost excitedly as if he’d had some kind of breakthrough on something and it turned out that he did.

“The house in the tape, I know it. It’s in the Hills. King’s Way, if I’m not mistaken. My guess is that the fiend that made this tape is using these creatures to hound the Nosferatu, which would explain their sudden absence. They’re trapped,” he frowned, crossing his arms. “Well, it’s unfortunate that the prince needs you to see the Nosferatu, because it looks like this fiend knows how to get at them, and I doubt he’s going to draw a map for you. Looks like King’s Way is your only way in, unfortunately.”

‘That being the case, I couldn’t have gotten help from Shizu-chan anyway; if the Nosferatu were trapped somewhere then he couldn’t get there either another way either,’ he reassured himself.

“I can have a car drop you off when you’re ready. If I don’t hear from the Nosferatu within the next few nights, I’ll tell LaCroix he’s going to need a new leading man and march a few of my own
troops up there.”

The man was used to his own leading position, Izaya could tell. He was already strategizing. Still, the idea that he may not return was ominous, to say the least.

“And if I may give you one final word of warning – do not trust LaCriox. Don’t play the damned politics of the Camarilla. This city hasn’t needed them in a long time, and won’t ever. Who you trust is for you to decide, I only know who not to trust.”

It was sound advice, and although Izaya had a handle on who he was and wasn’t trusting, it was almost nice of Isaac to say all of that.

Izaya smiled. “I’ll remember that, thanks.”

~

The car dropped him off in front of the large mansion. Indeed, it looked like the same one in the video from the outside. He climbed over the gate that secured the area and dropped to the ground as the car drove off.

As he approached the mansion, he saw that the front door was actually boarded up. Likely, there would be a better way in.

Hopefully it wouldn’t lead right into some kind of trap which would cause Izaya to be in over his head with trouble.

He found himself circling the place, climbing up the side of it using ivy and getting in through a window on the second floor. The mansion’s rooms were constructed rather oddly for a home – the rooms just linked together and then stairs would lead him downwards. No hallways or anything similar. And in each room, there was at least one monster jumping out of somewhere for him to fight off and kill. Th entire place stunk worse than it looked – old and new blood along with decay ruled the place. Aside from all of the flies, that is. One room even had blood dripping down its walls from the ceiling. The stairs that the woman in the tape had used were barred off, and Izaya made his way through the kitchen on the first floor to find stairs leading down into another room, a monster jumping at him from the bed. The next door, he saw, had stairs behind it, leading into the basement. Worse, he could see that there was someone there…waiting for him? Or someone?

Izaya took a deep breath and gulped audibly.

He had a bad feeling about this.

It’s not that he couldn’t fight on his own, nor that he would be too scared or anything silly like that. It wasn’t that he needed Shizuo.

‘I just want…would prefer for him to be here.’

Yes, he told himself, it would simply be…convenient, is all.

His racing heart and increased adrenalin had nothing to do with it.

~

“What?? You let him go out there?”

Shizuo had called Isaac, looking for an update on Izaya’s situation, and he ended up with far more
information than he’d expected. Not only on Izaya’s progress but also about Gary and the others. They were right where they always were down in the sewers, but they were loath to move from their spot all things considered.

The entire situation…Izaya could probably handle it. No, he most certainly could, it was just that…

Shizuo raised a hand to his face in thought.

‘What if it’s just too much for him on his own? What if it’s too much for anyone on their own? Even Gary and the others aren’t moving against these things right now, and it’s bound to be much worse if he’s making his way into the sewers…’

In his mind, he saw Izaya’s sleeping face, his smirking face, his embarrassed face, and his smiling face.
That clinched it.

Shizuo made left his home and made his way to Gary’s place so he could use the cameras. He had to watch for Izaya. There was no way he could just sit and do nothing while Izaya faced something like this.

When he got there, Gary gleefully informed him that in that maze of a sewer system, those monsters were most definitely not the only things down there.

Shizuo parked himself in front of the various monitors and switched cameras constantly, hoping to spot Izaya as soon as he could.

‘Just please be alright. Please.’

He sat with clenched teeth for what felt like far too long. He drummed his fingers on the chair, shifted positions multiple times and sighed an uncountable number of times.

This continued for a few minutes more before he got up, gave Gary his best, and left the Nosferatu’s lair. He’d reach Izaya himself and help him, even if Izaya didn’t want the help – he was going to do it anyway. Izaya would just have to put up with it, even though he didn’t trust Shizuo.

And maybe it was stupid…but facing the danger and helping Izaya – it made him feel alive again.

*

Clan Tzimisce:

Possessed of a peculiar nobility, coupled with an evil that transcends mortal perception, Clan Tzimisce leads the Sabbat in its rejection of all things human. More so than any other vampires, the Tzimisce revel in their monstrousness. They practice a ‘fleshcrafting’ Discipline that they use to disfigure their foes and sculpt themselves into beings of terrible beauty.
Okay, here we are! Yayyy!!

Somehow I'm finally back - this only took me for-freaking-ever.
Why? Well...writer's block, apartment hunting, job hunting, full-time working, and a class.
TL;DR: Adulting from Hell
(PSA: If your psychiatrist sucks, get a new one. It's practically like I'm not on any meds so that hasn't helped either.)

Thank you for reading, as always!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The form was disfigured and was definitely not humanoid in nature. Though dressed in red robes which would look elegant on most humans, they had a peculiar effect on this creature who possessed grey, scaly skin, orange eyes, and claws instead of finger nails. His head was shaped in an oblong manner, the back of it rising up into spike shapes, and flat sides to it.

He spoke with an accent which sounded Eastern European, Izaya thought.

“Ahh, hello young Cainite.”

Izaya had reached the bottom of the stairs, emerging into a spacious square room. The…décor resembled much of the rest of the house. And there from the other side stood this... what had to be some kind of vampire. He crossed the length between them to stand near Izaya, who was quite on guard... his appearance was rather shocking, after all. More than that, he could apparently tell...or just knew that Izaya was still on the fresh side.

“I see your face is not so lifeless, your nerves not so deadened, that you cannot express shock,” he stopped walking, and stood straight, hands behind his back. “I am Andrej…tell me childe, is my appearance that frightening, or is it my knowledge of you that is so unnerving?”

This did not sit well with Izaya. Such a patronizing tone.

“This place is horrific; just what is it that you are doing?”

“Oh, childe of Caine, the sights in this haven pale in comparison to my ancestral estate. Comfort...is a custom, and all of this artifice brings me closer to my home. Do not fear from my furniture, young one.”

Izaya knew it would be unwise to outright attack this...Kindred. He needed info to find the Nosferatu. Perhaps be going through the large double doors at the other end of the room.
“So, it was you who made that tape?”

“Oh yes, the ‘tape’. Merely a test. Certainly not intended to fall into mortal hands. Fortunately, we are in the capital of mortal trickery and illusion. So did the tape drive you to find me? From whence flows your longing, childe?”

Too many questions that he didn’t really have the answer to. “Does it matter? What’s the whole point of this place?”

“To gouge out the eyes of the Camarilla. The sewers are clogged with my creations. I will kill or drive the Nosferatu from their pestilent nests. Without the sewer rats to guide them, the Camarilla will be blind to the Sabbat’s designs.”

‘I should’ve known it would come back to politics,’ he scolded himself.

“I’m so terribly sorry, Sabbat-san, but I won’t allow that to happen…so I must spoil the party.” If Izaya was good at only one thing, it was putting on a front. He could tell that this would devolve into a fight.

“It is not for me – it’s for the will of the Sabbat! The Camarilla is stunted; dead and festering in the womb, good only as pawns of the father. Even now, they answer the call of the Ancient and seek to free him from his torpor.”

Izaya narrowed his eyes. Most curious.

“The Ancient, you said?”

“He slumbers within the Ankaran Sarcophagus; one of the fathers whose return shall hearken the Reckoning. Gehenna is at hand and the Camarilla are unwittingly speeding us all toward our doom.”

‘Ah, those rumors from before…’

“Regardless of that…what of those creatures – it was you who made them?”

“Blessed creatures; I have broken through their mortal crust and drawn from them their greatest strength: mutability. I coax bone, weave flesh, and lace sinew tight until it strains to lash out!”

Izaya did not want to ask his next question, but at the same time, he felt he needed to.

“From where did you obtain the…raw materials?”

“Illegals, mongrels, half bloods, and Caitiff; the bane of society, Kindred and kine. They are as of little consequence to authority as they are to me. It is…a culling, of sorts.”

“These ‘machines’ of yours are brutal, broken, and disgusting.”

“Perhaps, but they are exquisitely functional. Still there’s an uncanny elegance to even this, my most mercenary of designs.

“Ah, but it is not too much effort for those of us able to give the gift of metamorphosis, young one. I know you have a cold appreciation for the aesthetic of my creations; I see awe and longing in your eyes.”

‘Bastard.’

Izaya let a smirk creep over his face. “I do hate to inform you of this, but my only longing is to see
you dead.”

“Hmph. Well now, Camarilla whelp, let me see you fight your nature in the face of those who have embraced their Beast. Deny yourself Caine’s gifts, and be torn asunder by my minions!”

“Bring it.”

The fight proved to be long and arduous. Andrej was obviously both old and powerful, and yet Izaya would have to take him down. More of the monsters from before crawled out of what looked like sewer holes that were built into the walls, and they wasted no time in emerging into the room and jumping straight at him.

As usual, these weren’t very hard for Izaya to take down with a couple of swipes of the knife or even with the help of a punch here and there. The real problem was Andrej. Obviously, he was the main target. However, he had a strange ability to sink in the floor as if he were merging with it, and then he’d emerge from it again in another spot, generally a good distance away. From there, he’d summon, or so it seemed, more of his monsters to attack.

It took some time, but Izaya used his parkour skills to maneuver through the room and along the walls, using his agility to his advantage to dodge and attack his opponents and he even managed to execute surprise-attacks on Andrej several times that way. He’d used time to his advantage and managed to suss out better attack and defense patterns his enemies were using. That being the case, his own attacks slowly became more and more effective and he was doing some real damage.

Finally, after what felt like hours, Izaya got enough hits in, it seemed. Andrej sank into the floor and didn’t appear again. For a few minutes, he searched around the room, looking under the stairs, under a large pedestal in the center that was covered in flesh and blood of some kind, but there was no one.

To find the Nosferatu, he’d need to push onward. What better way to do so than the passageway open to the sewers? On the far wall from the stairs was a set of wooden double doors, set into the cement wall. There were metal gates made to cover the hole, but they were pushed to the walls, remaining open.

Through the hole he moved, twisting and turning until he came to a broken sewage pipe that he was able to crawl into, and followed it to the only exit provided. This led to system of sewers with a shockingly high and curved ceiling. Water ran underneath the ground, visible underneath a strip of grating running down the middle. There were some areas sectioned off by metal gates, controlled by a lever to the side. The entire place looked like the dungeons to a castle considering how large it was, just without the actual dungeon part of it. The bigger issue was that the place felt just like a maze, and while figuring it out he’d have to dodge and fight those same monsters every so often. Moreover, there was unsettling chill in the air that even he could feel – it was likely just caused by being underground in the first place, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that it was more than that.

Down one way, there was a very comforting thing laying on the floor. A dead body. Fairly fresh looking as well. He had a jumpsuit on, and a clipboard lay nearby. It seemed the human had been from the Water and Power department. According to the clipboard, there had been strange sightings in the sewers reported to them and that Spring he’d come down to investigate. It seemed that this man had gone through various quadrants and toward the older parts of the sewer, he’d started hearing odd noises and seen prints. Eventually, he’d come across a couple of them and it had not ended well. Izaya hoped not to come across more evidence of horrible things happening in the past that seemed all too familiar, but he knew as well that such hopes were going to be pointless.

Down the hall he threw a level for a gate, and another and subsequently reached another hallway, where he saw a door made of metal, though it was covered in grime and locked. But it was nothing
that his skill with a lockpick couldn’t handle. Inside, it was just a small cement room that looked like an abandoned office with an old desk, boxes, and metal storage shelves. On the table was an old newspaper.

**CITY HALL COVER UP**

“Haunted” sewers bricked over! Bodies never found!

‘Oh great,’ he thought with a wince. ‘More mysterious and creepy nonsense.’

Right next to the newspaper lay a ledger on the desk.

‘Why not take a break?’ He sat down on a chair and began reading it.

It was again by a person from the Department of Water and Power, but all entries appeared to be from the year 1972.

In the beginning entry, the writer explained that the mayor was requesting weekly logs after reports of “hauntings”. He then stated that he felt that such stories were unsubstantiated and ridiculous – which any normal person would think. Izaya knew better.

The next entries went on to describe the results of what investigative teams and the writer himself had found. From reports of whispers to sightings of shadowy figures, the writer had ended up joining the investigation teams himself. The book went on to say that the writer saw shadows and very odd sightings himself and had no choice but to report it to the mayor. He also seemed fairly incapable of explaining himself in writing regarding exactly what it was he saw. He’d chased something to a dead end – a brick wall, but there was nothing but laughter surrounding him.

It seemed that eventually that more sections of the sewers were sealed off permanently due to ‘official reasons’. The man wrote that something like this had apparently happened before. No further inquiries into the matter would be tolerated and something was happening that was not to be released to the public. The writer closed his log mentioning that this office well within the closed off sections and thus records and ledgers would be left there.

Izaya closed the book and dropped it back onto the dusty desk.

“So it happens again and again, does it…” he muttered to himself.

Exiting back out of the door, Izaya made his way back into the maze of sewers which he’d learned were apparently sealed off from the areas that were actually in use. Here and there were small concrete holes at the bottom of the walls that looked like tunnels. Many led to grates the he couldn’t force open, while others led to nothing at all. There were also instances of coming upon dead ends to the winding hallways, many of the dead ends were caked in bloody hand prints and long-since dried up pools of blood. Despite now relying on blood for sustenance, Izaya found it no less disturbing and grotesque at best.

The hallways would occasionally go uphill or downhill now and then. Making his way through the sewers was requiring some retracing of steps and ignoring the tell-tale sounds of those monsters that were sometimes hiding around a corner, ready to spring out at him.

On a downward slope, he found that one of the tunnels there formed a kind of L-shape and led out into a small enclosed space, though lanterns lit the small stone area, oddly enough. On the other end of the same wall was another tunnel, in the same shape, and it led out into another sewer hallway.
But it was a new area, one that led to a square-shaped room that had a floor, but it was lower than where Izaya was standing. Moreover, it was filled with water. Nothing helpful save for a wheel at the side of the room with a red light on above it. He’d be waist deep in the water if he went to turn it.

‘Now is this some kind of trap, or is it an unfortunate decision that I must make?’ he thought. Naturally, he would stumble upon some kind of truly unfortunate choice like this.

Upon turning the wheel, the result was that a square shaped concrete opening at the center of the floor was opening up even wider, and the water in the room was pulled down through it. Which meant Izaya was as well.

It didn’t really matter though; he didn’t need to breathe.

The issue was that he found himself tumbling with the water through different waterways, nearly getting bashed against the slimy and wet walls until he found himself spat out unceremoniously onto very solid concrete floor. Though he would’ve liked to take a few moments to get himself sorted out from that very fun water party, he noticed in the nick of time that he would not have the luxury.

The issue here was that a creature looking like an eight-foot-tall troll was running towards him. It wasn’t fast, not by any means, but it did look like it wouldn’t fall easily to simple knife play.

He had enough strength left to summon his super speed. He got out two knives, one in each hand, and ran at the supposed troll. As expected, the troll attacked with its arms, swiping wide, and with very little order. However, a large spear-like object protruded from the right arm and was curved, looking eerily similar to an elephant tusk. This only meant, however, that Izaya would have to calculate space for it in his movements. Moving to avoid the tusk, he used speed to get into closer than close-range and attacked, swiping deep cuts into the troll with his knives, before retreating back to a distance to regroup.

The damage he’d managed on the troll had been more than he’d expected, though it was still not as much as he’d wanted. He’d have to dodge, charge in, attack, and retreat. Speed and his knifework would be what would win him the fight.

This style of fight was not brand new to him, he’d fought many times with his Shizu-chan, after all. But it was strange that the feeling of attacking like a mosquito came to him. For Izaya to label himself with an insect name was nearly a heinous crime, he felt. Even so, it felt too similar in this instance. It wasn’t the same with Shizu-chan. No, no, that was different.

The troll roared in pain and frustration after Izaya carried out his tactic a few times more with decent success. It looked like he was close to defeating the creature, it shouldn’t take much more at that point. Still, it wouldn’t do to be caught off guard. After harder concentration on his next moves, Izaya finally defeated the beast, though he came out of it worse for wear. The troll had gotten in a couple of hits, but Shizu-chan hit harder.

Even so, Izaya found himself breathing heavy and leaning against a dimly-lit wall, feeling rather exhausted; he’d already been through strange and ridiculous trials to get where he was now and the sun had to be up by then. It would only be natural that he’d feel a bit tired.

He made his way over toward where the troll had been standing before it disintegrated into black dust, the way vampires did, interestingly enough. It had been in front of a set of bars set into the stone walls. He could see the other side - it looked just like the maze area he’d been in before. With a pull of a level next to the bars, they rose up from the ground and slid up into the stone with a loud clang.
‘At least there’s a way forward,’ he thought, almost reluctantly.

‘Yes,’ he frowned. ‘If I didn’t know any better I’d say I was right back in that first maze.’ He did know better, however – there wasn’t blood or any…pieces strewn about from when he’d defeat the two-legged monsters that had been almost everywhere in the earlier maze.

It seemed he’d be stuck in another labyrinth of sewer tunnels with more monsters that would be much harder to kill.

Izaya leaned against one of the walls for support, listening for tell-tale sounds echoing throughout the halls to indicate an enemy approaching as he slid down with his back against the wall, just to get a bit more of a rest after that last fight. The sun was likely up by now, and he’d been trekking through the mazes and waterways for some time now, fighting against creatures all the while. It was no wonder he was feeling exhausted. With a sigh, he reluctantly continued forward, knife at the ready to take down anything in his way.

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It’s not like there was anything to worry about. Izaya could handle himself perfectly well. Therefore, Shizuo had no reason to go chasing after him. The only problem was that he couldn’t shake the terrible feeling he had.

Which was why he’d kicked down the front door to the large mansion. It’s not like he’d need to keep the element of surprise or anything. Not likely, anyway. Izaya had already come through, after all.

It was upon entering the basement, however, that he ran into someone almost literally. Andrej stood there in his deep red robes, smirking at him knowingly as he stood nearby the sewer entrance.

“Ah…another childe of Caine. Welcome.”

Shizuo frowned. “And you’re from the Sabbat.”

“Yes, young Cainite. Who is it that you seek…the other one who came through here not long ago?” he smiled. “I did sense a good amount of power from him despite his age…and from you as well.”

Shizuo huffed a response. “That’s all great but I’m looking for my friend. So, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be on my way.” He moved past Andrej and approached the sewer entrance.

“Friend, is it? Perhaps not for long…”

‘He’s trying to bait me,’ he thought, annoyed.

Still, he couldn’t help but respond.

“What do you mean?”

“We had a nice chat earlier…he would make a fine…addition to my ranks.”

That smirk was beginning to piss him off.
“Hmph. You don’t know shit about him, asshole. He’s too smart to fall for some stupid trick anyway.”

With that, Shizuo stormed into the sewers, leaving Andrej behind, who laughed.

“We shall see…”

He came across many more two-legged monsters in his path. Luckily, that was all he’d seen between the dead ends and circular tunnels.

He started feeling real worry that he may not make it out of the damn maze. Without knowing how much lay ahead, he paused for a break whenever he could.

Inside another office room lay a similar ledger. This one was from 1957 and was almost the same as the one from the 1970s. The main difference was that the writer was describing the disappearance of three workers who, officially, were never found. The writer told a different story. Like the other writings, this one described the sightings of impossible things and unexplainable sounds. The writer implied knowing the fate of the three missing men and reported to the mayor who had all of the old sewers of LA bricked up. It seemed he’d even decided to quit his career and find a different line of work altogether. Whatever he’d seen must’ve been gruesome or at least not for the faint of heart.

Izaya took the opportunity to rest once again before venturing out once more. If he didn’t keep moving, he’d never get out. Besides, the creatures might become more numerous the more time he wasted.

Not that he’d admit it, but leaving the sewers also meant he could see Shizuo again.

In the end, it wouldn’t take much longer before he got himself into a truly dangerous situation.

As he proceeded through the hallways once more, he came across another troll. He’d recovered enough strength that he felt he wouldn’t need to run or anything like that, but it would be a long fight, he was certain.

In fact, what made it longer was the fact that he got hit with the green light that the troll shot from his hand. It was almost some kind of goop, yet it wasn’t solid. But the effect was that Izaya was slowed down exponentially; even slower than when he was a human. This allowed the troll to get a few good hits in, as it had managed to get close to Izaya while she was still stuck in the strange slowness.

Izaya had to take the hits as they came, though he could block a couple of them. That was the way he spent the next several minutes – dodging and blocking to the best of his capabilities while in this slow mode.

It took close to ten minutes but he finally destroyed the troll…only to turn around and see another one coming straight at him. Worse, there was something else with it.

The new creature had four legs and a pair of arms. It was completely hairless like the troll was, and seemed to otherwise be a female version. What looked like an open wound was slit into the stomach
but it didn’t seem to have been damaging at all. The new creature shrieked loudly – an ear-piercing and raging scream emitting from it.

The main problem was that she was far faster than the troll and what was worse, Izaya found himself backed into a corner – a dead end inside the sewer maze. The two were rapidly approaching him, and all he could do was try to fight his way out.

The troll hit heavy but he was slow. If Izaya dodged the green light, he wouldn’t be slowed down and it wouldn’t be hard to avoid being hit by him. The dangerous one was the shrieker; Izaya’s strongest attacks were with his knives or even fists with his vampiric strength and his skill with Celerity made him even faster. However, the shrieker proved just as fast if not faster than him – when trying to get a strike or slash in, Izaya would be blocked and hit hard by her claws. Meanwhile, the troll wasn’t allowing him any extra space to move about and was trying to get hits in on him as well.

Then the worst thing that could happen did happen: more of them were coming.

He was losing some blood and becoming exhausted. Even though he would heal quickly enough, the rate of the damage he received far exceeded his healing rate.

‘I’m dead if this keeps up.’

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Shizuo only had to follow the sounds of the shrieking and the roaring. It wasn’t exactly hard to miss. It had taken him some time to reach this area of the sewers. Not that he hadn’t been down here before, but it had been a few years ago. On his way trying to reach Izaya, he’d made his own errors trying to figure out the way through the mazes and encountering the same monsters over and over again. Even for Shizuo, he was starting to wear down and he had accumulated some injuries.

But despite all of that, he pushed onward. Especially once he heard all of the noises. It sounded like multiple monsters were attacking, but he wasn’t the target. It could really only mean that someone else was being attacked.

‘Izaya,’ his brow furrowed, determined. He had to reach him and fast, from the sounds of it.

Even if it weren’t Izaya, if anyone were being attacked like this, he’d try to save them anyway.

Still, he ran as fast as he could, following the noises. Izaya was strong as hell in his own way. Always had been but even as a vampire he was not indestructible. Even Shizuo wasn’t, he knew.

Rounding a corner, he came to a halt. Whoever was being cornered up ahead was sufficiently kept there, unable to escape. He could see two monsters there at the end of the hallway and at least five more had begun to crowd around the area.

There was just one thing to do.

“IZAYAAAAAAA!!!!” he shouted at the top of his lungs.

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He wasn’t losing, not at all.

‘Who am I kidding?’

It was a losing battle, unmistakably. He was able to get hits in and evade others, but he was slowly being worn down and hurt. He’d managed to defeat two trolls, but the shriekers were another story. He’d badly wounded one of them but the monsters kept on coming and he wasn’t going to be able to endure it long enough to kill them all.

He grit his teeth in preparation of blocking another hit from a shrieker when a louder sound flooded the hall.

“IZAYAAAAAA!!!!”

It was reminiscent of the old days, that kind of shout. But there was far more desperation in it, even a hint of pain and fear. And that was the difference.

Izaya managed a small grin as he kept up the fight as much as possible. Shizu-chan was here, after all. It was obvious too that the other vampire had begun fighting at the other end of the pack of monsters. Even the small two-legged things had come around here and there to join in. It was obvious however, that Shizuo was doing well on his side. With shouts, grunts, and the unmistakable sound of fists hitting flesh, Izaya could tell from where he was that Shizuo was doing well. When he saw one of the shriekers disappear into scattered ash, it was a strong sense of relief and hope that flooded through him. It was going to be alright; he wouldn’t die.

‘Besides, if anyone is allowed to kill me…it’s Shizu-chan,’ he paused for a moment, considering the thought. ‘That means…no one will kill me.’

It was true – the only one permitted to kill him was Shizuo and if he could trust in Shizuo, then that was never going to happen at any point in time.

A warmth spread throughout him as those feelings solidified…he couldn’t let Shizuo know that though.

‘Who would have thought such a day would come, right, Shizu-chan?’ he smiled at the thought and felt a sense of renewed energy and could find more fight in him. He used that energy to keep fighting his own battles as the sounds of Shizuo’s fighting rang out throughout the hallway. Finally, Izaya defeated one of the shriekers though he had little desire to fight any more them.

Still a few more piled into the dead-end hallway but Shizuo kept hitting them. Once enough of the shriekers and trolls had been destroyed, Izaya could see a little clearer through his own enemies that Shizuo had managed to beat more than half of them…though what was strange was that it seemed he’d started roaring at the enemies and his attack patterns looked far more…erratic. More than what he’d usually seen for Shizu-chan anyway. It seemed he’d picked up the speed as well.

What Izaya failed to realize was that Shizuo had picked up a great number of injuries and had lost his fair share of blood.
A turbulence had taken over his mind.
He saw almost nothing that wasn’t red in his vision.
I was raw, primal, and instinctual.
Fear, pain, and an odd sort of hunger.
And it ruled him as he tore enemies apart, almost shredding them up.
Pain.
**KILL**
Death.
**FEED**
Rage.
**NOW**
Terror.
**SURVIVE**
**KILL**
**KILL**
**KILL**
**KILL!!!!**

Nothing.

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There was just one creature left, and it had appeared to be unsure as to which target it wanted to attack. But it didn’t matter – Shizuo ran at it and the troll was destroyed after a few hits.

There was something off about him, Izaya decided. What had happened?
That was when Shizuo straightened up and turned to look at him.
Red eyes met glowing red eyes.

“Shizu-chan…what is that?” He wasn’t getting worried or anything, of course.

His question was met with a growl.

Shizuo took his time walking over to where Izaya had been fighting – at the dead-end of the hall.

Izaya watched him approach, calmly. There was obviously something going on but what was it…? His expression pinched as he tried to remember – he had a feeling he’d heard about this.

“The Beast – it’s always there, waitin’ to take over. When it does, it’s like a wild animal wearin’ your skin…raging, desperate, scared, reckless. He’ll do anything to survive and it’s you that has to deal with the consequences.”

Izaya looked back to Shizuo who was the picture of rage and desperation with glowing red eyes. There wouldn’t be any way out for him, he knew. He was out of strength and speed and was beyond exhausted.

But this wasn’t Shziuo. This wasn’t his Shizuo.

Izaya knew Shizuo didn’t want him dead. That he himself killing Izaya would be the last thing he wanted. Izaya believed in that. And he was going to trust in it.

That was when his wrists were pinned to the wall by shaking fists. As to why they were shaking, Izaya couldn’t know but he had to concentrate now and stay alive. It would be a shame if there were some thing left unsaid between them, assuming Izaya didn’t successfully save Shizuo from whatever kind of hell he was in before he was killed.

That would be a fate he wanted to avoid at all costs. He noticed that it was not only for his sake, but because he knew how much it would destroy Shizuo inside as well. Once a goal of his…now, a fear.

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The red had taken him over, but…he was beginning to see outlines now.

His thoughts were muddled and impossible to clear up yet he could begin to hear things again. There weren’t any more enemies to be seen but there was one figure close by. His body approached it and he grabbed something.

His immediate instinct said to attack but he could hear something. This was different – he wasn’t being fought against and he could hear…just a bit. It was almost as though he were hearing it underwater.

A voice?

“…kill me…”

Kill?

KILL
No!
“…trusted you…”

Trust…me?

He felt himself shaking his head…no, he was shaking his own head.

This voice…he knew it. The feeling in his body was returning. Was he getting control again?

But who was he?

“Shizuo…I…”

Yes. Shizuo. That was him.

The red started fading out and the voice grew clearer, as did other sounds in the background.

“Worst of all, I hated that I made you hate me.”

Hated…? Why?

Where was he? The dripping of water and the smells…it had to be the sewers.

‘Why am I here?’

“…yet when you left, I could never…”

And there was the voice yet again. It was so familiar and his vision was clearing up; he could almost see where the voice was coming from.

“I could never forget you…”

Forget? Him? Who was this…?

Someone was definitely talking to him. It was definitely someone he knew. But who? The voice was so soft, and it sounded…hurt, yet affectionate?

“…love…”

Love…?

Love…

Izaya.

…Yes. That was it. He could remember now.

And the voice…the now teary-sounding voice.

“…Izaya.”

He could see again.

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He’d have to try to break Shizuo free from the beast – it was the only thing to do.

“I know…you don’t want this. I know that you don’t want to kill me, Shizuo."

The grip tightened on him, and an enraged face with fangs bared grew a little closer. Izaya bowed his head, not wanting to see his possible doom.

“I never trusted you before. Back in our Ikebukuro days…back in Japan or even here…not for a while.”

Izaya took a breath. He needed his words to be steady.

“But you should know that all of that has changed…Shizu-chan,” he looked up to Shizuo’s face. He was shaking his head, eyes squinted shut like he was trying to shake something. Maybe it was working.

Izaya took another breath, determined.

“Shizuo…I…always hated you. I hated your single-minded determination. I hated how steadfast you were in defending your values. That you had the strength to do as you liked and defend yourself. And that I could never predict you. Worst of all, I hated that I made you hate me.”

The grip was starting to loosen, just a little.

“And yet when you left, I could never forget you. And I tried, you know. Not always, but I did. And I found…that I just couldn’t. And what was worse was that I knew there was no way you felt the same even if you were alive all those years.”

Izaya saw it. The eyes…Shizuo’s eyes were going back to their normal color.

Izay’s voice was starting to stick in his throat as it tightened, but he pushed onward.

“When you said you loved me…I couldn’t handle it…I didn’t know how to. But…if it’s true…if you love me, then…”

His wrists were released. Izaya looked up into clear, golden eyes and a fully-conscious face.

“…Izaya.”

Izaya raised his hands up, and cupped Shizuo’s face in them, his heart racing.

“Then…please don’t leave me. Don’t leave me like that again. If you love me, then…stay with me…”

Shizuo placed his hands over Izaya’s, and held them gently.

“I will. For whatever eternity awaits us. I’ll always be here for you. I promise.”

‘He’s just not fair,’ Izaya thought. The soft, loving look on Shizuo’s face that began with the eyes, the small, happy smile that graced it…the way the hands were laid over his own, and the low, baritone voice that shook his very core. Izaya had no defense against that.

He had to look away before he got swept away.
“I always called you a monster…a beast. But you’re not, Shizuo. I know this. So…so don’t let it take you again.”

A dawning expression of understanding crossed Shizuo’s face. It seemed he didn’t realize what had happened.

“You said,” he continued. “You said that you’re mine…did you mean that?”

“Forever.”

The answer carried no hesitation or uncertainty.

Izaya wished he could hide his blush so badly, though he was fine with the smile that came out. He dropped their hands away from Shizuo’s face.

“Then that’s why you can’t leave me…”

…my Shizu-chan.”

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He had smiled.

His flea was too adorable. Well…he wasn’t his but hopefully…someday, that would change.

Besides, how he had waited to hear words like that come from Izaya’s mouth while being directed at him. It had to be some kind of miracle. And Shizuo wouldn’t take it for granted. He drew close to Izaya and planted a kiss on his temple, smiling himself when Izaya blushed harder.

He could watch Izaya like this all night but there was an urgent question he had to ask.

“Are you alright? Did I…hurt you?”

Izaya’s eyes widened slightly, as if he were surprised by the question.

“No, you…I trusted you wouldn’t,” he uttered softly, looking away.

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It was true, he had never really thought he’d be killed or hurt (not much anyway) by Shizuo. Not for a little while now. But he wasn’t quite sure when it was that he’d come to trust in Shizuo.

A hand tilted his chin up, and he was looking back at Shizuo.

Shizuo’s grateful smile was beaming at him.

“Thank you, Izaya.”
Izaya swallowed. The warmth from before was back and he didn’t want to hide it this time.

Chapter End Notes

I am garbage, hear me roar.

No but really @.@ Uh thanks again for reading <3 I love you guys~

(And the story I beta for- we swear the next chapter is coming...it really is so don't think it's abandoned...we just...struggle with life. Yeah.)
Oh...man...is this happening?? IT SURE IS I'M BACK!!!

Yes, here we are with an honest to goodness update! I'm so shamed though, it's been literally almost a year. But I wasn't lying, I am definitely continuing and finishing this fic~ Ah, so excited.

The reasons for taking so long? Uninteresting, I assure you. Another hospital stint, work, school, poor mental health, you name it.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“…stupid Shizu-chan.”

He smiled.

Shizuo had passed out in Izaya’s arms almost immediately. Izaya backed up into the cave wall, trying to keep him upright before giving up, and laying Shizuo on the ground on his back. He’d been in too awkward a position trying to pick him up without first putting him down. Once he’d made sure that Shizuo had indeed merely passed out and was sleeping, Izaya took a moment to consider his options, of which there were very few. That was when he’d stopped to simply observe…while he had this chance.

An outside observer seeing Izaya’s face right then might have reacted in abject horror.

Or at least they would, had they known him exclusively as the infamous info broker of Shinjuku. For who from that area would ever expect to see such an expression cross Izaya’s face?

Loving.

Izaya’s features had melted into a genuine smile upon seeing the sleeping face of his Shizu-chan. It wasn’t a big smile, but it clearly was one. Corners of his mouth raised, it helped to soften his entire expression. His eyebrows came together gently as they do when one sees something adorable. Head tilting slightly, Izaya’s breath came out softly through his nose as his expressive eyes swirled with emotion.

He knelt down next to Shizuo, nearly transfixed. He hadn’t been able to see a sleeping Shizu-chan before. Not his face anyway. Those other times they’d shared space sleeping, Izaya never got to see his face.

His face was softer in sleep, with eyelashes a little longer than Izaya had realized. The blond hair really did suit him, he thought. Earlier, Izaya had touched that face, but he’d had his gloves on. Removing one of them, he took the chance to reach out, and…
His cheek was softer than Izaya had thought it would be, but his jaw was as strong as it looked. Izaya’s hand followed the angles of Shizuo’s face with feather-light touches. The tips of Shizuo’s hair lay on his hand comfortingly as he moved along Shizuo’s features. Air was escaping through Shizuo’s nose. It seemed that he hadn’t subconsciously broken the human habit of breathing. Not that Izaya had any room to talk about that.

Shizuo’s head shifted, pushing at Izaya’s hand oh-so slightly as a soft and low groan escaped that mouth. Izaya blinked and his eyes widened in surprise and wonder. He stared at Shizuo with some awe. So...Shizu-chan was one to be comforted by touch. Or...did Izaya dare to think that maybe, just maybe, it was because it was him?

His fingers ghosted along those dangerous lips. Those lips that said the most frightening things, that felt so addicting, and had him staring for much longer than he had intended.

But finally, finally, it was time to stop this.

‘I must be crazy,’ Izaya chastised himself.

Slowly withdrawing his hand and replacing the glove, Izaya stood back up, blushing. He looked away, crossing his arms as he attempted to calm himself. Letting out a trembling breath, he closed his eyes briefly before deciding to continue onward.

He picked up Shizu-chan off the ground and found a position for him that would allow Izaya to carry him on his back. Weight wasn’t a problem for his vampiric strength, it was just an issue of finding the best way to carry him for an unknown amount of time. Izaya held him at the legs, Shizuo’s weight pressing against him from behind. Piggy-back was really the only way it was going to work. That finally done, Izaya set off down the tunnels once more. They’d find the Nosferatu safely, Shizu-chan would wake up, and he’d get this mission over with.

After all, this wasn’t exactly the time or place for revelatory thoughts and emotions.

And yet...it was happening anyway.

Shizuo’s head was resting on Izaya’s shoulder, and he could feel Shizuo’s chest pressing against his back ever presently.

Izaya frowned. He’d always been able to stop this, but now...

Oh, he’d known for some time now. For years. But there was a difference between knowing and knowing. A difference between falling, and falling for so long that he’d splattered on the ground without even noticing. A difference between pushing it to the back of his mind constantly, and...letting it come to the front and acknowledging it.

Falling to that place. That dangerous, horrifying place.

The same place that Shizuo was apparently in. The place that Izaya really had been in all along but had had covered his eyes and plugged his ears to.

“I love you...and don’t you forget it, Izaya.”

“I’ll wait...”

“I am yours.”

“Forever.”
Izaya frowned, Shizu-chan’s head was starting to make itself comfortable against his neck. What timing he had…as usual. Izaya tightened his grip on him. He was able to keep walking, only automatically like a machine.

Maybe he couldn’t say it before, even to himself.

Maybe he’d never be able to say it out loud, to tell anyone at all.

But in his own head…

In his own private space…

“I won’t break you.”

“I’ll always be here for you.”

“…sure, anytime.”

“What I want from you? …everything.”

At least to himself, he could admit it. To himself, he could say it.

“So…do you have an answer for me?”

Izaya took a breath and thought to himself resolutely.

‘I do…I do now, Shizu-chan.’

There was a final twisting of the tunnel he’d found himself travelling down, and he came out into a large open cave, a wooden bridge travelling across what looked like a lake. The other side was another system of tunnels with junk and lit up signs strewn about.

Izaya crossed the rickety-looking bridge, Shizu-chan, of course, in tow.

‘It’s true, I…really do,’ he thought to himself.

‘I love him.’

Izaya smiled…there was a sense of relief washing over him.

‘I love him…Shizu-chan…my Shizuo.’

He paused for a moment, in a bit of awe that he was coming to terms with this…where he was, of all places.

‘I’m in love with…with Shizuo.’

His chest was about ready to combust, but Izaya was smiling so wide now, he thought his cheeks might fall off.

Ah, but it would be ever the task to admit it out loud, let to alone to anyone. Likely to never happen. Whoever would have thought things would come to this?

Still, he couldn’t help that beaming smile. The relief surrounding him, and the sheer happiness had him start skipping along the bridge. Humming to himself, he kept moving across what he was hoping was a normal lake of normal water.
Reaching the other side, Izaya stopped to look at the area before proceeding. This area of tunnels were man-made, but not so...precisely made. More like carved out by some kind of beast; they twisted and turned and were made entirely out of rock and Earth. More random stuff and even lit Christmas lights were decorating(?) the tunnels.

Making his way through the tunnels took some time. He seemed to have gone in circles once or twice and the weird, creepy laughter that he could hear now and again wasn’t really welcome. Not at all. Though, it did seem to indicate that he was definitely in the right place.

Besides, it gave him some time to compose himself.

He emerged into an area that was much wider, and saw, interestingly, some wooden doors with lights surrounding them embedded into the sides of what Izaya decided passed for a hallway. They even seemed to have mailboxes next to them.

There was one door, however, that was open a bit. The Christmas lights surrounding it were yellow. There were the tell-tale clacking sounds of typing coming from the room, and someone’s nasally low voice was coming from inside. Aside from that, only the sounds of dripping water surrounded Izaya. An occasional chortle sounded from within as though the person were greatly amused by something. Listening closely, Izaya could tell the person also seemed to be talking to themselves softly.

Izaya peeked in to see a Nosferatu standing at a computer terminal, with multiple monitors. There was a chair behind the man, but he seemed to have decided to stand instead. From where Izaya was standing, this Nosferatu didn’t seem any stranger looking than Bertram had been. Honestly the weirdest thing was that he seemed to be wearing a thick black choker; Izaya judged the guy’s sense of fashion more than his looks. Everyone had their thing though, he supposed.

In any case, that hardly mattered. He had, apparently, found the Nosferatu. Now to make sure Shizu-chan was taken care of by someone competent. Then, he could find Gary.

Izaya knocked on the door, already halfway into the room anyway. The Nosferatu let out a grunt of vague acknowledgment and lifted a hand, waving Izaya inside without looking over.

“Come in, gimme a second.”

Izaya did just that, closing the door behind him, and standing near what seemed to be a bed. Looking around the room, there wasn’t much in there. It was basically a literal cave, after all. But aside from the bed and computers, there were a couple of chairs, some electric cords running through the place, allowing the running of a mini-fridge and the light of a couple of lamps. Otherwise, there wasn’t much to look at.

“Go ahead and sit wherever.”

There was really only the bed to sit on. Why not? Izaya had a seat there, just in case this Nosferatu changed his mind and decided to sit in the computer chair.

He was right. A few minutes later, the guy turned around, his yellow eyes glowing in the semi-dark a little. He sat in the small swivel computer chair and leaned back in it. Smiling, he spoke.

“So, you made it here in one piece, huh?”

Izaya had figured he might be expected, but this guy was just a random Nosferatu, wasn’t he? Or was he Gary?

Izaya nodded in response, unsure how else he should at this point. He had just been through a fair
number of things, after all. It wasn’t his fault he was a little tired.

The Nosferatu just grinned.

“I’m Mitnick. And you must be Izaya, right?”

“I am…and I was expected, it seems.”

“Right you are,” Mitnick didn’t drop his amused look. He simply gestured behind him, pushing himself on the chair away from the monitors. Pushing a few keys, the various monitors each took turns displaying the expansive cave system Izaya had just come from.

“I was indeed watching you out there,” Mitnick crossed his arms. “When it comes to information, we Nosferatu are the ones you want to come to,” he explained before gesturing to Shizuo, who was still draped across Izaya’s back. “Of course, Zen here- or Shizuo, that is, is coming up real well in that arena.”

Izaya frowned. Shizuo had said before at the club something about watching him…even in Tokyo. Had this Mitnick helped him?

“You must be the friend, then, that he was talking about,” Izaya replied. “The one who helped him learn these skills?”

“I’m glad the two of you have had some time to chat, then,” Mitnick grinned again.

It was a little uncomfortable, Izaya reflected, this stranger knowing things about him like this. Really, it was a little ironic, he supposed. But he’d have to push it aside for more important matters.

“It’s my understanding that you’re like us, though,” Mitnick replied. “An info broker, right? A shame you’re a Toreador; we could always use an addition to our ranks with one such as yourself.”

Izaya grinned. “Well I don’t hold any particular clan loyalties…though I’m always interested in allies.”

It was true, and Izaya saw no reason to obfuscate that intention from Mitnick. Besides, he was apparently close with Shizu-chan. If, as he’d heard before, this group of Nosferatu were as skilled with information as he was, if not more so, they’d be not only valuable, but a good idea to stick close to. Hell, maybe even he could learn a thing or two from them if they were even skilled with international info gathering.

Mitnick chuckled.

“Well I wouldn’t refuse that,” he reached out towards Izaya for a handshake, and Izaya took it.

“Go ahead and lay Shizuo out on the bed, he’ll still be out for a while, no doubt,” Mitnick started. “I’ve got some blood packs here; he needs it.” Mitnick stood and walked to the mini-fridge, pulling out a few packs. “You could use one too, ya know.”

Izaya reflected on that. He was probably right. Between the fighting and the amount of time that’d passed…Izaya set aside one of the bags that Mitnick handed him for himself. Mitnick sat back down.

“Make sure you have one first, you’ll feel better.”

Izaya did just that, drinking one down quickly. It was still strange to him in a way that blood could be so comforting to drink. Never in his old life would he had ever thought his continued existence
would include drinking blood and that it would not be just tolerable but good. Usually, anyway.

“Now, just open a pack, and hold it at his mouth. He should drink it on his own without needing to wake up.”

Izaya raised a brow. Curious. Was that due to some kind of instinct?

True to Mitnick’s words, that was exactly what happened: Izaya held the bag there, and Shizuo drank. Slowly, but surely. It wasn’t too long, however, until another bag was needed.

“About three of those should do the trick for him.”

And that was how Izaya found himself feeding his Shizu-chan.

He could add that to his list of things that were exceedingly bizarre.

Once that was finished, Izaya noticed his own self having recovered remarkably well just from one bag.

Mitnick took the time to explain that Gary had them all laying low while the whole thing with the sarcophagus and LaCroix blew over. Following this, he gave Izaya directions to finding Gary from there.

Shizuo rolled onto his side, facing him and Mitnick now.

Maybe he’d be stirring soon? They didn’t have all that long until daylight either, if his sense of time was still on the mark.

A soft question. “So…you really love him, don’t you?”

Izaya stiffened up, his body freezing in place.

“I’m right, aren’t I?”

Izaya stood up, none too slowly.

“I’m afraid I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he spoke, coldly, looking toward the door as if to literally escape the question.

“Now, now, no need for that,” Mitnick responded. “I saw you both down there, don’t forget.”

Izayas head whipped back to Mitnick, yet what he saw stopped him. Mitnick was smiling. Not just any smile, however. It was a particularly joyful one.

Mitnick was serious about this.

“I saw your face down there, you know.”

Izaya looked away. He just…couldn’t.

More gently than he’d intended, Izaya finally spoke again as he walked to the door, facing the exit.

“Take it as you will…I can’t control your thoughts.”

“Then I’ll take it as a ‘yes’,” Mitnick was quick to reply.

Izaya rested his hand on the doorknob, hesitating. “Do as you like,” came out as a whisper.
He opened the door.

“It was…a pleasure, Mitnick. Let us chat again soon.”

“I’ll e-mail you then, alright?”

He hadn’t checked that thing in quite some time.

“Then…Shizuo?” Izaya asked. “You’ll take care of him for me?” he said softly, looking back toward him.

Mitnick smiled again, nodding.

“I swear I will.”

Izaya watched his face just for a moment…hesitating to leave. But there was nothing for it.

He left, with his heart behind him.

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Mitnick swiveled back around in his chair and faced Shizuo, still laying there on the bed.

“Did’ja hear that, Shizuo?” he asked with a smirk.

Shizuo opened his eyes.

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Izaya made his way further down the hall, ignoring some of the other doors on either side, until he came across a short bridge over smoky water. This led to one more winding cave, before a large pair of green doors waited before him.

It wasn’t as though it hadn’t hurt, leaving Shizuo there. But Shizuo needed his rest to recover after that whole ordeal. He was safe here, it seemed. Apparently, Shizuo knew these Nosferatu pretty well from what he could gather.

Still, he was tempted to turn right around just to check on him…

No. He had a task to finish. What was he thinking?

Izaya frowned. He was the silver-tongued informant of Tokyo, not this…love-sick fool…wasn’t he?

Right?

He waited a bit before proceeding through the doors. He needed to steel himself. Try to forget about these…emotions of his.

Useless. That’s all they were.

But…it was part of him, wasn’t it…? Izaya hung his head. He would have to just accept that without
reservation. It’s not as though he had to go around announcing it or anything. It wasn’t anyone else’s business anyway.

Yeah…that was right. Izaya smirked and went through the doors.

Walking straight ahead was a large carved out room of the cave, the other side shrouded in darkness, so he couldn’t see that side as easily. There were a few framed things on the walls, what appeared to be an entire bar to the left, and in the center was a clothed table set up with chairs and a couple of skeletons sitting at it with lit candles what looked like an entire dinner complete with drinks sitting on top with lit candles.

Suddenly, there was a voice sounding out all around him. It had a silky yet somehow rasping quality to it, as though it were hissing at him.

“By the clack-smack cracking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes. I don’t remember seeing you on the guest list for this dinner party…we’re having a wrap party for The Misfits about forty years late. Cast and crew only, boss.”

Boss, huh? It was a lot better than cupcake and the various other things he’d been called, even if it didn’t really make sense.

This had to be Gary though. First things first.

“Where are you?”

“Maybe I’m in your head…uh, oh…you might’ve picked up one of those psychoses so common to new Kindred.”

Izaya looked around. That was obviously a lie. Why was everything seemingly made to be difficult for him? Well. It seemed he’d have to be patient.

“I just need to talk with you.”

“We are talking. But you aren’t listening, boss.”

A game, was it?

“I don’t much care for games like this.”

Not anymore, anyway. Especially when he was the one in this position.

“And I don’t much care for when the rain seeps into my chamber…but to stop the rain you’d have to kill all the clouds. And I don’t much care for murder.”

Hm. It was entirely possible too that this was someone else just trying to fuck with him.

“Who are you?”

“Maybe I’m a ghost,” the voice continued. “Oh c’mon. Don’t tell me you just stumbled down here. What I need to know is why you’re here.”

Izaya stared up at the flame-lit chandelier that was somehow hanging from the cave ceiling.

The voice began talking from different directions.

“I’m over here, boss! Or wait, maybe I’m over here! Or maybe…I’m behind you, with a hatchet in
my hand!”

Now he was starting to get annoyed.

“…Or did you ever stop to think…that your fear, given a voice…would sound…like…this…”

Izaya frowned. How this Gary sure did like to go on.

“What do you want?”

“I want to stick your lovely face in a piranha tank; I want to apply an acid glaze to your perfect body; I want to throw your pocket mirror under a thresher and watch you fetch it. But I’m no butcher, boss. Are you?”

So…he was referring to Izaya being a Toreador. Sounded like a baiting game.

What did Izaya want? Well…the answer these days was simple. His Shizu-chan. He wouldn’t rise to such awful bait.

“I’m simply here for the sarcophagus.”

“You don’t say? Wake up, boss! Who do you think you’re dealing with? Why else would LaCroix send you on this snipe hunt? Oh, that’s right…I well know that you work for the prince.”

Interesting. Did Gary really think that? If that were true, maybe he was doing an even better job of appearing so than he thought.

“I’d simply like to know about the sarcophagus so that I may leave.”

A chuckle. “Shoulda got here sooner, boss. That lots been sold.”

Great. Fantastic.

Izaya looked at the floor, resigned.

“And who bought it?”

“Oh, but I like to discuss business face to face.”

“…Then, show yourself.”

“Are you sure, boss? You don’t want my image in your subconscious. It’s the stuff nightmares are made of.”

Izaya smirked. “Ah, but the suspense is killing me.”

“Be careful what you wish for, boss. You just might…get it.”

“Yeah~?”

“Boo.”

The voice had materialized behind him.

He turned around to see a Nosferatu…in a bartending outfit. The man was grey, with yellow eyes, pointed ears, and pointed face. There was not otherwise anything all that remarkable about if, if one asked Izaya.
Izaya blinked. “Gary, I presume?”

The man smiled.

“What, you don’t recognize me from the pictures? Gorgeous Gary Golden? Don’t tell me you missed Pirate Town or Tap Hotel. Little before your time, eh, boss?”

So, a former movie star?

“Well, those days are long past. Nowadays, it’s just Gary, indeed.”

Gary seemed to think he was particularly hideous. Izaya didn’t really think so. It seemed to him that the Nosferatu thought they were much uglier looking than they really were.

Izaya smiled at him.

“Delighted. So…where is the sarcophagus if it’s not here~?”

Gary gave him a once-over, as if viewing him for the first time.

“Hmm…you really are like he said.”

Izaya was confused. ‘He’? Did Gary mean Shizuo? Izaya kept quiet at that remark.

“Hm…but where, where oh, where did it go? That thing seems to get around more than Mae West,” Gary smirked. “Why, might I ask, should I give you that information?”

Izaya sighed. “I dunno, some guy in a tower told me to, I guess,” he stated, none too enthusiastic.

It did make Gary laugh, however.

“Well…I know where your prince’s prize is. There’s very little that doesn’t leak down into this place. Tell me, boss, you ever gone up against a Kuei-jin?”

This was a new term. It was definitely Eastern in origin, however, it sounded like…

“The Kuei-jin are vampires, but not like Kindred. Sometimes known as the vampires of the East. But they ain’t kin, boss…they’re just someone else that, if you ain’t being careful, might give you the Final Death.”

It was interesting that Izaya himself, Shizuo, and Kaz were not these Kuei-jin, he thought. …Then again, their sires were Western…that had to be the clincher.

“Alright, tell me more.”

“Even for old Gary, there ain’t much more to tell. You see, I sent an agent, Barabus, to snoop around Chinatown…do a little hacking, make a few contacts,” Gary responded.

Sure, that was work Izaya could relate to.

“But, you see, he hasn’t been calling lately, and it’s just breaking my heart…”

Ah, shit. Izaya knew where this was going.

“You up for a little trip to Chinatown? You’re in no danger there; but me – best you don’t mention my name there, boss. That’s the going rate for my info right now…you get our chum back from
Chinatown, I’ll give you what I need.”

At least this made sense. A favor for info. It was actually comforting in its familiarity.

Besides, it wasn’t like he was about to get the info any other way. Unless, of course, he could get the info from those who had personally moved the sarcophagus and sadly, he was lacking in that information.

“Alright, you’ve got yourself a deal, then.”

“You’ll need to go to the Golden Temple in Chinatown – it’s a piss poor copy of a real place…looks like it’d be more at home in a theme park. That eyesore’s where you’ll find the leader of the LA Kuei-jin. They call her Ming Xiao.”

Didn’t…sound…hard and yet…

“Sounds dangerous? No, this ain’t a suicide mission, boss. You’ll be more of a curiosity than a threat. Talk to Xiao, ask her where my boy is, and get him back. Once he’s safe, I’ll tell you everything you need to know about the sarcophagus.”

“And we aren’t….at war with the Kuei-jin?”

“Not that I know of. It’s like the eye of the hurricane right now. Don’t make those winds blow, boss.”

Great. Izaya wondered if this had anything to do with the man he’d fought at Foxy Boxes before…it sounded awfully connected to him. If that were true, then these Kuei-jin were definitely after territory. Just like the other sects. Beautiful.

And to think if Izaya were still human, he’d have no knowledge of this at all whatsoever. Simply incredible.

“Alright then. So long as you keep your end of the deal, we’re…golden.”

Gary laughed. Quite loudly, at that. It seemed like he was getting on Gary’s good side. At least, a little bit.

“Well of course. What kind of a monster so you take me for? There is a method to my madness, boss. There’s a payphone in Chinatown. I’ll call you with the info once Barabus is safe…until then, you’ll never know where I am…”

Gary disappeared back into the shadows.

“Miss me, boss?”

In fact, he actually kinda did. It was nice to talk to someone who made sense, odd as it seemed.

Luckily, there was more to the room than first met the eye. Further in the back was a large bookcase, a grandfather clock, and…a door. Well, unless Gary stopped him, Izaya would give that a try. There was no way he was meant to backtrack, right?

And he was right, Gary didn’t stop him.

Heading through the door, he came out into a tunnel that led upwards using ladders. After just a couple of minutes, he emerged out of a small door…that turned out to lead to the mausoleum in the Hollywood graveyard.
…It was that easy all along?

Was this what Shizuo meant when he said he’d take him right to Gary before? Probably.

Damn…maybe he should’ve just went with that.

But then…

‘I love him.’

Maybe not.

~

*

~

Shizuo and Mitnick finished listening in on Gary and Izaya’s conversation.

“There we have it,” said Mitnick.

Shizuo sighed.

He knew it would come to this, or at least something similar. As the one who’d stolen the sarcophagus from the museum in the first place, he was aware of the ultimate path of it as they had discussed.

Even so, he did not at all like how wrapped up Izaya was in the whole plot. All he could do was ensure Izaya’s ultimate safety. And so, he would do so. No matter what.

He sat there on Mitnick’s bed, preparing to make his next move. He’d have to try making it back home or at least back to the club. Kaz would probably be home, so he’d try to make it there, but that depended on the sun.

“What were you doing pushing him like that, anyway?”

“Pushing him about his feelings, you mean?” Mitnick clarified.

“Yeah.”

“You want to know, right? I’m curious too.”

It was true. Shizuo desperately wanted to know Izaya’s feelings towards him.

But at the same time…

“It’s…not our business, Mitnick.”

Mitnick smiled. It was just like Shizuo. So in love, he was.

“Not mine, sure, but you?”

Shizuo just looked away.

“Anyway, you heard him…I’m certain he does love you.”

But Shizuo couldn’t let himself believe it. It would be too good to be true.
He thanked Mitnick for his help and went to leave.

Mitnick just shook his head at the retreating back.

‘What a couple of fools.’

~
* ~

Izaya still had a little bit of time. But…not enough to make it back to his haven.

‘The best move then, would be to go see Issac.’

Doing so would allow him to have Issac call on Kaz, which should allow him to stay at the club again for the day.

Issac’s place was not far from the graveyard luckily, and he nearly ran there quickly.

Upon entering, Issac was alone. He also looked surprised to see him.

Izaya started. “King’s Way…there was a Tzimisce…notice, however, that I’ve used the past tense.”

Issac smiled, he seemed genuinely pleased.

“Exceptional!” he exclaimed. “Come back again tomorrow, I should have something for you then.”

A reward, huh? Sounded nice. And satisfying.

“Thank you, Issac…I do have a favor to ask of you, though.”

“Yes?”

“If you wouldn’t mind reaching out to that club again…I’m not going to be able to make it home before the sun, you see. Unless you know of any other acceptable lodgings in the area.”

Issac thought for a moment. “Well I don’t have any spare rooms here…and hotels will have windows that are likely to let light in,” he thought out loud. “I’ll go ahead and reach out to them, sure. Go ahead and head over now. You should be able to just walk right in to the place.”

Izaya smiled. Things were starting to go his way a little. “Thanks.”

“My pleasure. See you tomorrow.”

It took the rest of his precious time to reach the club. The sun would rise shortly.

Entering the club, he saw no sign of Kaz, or anyone else in fact. But what did it matter – he made it indoors to a secure place away from the sun. Looking back, it was possible that he could’ve asked Gary for somewhere to stay down in the caves, but…

He’d run the risk of having to stay near Shizu-chan and…he didn’t think he could handle that now.

He headed up the steps that led to the office and the area where he knew cots were set up for Kindred such as himself who needed the place to stay.

But he was truly shocked at what he saw.
One cot was set up in preparation for him, he assumed.

But there was, in fact, someone there.

Shizuo.

The blond Kindred looked up at him, smiling.

“Izaya,” he practically breathed the name. “You’re safe.” The relief was clear in his voice.

This was highly unanticipated…Shizu-chan had woken up at some point and beaten him here?

“…Shizu-chan.”

Shizuo got up from the cot and gestured at it.

“You are, of course, welcome to stay the day.”

Izaya just nodded. He didn’t know how to react or…how to interact anymore with Shizuo.

No matter what he could think of to say, nothing seemed right.

So, he refrained from speaking.

It didn’t matter anyway, Shizuo didn’t seem to need his words to seem perfectly fine.

“I’ll get you a blanket.” He left, and returned a few minutes later with a blanket, indeed.

But in those few moments, Izaya did decide on one thing.

“Where are you sleeping?” he asked.

“There’s a decently comfy chair in the office,” Shizuo explained, as though it were obvious.

Was there no end to protozoan’s stupidity?

Did he have to explain again that he’d get sick that way?

Izaya simply took the blanket and laid it out on himself…before he moved over on the cot a bit, caught Shizuo’s eyes…and patted the spot next to him.

“You can…stay here with me.”

He was quick to look away, trying to hide his blush.

He heard Shizuo sit on that side of the cot. A hand reached up to his face, playing with his hair.

“Are you sure?” that voice was low and soft.

Izaya merely nodded, and laid down on his side, facing away as he spread the blanket a little to allow Shizuo to have some of it.

Shizuo laid down under the blanket next to him, but the cot was rather small for two.

Izaya found himself entangled with that body next to him. The arms wrapped around his waist, the legs tangled together with his own, the chest was against his back, and those lips…kissed the top of his head.
“Love you, Izaya.”

“…I know.”

“I’ll tell you a secret,” that mouth was close to his ear. “We Kindred…don’t get sick.”

Izaya tensed a little in realization.

So before, he…

That Shizu-chan…he had…

He was squeezed in a hug from behind, as he was thinking in a little shock.

“Good night,” Shizuo whispered.

. . .

“…stupid Shizu-chan.”

He smiled.

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**Kuei-Jin (kway-jin)**

The Kuei-Jin, or Kindred of the East, are not truly vampires. They are a similar form of undead from Asia. The Kuei-Jin generally dislike European Kindred but are not necessarily antagonistic. The Kuei-jin seem to have little in common with their Western brethren. Rumors of demonic powers surround these Asian visitors, and their enigmatic behavior and foreign mindset leave many Western Kindred ill at ease.
Thanks for reading!! Please do leave a comment, it gives me liiiije~

No promises on the time of the next update. I'm gonna tryyy for monthly updates (I know, lame) but it really is a hardy try for me.

But yes, thanks as always for reading and I hope you liked it. ^^/
Shizuo was the one who’d slept a little too long this time.

Izaya had wriggled out of his grasp early in the night. Almost early enough to still be light out. To make sure, he’d accessed a manhole from one of the back rooms of the clubs and determined from the sewers that it was no longer light out and made his way to a cab from there.

He had a feeling Shizuo would probably catch up to him, likely knowing where he was going but…

‘At the same time, I can’t just…give in. I can’t just let him so firmly attach himself to me.’

Shizuo may have wooed him quite a bit and Izaya may have admitted his feelings but he was still his own person. Still the sly, clever, and daring informant that he used to be just weeks ago. It didn’t matter that he’d finally allowed himself to fall in love.

Somehow, he still felt as though he were beguiled by Shizuo in some way. Like it was all too convenient. It was like Shizuo had swooped right in and stolen Izaya away from himself. His time as a Kindred was a whirlwind to say the least. And Izaya had a feeling the climax was yet to come.

As such, his thoughts and feelings were still in a state of confusion. Should he even allow Shizuo to come so close? Wouldn’t he just lose him? Doubtless, Shizuo would just be destroyed by being too close to him. Naturally, something horrible would happen and the peace-loving, gentle-smirking, and supportive and loving Shizuo would be…he’d be…

…well. That was why he’d snuck out of the club. Maybe Shizuo didn’t know where he was.

But ah, here was a place he hadn’t explored in his mortal life, Chinatown. The cab had arrived. Izaya paid his fare and stepped out, looking around for anyone nearby. Especially any bat-wielding
It seemed to be a rather small district within the city of Los Angeles proper. The area had small shops and building interspersed between pagoda-like buildings and your typical Western-style buildings. Though the most obvious and noticeable structure was a large fake golden temple at the end of the main street. He could smell Asian street food, hear the clucking of chickens and windchimes and saw very few people on the street. There was an older man who looked as though he was reading fortunes nearby, and a hostess to a restaurant standing outside. Aside from that, the district seemed oddly dispirited in general.

Izaya did manage to lure a woman who appeared to be a prostitute into an alley though for breakfast. After his drink, the woman wobbled there, out of it, as he walked back onto the main road, having another look around. There was a lot of red coloring to some of the building’s rooftops and some red neon here and there. But that golden temple would’ve been the place Gary mentioned. It was time to meet Ming Xiao.

Approaching the place, it was a little bigger than it looked from farther off. As was natural. Still, it seemed a little bigger than he’d expected. Going through the main gate, he found a smaller pavilion on the other side of a short bridge that crossed a river snaking through the outdoor area. It seemed to be a rather large yard that did have other doors to separate buildings. But the pathway seemed to go straight ahead, so he went into the smaller pavilion.

The inside was not intricate, but a simple-styled Eastern style room in which a woman with light make-up and long black hair pulled back with clips stood. She looked almost stern, had a green long dress on to match her eyes, and spoke immediately as he Izaya approached her.

“Welcome, Kindred. And thank you for respecting our traditions by announcing your presence in our domain. I am Ming Xiao, High Priestess to the people of Chinatown. Can I get you anything? Tea, perhaps?”

Now that was somewhat perplexing. But Izaya only let it show in the form of a raised brow. Like many otherworldly beings seemed to do, she’d likely end up answering his question and talked with him at length. How anybody in this hidden world got away with keeping any secret, Izaya had no idea.

And indeed, Ming Xiao, at his expression, continued talking.

“We are called the Kuei-jin, though you may know us as ‘Eastern vampires’. It is a grave misnomer, I can assure you,” she spoke, with a clear air of superiority.

Izaya gave her his name and promptly declined her offer for tea.

“I forgot that your kind is no longer able to partake of mortal consumables,” was her response.

So apparently the Kuei-jin could not only drink tea but also eat other human foods. Izaya could admit he missed his fatty tuna.

“What are you in charge here?”

“You may think of me as the Baron of Chinatown, to borrow from the coarse, Cainite language.” Oh yes, the sense of superiority was not at all hidden. “We are supernatural; though that does not mean we are Caine’s children. We are beings returned through the Second Breath for a purpose. We undergo a spiritual awakening, not some lowly blood ritual meant to spread a despicable curse.”

Izaya nodded in understanding. Considering his intelligence, he could connect the dots easily
enough. That didn’t stop Ming Xiao from continuing, however.

“You an I share superficial similarities; Kuei-jin do feed on essences that can be found in blood, yes…but as we refine our existence, rarely are we lowered to consume the bodily fluids of others. Most of us are also banished from the realm of the sun. Although we suffer rot instead of burning, the day’s light is no more kind to our existence.”

Very curious.

“So as a mortal, you can choose to undergo this…transformation?”

“No, we do not choose, but events of our lives can awaken dark spiritual energies. We are not born of the whims of another as the Kindred are.”

It sounded similar enough to Izaya.

“Each of us is reborn with a purpose they must find. Once their path is evident, they must seek to fulfil it, even if it takes an eternity.”

Well…that was about enough for Izaya. Time for the reason he was here.

“Have you heard of the Ankaran Sarcophagus?”

“Of course. The entire city is alight with the news of its arrival and speculation about one of your ancient vampire grandfathers, and his evil apocalyptic plot.”

So, she didn’t believe in the rumors, or so she was implying. “Are you looking for it?”

“We seek it, of course. I have two of my best agents looking; it could be a powerful bargaining tool.”

Of course. So…there wasn’t about to be a lead there.

“I’m looking for a Nosferatu agent.”

“So…the great Nosferatu have lost an agent, have they? It was not by my hand, if that’s what they think.”

She was a tricky one; Izaya couldn’t tell if she was honest here or not. He could tell she had been up until now, however, at this juncture…he wasn’t sure.

“Perhaps you should speak with Wong Ho about this. He owns the Red Dragon restaurant. He is a prominent businessman, who has garnered much respect among his people. If something is amiss in Chinatown, he may know how to help you.”

More run-around, huh? What else was new.

“I’ll head there, then.”

“I grant you permission to operate in the Kuei-jin domain…for now. May you find your path, Kindred.”

Izaya left.

Immediately when he returned to the main street, a few people were running across it, with someone on one of their shoulders. They escaped from sight, but Izaya did notice that they’d come from the Red Dragon.
He didn’t know the situation with the supposed abductee to go running after the people. Naturally, he’d do what he did best and that was get information. Not that he’d had any trouble with that at all (at least one person who’d been so forthcoming with him was bound to pay for it). Even so, now would be the time to head over and see what was going on?

~

Of course he’d left.

Shizuo ran a hand through his hair. It was, admittedly, a little frustrating that Izaya kept running. But, he’d expected this. Even so, it was frustrating because he couldn’t help but worry for Izaya. Their very existence was inherently dangerous and even though Izaya had lived a dangerous life prior, this was another thing entirely.

Still…if anyone could pull off the tasks LaCroix had assigned, it was Izaya. Regardless, even Shizuo knew the Kuei-jin were dangerous. Shizuo had thought that he might be able to make allies there are one point in time but it was not to be. Chinatown itself was safe enough for the time being but one false move, and…

Still. Shizuo had to respect Izaya’s boundaries. He wanted to venture and fight by his side, but Izaya had always had his independent streak. He had confidants, maybe allies, but rarely friends.

Still…he hated being apart from him. Though they’d been reunited after years, it hurt just as much to be away from Izaya now. It was a good thing he didn’t need to breathe anymore; it’d probably be too painful.

Perhaps he’d go see Mitnick. Or watch over Izaya. Or both.

~

Upon entering the restaurant, the hostess explained that the lounge was still open, though dinner service was over, though he wasn’t sure if she was talking to him, or to the person over the phone she was holding. She had a bit of a shrill voice, and as she opened the elevator for him once he explained who he was here to see, he could still hear her talking as the elevator when up.

“Hello?”

“Hey, baby.”

“No, I’m still at work.”

“I dunno, why WOULD I want to rush home right away?”

“…yeah? I do like that. What else?”

“With a WHAT??”

“Ohhhhh…you’re in the kitchen. Yeah, they were on sale, so I bought some.”

“You do too like zucchini!”
And that was everything Izaya heard. Only thing was that he still wasn’t sure of what he heard exactly.

Making his way onto the second floor, there appeared to be a variety of rooms behind large doors and also screen doors. No one appeared to about around, so Izaya used his Auspex ability to see through the walls and find Wong Ho in the messily-designed second floor. There he was, in one of the center offices.

Heading inside, Izaya was barely able to introduce himself before Wong Ho frantically spoke.

“They took her!”

Best to figure out what was happening.

“ Took who?”

“Kiki, my daughter. They grabbed her. They’d called and said Wong Ho has meddled with the Tong for the last time!”

Ah, so that was the ruckus outside earlier. Maybe they would work out a deal.

“Well…you see, I was sent here by Ming Xiao.”

“Ming Xiao? Oh, of course. Please forgive me, but as you can see I am in a most terrible situation. I am Wong Ho, owner of the Red Dragon. Again, I apologize for my inconsiderate behavior.”

“That’s fine. What’s going on here?”

“The Tong…a local street gang here in Chinatown just broke into my restaurant and kidnapped my daughter at gunpoint. The Tong grow bolder every day, and now they have my Kiki!”

Izaya thought for just a moment. Wong Ho seemed the decent sort, and from what he could tell, likely a lot of connections. Doing him an easy favor would probably be a good idea.

But…the Tong, huh? They hadn’t flown under Izaya’s radar in the past. That was a group that the Awakusu-kai had of course had their eyes on in the Los Angeles area. Of course, they paid little heed to them; they weren’t intending to expand to Chinatown, at least not for some time. Besides, the Tong were a minor threat.

“I could go get her, if you know where they are.”

“No…the Tong have many-“

The phone rang, and Wong Ho picked it up.

“Please excuse me a moment.”

Izaya waited as Wong Ho spoke in rapid Chinese over the phone. But he sounded…happy? Finally, he hung up.

“That was…someone who owed me an old debt. It has been repaid; I know where the Tong are keeping my daughter.”

“Tell me where, and I’ll get her for you.”

It was clear that Wong Ho care about favors and indebtedness. This could be most useful.
“Kiki is being held at the Lotus Blossom, a massage parlor here in Chinatown. If you bring her back to me, I will help you in any way that I can.”

“No problem,” Izaya grinned. This sounded like it’d be…cathartic.

“Thank you. I shall wait here until you return. Strike fast; the Tong will not be expecting anyone so soon. Good luck, my friend.”

Izaya boarded the elevator once more after leaving the office and walked past the apparently zucchini-loving hostess and out of the establishment.

~

“I’m serious, Ze-Shizuo, why don’t you just follow him if you’re this hung up about it?”

Mitnick seemed to be getting frustrated with him. Understandable, all things considered. Shizuo did always have this hang up with Izaya and Mitnick knew it.

“I can’t just…stalk him…all the time.”

Shizuo had to admit to having followed Izaya around before so he couldn’t just deny the idea outright. Even so, he had his convictions. It was true that he couldn’t just force Izaya to put up with him all of the time. He was still uncertain of Izaya’s feelings, after all. And even if he did, somehow, love him back, Shizuo couldn’t force anything on him.

“I don’t see why not, it hasn’t stopped you much before.”

“Just because I love him, that doesn’t make him my property…not like that.”

“But what if he finds someone else?”

Shizuo smiled and looked at Mitnick as the two of them sat there. “Even if that happens, I’ll be there for him until the end, whenever he needs me.”

Mitnick let out a slow whistle.

“You know how pathetic that sounds, yeah?”

Shizuo chuckled. “I know. But it’s the truth,” he smiled again. “If anything happens to him, I’ll take down anyone in my way from helping him or fixing anything that’s wrong.” His smile turned dark. “No matter who is in his way, they’ll go down.”

“I wish I could understand all of this feelings shit so I could help ya out, Shizuo, but I just don’t get it.”

“You don’t have to, Mitnick, you’re helping me just fine.”

“Well…you know you have our support, whatever you need.”

“Of course. Thanks.”

After a moment, Mitnick prodded again. “You know there’s that gang in Chinatown, right? What if
he gets mixed up with them or he gets on their bad side?”

Shizuo laughed heartily. Mitnick just raised a confused eyebrow in response.

“Izaya used to run with the yakuza in Tokyo…that would be cake for him.”

~

It was cake for him.

The Tong were weaklings, even for a human gang. Of course, he knew his own abilities were above par…he even knew he was growing quickly and highly especially for a Fledgling but…still, these Kine were pathetic. He'd had a feeling based on his info from his own Kine days but…they just shot at him wildly and then looked so surprised when he got them easily and quickly with his knives. Of course he could get them, they were lousy shots. How did they not realize that? Pathetic.

Meanwhile, several parlor girls had escaped the establishment and Izaya knew that meant he didn’t have too much time to find the girl. He busted through a locked door on the second floor which seemed to be a proper bedroom…weirdly. But locked in the closet came a screeching voice.

“You asshole! I can’t…I can’t breathe in here!”

Izaya somehow managed to refrain from rolling his eyes. He was in quite the mood today. “That’s why I’m letting you out.”

“What? Yeah. Who are you? You’re not with the Tong.”

“No, I’m not.” Why was this taking so long?

“Didn’t I just say that? You may not be with the Tong, but you seem to be as smart as they are.”

This time, Izaya did roll his eyes. “I’m here on a favor from your Father.”

“Oh, I’m sooo impressed. What? Like, you want me to thank you, or something? In your dreams, asshole.”

Izaya merely smirked.

“I don’t HAVE to let you out, you know. I don’t need to do this. I could just leave you in there until you turn blue in the face and suffocate to death…did you know that suffocation is quite unpleasant? Would you like to know, in every minute detail, the things your body experiences during those moments?”

They really didn’t have the time to waste on this, and she was being a pain in the ass.

“O-ok, ok! Just…take me home, alright?”

Izaya broke open the closet, and the two of them left.

Finally.

Kiki ran ahead once they were outside. A good idea, since police were probably going to show up
soon enough. Izaya took some alleyways back to the restaurant.

Going up the elevator, the hostess was…still on the phone.

“Hey, Andrea.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“No he’s not…”

“No he’s NOT.”

“No he is NOT!”

“Uh, hold on Andrea, I’ve got another call.”

“Hey Serena, did you hear about Joe and-“

“Yes he is.”

“Yeah, he is!”

“I was just on the phone with Andrea, and I was like ‘No he’s NOT!’, YES HE IS!”

Weird. Again.

Apparently, this Joe was…something. And that was all he could gather.

But more importantly…

The elevator opened, and Izaya walked right passed Kiki to where Wong Ho was.

“Ah! Welcome, my friend! I owe you a debt of gratitude!”

As he thought.

“You have returned to me my greatest treasure. Kiki told me that you rescued her. You are a man of
great courage and honor. Thank you!”

“It’s not a problem at all. Have you found out why they took her?”

“No, but I fear it may run deeper than the Tong.”

Izaya frowned. “How so?”

“For a long time, I have been trying to clean up Chinatown. It was a difficult job, but the community
came together and we started to take our streets back from criminals like that Tong. Businesses
reopened, families moved back into their homes.”

“So what happened?”

“I thought that the Tong were almost gone, but then something happened. Tehir numbers began to
grow and suddenly they had a lot of money to buy weapons. With them followed the drugs and the
violence. It is almost worse now than before.”

“Who do you suppose would be backrolling them?”
“I do not know…but everything seemed to change as soon as, uh…I’m sorry…I have said too much.”

Oh, that was not going to fly.

“Come now…we’re friends, are we not, Wong Ho?”

“Well…things seemed to change as soon as Ming Xiao arrived and reopened the Temple of Golden Virtue. That was three years ago. I do not mean to insinuate that she has anything to do with the resurgence of the Tong. The two events merely seemed to coincide.”

…

That was quite interesting.

Izaya had an itch about this that was not going away. Ming Xiao seemed pleasant though a little impious, but was she a threat of any kind?

Oh, she played innocent and innocuous well. But not well enough. Not for him. Doubtless, Ming Xiao was behind this. But there was no way Wong Ho would accept that.

Indeed, he was going to have to be careful in Chinatown.

“I see,” he left it at that. “Now…I’m looking for a person.”

“And who is that?”

“His name is Barabus. He’s…a business associate.”

“Hmmm. What else can you tell me about him?”

“…he’s in surveillance technologies.”

“I see. I do not think I could find him for you. But I know someone who could. The man who told me where my daughter was being kept.”

Sounded good enough.

“His name is Zhao and he has many connections. He owns an import-export warehouse in Chinatown. Go and see him there, I will call ahead so he expects you.”

“That sounds great.”

This district seemed to be structured rather oddly. There was a sort of residential district behind either side of the main street but there were random businesses here and there within. That included a small warehouse that did have Zhao’s name largely printed on the side, so it hadn’t been very hard to find.

Inside, there was an office up the only set of stairs. The rest was obviously warehouse storage. Going up to the office and entering, the man standing there was facing away from Izaya. It was almost creepy as he spoke before Izaya could make any introduction.

“Wong Ho called. You’re looking for someone. Hmm…”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I don’t know where your friend is, but I do know that the Tong are involved. The leader of the
Tong, Johnny, he’ll know where they are.”

“And I’m sure Johnny would be…happy to see me?”

“He’s at Glaze; it’s his club. You’ll need a password to enter. It’s 725. There will be Tong everywhere, but his office is upstairs.”

“…why are you helping me?” It was a fair question. This seemed more convenient than what he usually had to go through, so it was odd.

“I am a man of my word and I owed a debt to Wong Ho. By paying that debt, I have made an enemy of the Tong, who I once belonged to.”

“So what will you do now?”

Before Zhao could answer, there was the sound of gunshots. Several people had come into the warehouse and were shooting and shouting up at the office. Zhao ducked beneath the windows, pulling out a gun himself.

“Zhao! We know it was you!”

“One a Tong, always a Tong, Zhao!”

“You know what happens to traitors!”

Zhao began shooting back, but there were far too many of them down below. Izaya decided he’d give a helping hand. After all, if these people were of the same group that were at the parlor, there was absolutely nothing to worry about.

And, he was right. It was child’s play to take them out.

Strangely, it never bothered him anymore to take human lives. That is, at least, if they’re shooting at him. Otherwise, they subject was a bit more complex. Nonetheless, when being so threatened like this, he had no issues defending himself.

He left Zhao to clean up his own mess and headed out to where he thought he’d seen the club. Indeed, the place wasn’t hard to find. He went down some winding roads, headed toward the loud music he could hear with his sharp hearing. And there it was, a place with…a passcode reader next to the door. What a weirdly-run establishment it would have to be.

There was a man immediately standing inside the doorway, next to a set of stairs…which Izaya was all too intent on climbing. But this guard had no interest in letting him by.

“No one allowed upstairs.”

“I must speak with Johnny.”

“You don’t look like someone he needs to be talking to.”

“Oh, but he must…it’s merely a social call, you understand.”

“Fine. You cause Johnny shit and it’s your ass.”

“Agreed~”

Izaya then nearly pranced up the stairs.
He didn’t really agree with the statement as it was wholly inaccurate, but it hardly mattered. There were some people walking around on a square catwalk. There seems to be a door on the other side that he’d need to reach. Walking calmly between people like he belonged, he made his way over to the door before casually strolling through it. He’d prefer not to get his hands dirty yet again if he didn’t have to; it was annoying for the most part.

A man in an expensive suit and inappropriate visors for his face was standing there in front of a large television screen.

He was quick to shout at Izaya.

“Who the hell you think you are, asshole? You know who I am? You know where you are? You want to die?”

That was quick.

“No, thanks.”

“The fuck you want, huh?!? Who are you??”

“I’ve heard that you may know where to find someone I’m looking for, you see.”

Truly, Izaya missed his old methods of information gathering back in Shinjuku…but it just wasn’t going to work for him here…yet. It was moments like these that he missed it, however.

“Who told you that? Ho-how would you know about that? Who are you? Answer me!”

Well…whatever,

“You don’t know who you’re dealing with, Johnny.”

Izaya may have no had little intel on the guy from before his time as a Kindred but he had heard of him before. One does not simply operate and an info broker in any country and not become aware of the heads of gangs in the area.

Suddenly, the screen on the wall behind Johnny turned on, and there was a shadowy figure speaking.

“Don’t tell it a thing, Johnny. Shoot it!”

“You told me that guy was a nobody! Just what the hell did you get us involved in?” Johnny screamed.

“Shoot it. You’ll find out.”

Well. This was a turn of events.

And indeed, Izaya was shot right in the stomach quite immediately.

“W-What the fuck? I shot you! You’re dead!”

Izaya sighed. It stung a bit, but that was about it. It was merely annoying, and he was already healing well. What was more annoying, however, was the fact that he’d have to eliminate this guy now. He was not made aware of vampires, and the guy on screen would need to be found as well.

How troublesome these humans were.
“That’s exactly it, Johnny…it IS dead. It’s quite difficult to kill something that’s already dead. And I assure you, it’s not wearing a vest, the bullet entered cleanly through the lower abdomen.”

At this point, Izaya saw no point in lying – the man on screen was very clearly aware of what he was. Exactly how, Izaya didn’t know.

‘But what an interesting one…I’ll have to find him. Doubtless, he has Barabus anyway. Now then…’

The man on screen was still talking.

“Normally, a bullet of that caliber would likely ricochet and tear up the small intestine, but as you can see, it exited cleanly through the back with little external bleeding…the reason being: its internal organs have atrophied.”

Well, how rude.

“W-what the hell’s going on?? Wh-What are you?”

“Dispose of Johnny and we’ll discuss the issue regarding your missing comrade,” came the TV man’s voice.

Although Izaya didn’t wish to do as the man said, he’d already decided on it anyway. Especially since Johnny was shooting at him again. Very simply, he jumped on Johnny and drained him. He needed a meal again anyway.

“You had to kill him, didn’t you? It’s part of your code of survival – covering your tracks, so to speak. And before you attempt to deceive me, you should know I’m monitoring your heat signature…it’s room temperature.”

“And just who are you?”

“I also must protect my identity. You may call me The Mandarin. You are searching for one of your kind, I understand. I have him at my facility. Come to the Fu Syndicate building…we’ll discuss the terms of release.”

“Fine, I’ll be there tomorrow.” Last Izaya checked, the night would be fading soon.

“Ah, that’s right…the sun is your enemy. Fine, fine. I’ll look forward to tomorrow night’s meeting.”

What a dangerous individual he was dealing with. Most likely, anyway. He knew a lot, that was for certain.

But now…he needed to get home.

~

Shizuo hadn’t been able to keep still, so he did the only thing he could think of.

~
It hadn’t been super fun leaving the club unnoticed, but Izaya managed it. What was more, he noticed the Fu Syndicate building right by where a taxi was parked. At least it’d be easy to find tomorrow.

But when he made it back to his newer haven, there was something there that he hadn’t expected.

Well…he sort of half-expected it. It was a fifty-fifty chance that this would happen, he thought.

Shizuo was there, sleeping on his couch. He hadn’t expected the sleeping part.

Even so, it seemed Shizuo was waiting for him. Izaya hid a smile behind his hand. It was an adorable sight, after all. Shizuo was on his side, using his own arm as a pillow and his hair had already begun sticking out in weird ways. He had removed his socks, it seemed, as they were in a ball on the floor nearby.

Well, this just wouldn’t do.

It may be true that Kindred didn’t get sick, but Izaya didn’t care. He checked a couple of closets and found extra bedding. Pushing a pillow under Shizuo’s head, he then draped a blanket over him. Luckily, it was big enough to cover Shizuo’s feet too. Shizuo had shifted a little but otherwise hadn’t woken up.

Or so Izaya thought.

As he ran his hand through Shizuo’s hair, almost absent-mindedly, he didn’t notice a larger hand come up to cover his own.

“Eh?” came Izaya’s eloquent response.

Shizuo’s eyes were open and he was smiling that usual smile of his. If Izaya had any air to choke on, he surely would have.

“Good night, Izaya.”

Shizuo pressed a kiss onto Izaya’s hand.

~

There – he’d seen it again, Izaya’s smile. Just a little partially-hidden one, but it was there nonetheless. Shizuo looked forward to Izaya smiling brightly…just for him. He was certain such a time would come.

Izaya truly was sweeter than he seemed. At least, sometimes. Shizuo smiled at the thought. Someday, hopefully soon.

~
Sleep came to Izaya slowly and restlessly. It was always hard to sleep when Shizuo was nearby, after all. He turned over and pushed away all thoughts of small bed somehow still being too empty.

**Blood Hunt:**

The precept is simple: Those who break the laws are slain. A vampire who violates the traditions and brings the wrath of the elders on his head in hunted down and destroyed. All who hear the call are expected to participate and assist. The most common name for this action is the blood hunt.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaand thanks for reading as always! Comments are oh-so appreciated!! <3

Everyone take care~!
Liability

Chapter Notes

Yes! Back again so soon~!! And with a longer one than usual @___@ Truly amazing, people!

Well, as usual- I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izaya was quietly preparing to leave that evening. Luckily, once he’d finally gotten to sleep, it had been a fitful one. Gathering together some weapons together that he’d stashed away (with thanks to Fat Larry), he started putting them away on himself which wasn’t very difficult being that most of it was knives.

Heading downstairs, he saw Shizuo sleeping in a tangled mess of the blanket on the couch. He was as sprawled out as one could be on a couch and was snoring very lightly with his hair in a mess. He was turned on his side, and Izaya could even see a little bit of drool on his face.

‘So cute, Shizu-chan,’ he thought to himself. The sight really was not only cute, but rather exclusive. His heart fluttered; not many others would have the privilege of seeing this, he knew.

Izaya approached the sleeping Kindred, smiling without restraint. It was unlike him, but…he couldn’t help but quietly lean over Shizuo and place a kiss on his temple.

He wanted to say it.

‘I really want to say it, Shizuo, but…’

He’d paused, hovering over his sleeping love. He’d even opened his mouth for a moment.

However, in the end, he withdrew a light huff and made his way to the door before looking back briefly at the still sleeping Shizuo and then left through the door.

‘I love you…’

~

Shizuo’s hand made its way slowly upward to touch the burning spot where Izaya had kissed it. It was a little hard to believe but…Izaya had kissed him before, and yet…

And…it had felt like Izaya was going to say something right then. There had been a hitch of breath, a light exhale and then Izaya had gone.

But the feel of that touch, the light flow of air against his skin…it’d mean nothing if it weren’t Izaya but since it was Izaya…it meant everything.

Shizuo smiled and did nothing to try to control his heartbeat.
Really though…was Izaya going to say…?

No…

Couldn’t be.

~

Izaya stretched out a little bit exiting the taxi in front of the Fu Syndicate building.

‘Honestly, if you’re going to be up to no good, why would your sign be so flashy?’

It was bright blue, and practically lit up the whole street. If they were an above-board operation, they wouldn’t be doing much of anything at night at all so why all the lighting? Further, it was odd that there were actually pay phones stationed nearby, attached to the exterior wall.

In any case, he went up the cement steps and through the strangely unlocked doors. Well, he was expected, after all.

The interior was most marble and contained fake plants along with a very long reception desk. The room itself was wide and spacious. The polished floors reflected everything rather well.

To the left, the double doors opened up, seemingly on their own to reveal a conference room. It seemed to be an invitation.

‘If this isn’t an obvious trap, I don’t know what is.’

The sad thing was, Izaya knew he had to go through with it. Izaya entered, and saw a screen inside the room light up, revealing the so-called The Mandarin.

He had short white hair, and an unfortunate pair of red sunglasses on, complete with a black business suit.

“So glad you finally decided to show up. If you want to meet your comrade, walk through those doors.”

He pointed to the right, where there were another pair of doors.

Yeah right.

“How about you bring him out here, and then we’ll chat.”

“Subject will not enter the next area. This may be due to a theoretical sixth sense, or perhaps it is simply afraid,” apparently he was speaking to a sound recorder. “Are you stubborn by nature or instinct?”

Izaya smirked. “Those who have asked me similar questions have not enjoyed the result.”

“Subject is uncooperative…this may be a side effect of its condition, or a residual personality defect…step through the doors.”

‘You want stubborn?’ Izaya thought.

“No.”

“I assure you, your comrade is still alive. If you want him released, you’ll do as I say.”
Izaya frowned. There was no way the man himself would come out, he knew it already. If he were to retrieve Barabus, there was really no other choice.

Going through the doors, he was faced with a small, square room. The Mandarin’s voice sounded overhead.

“Good. I am told you are a rather resourceful individual. This should make you a most intriguing species.”

The floor was making its way toward an opened veiling, it seemed to actually be an elevator into a room above.

“You and your kind may play mortals for weaklings and fools, and that may be fitting for some, but you underestimate me.”

The floor stopped in place, in a larger room, barren of anything really save for a window that was clearly bulletproof with The Mandarin and another human standing behind it.

“Subject is male, appearance suggests mid to late twenties, true age unknown.”

Something was now being rapidly pumped into the room, some kind of gas, Izaya concluded. Lucky he didn’t need to breathe.

“As with the other, there are no vital signs…no heartbeat, no body heat – test chamber air sample is 97 percent carbon monoxide, normal respiration cannot take place.”

Well…it was true that his heart didn’t beat. Usually. And that he didn’t breathe. Usually.

The human didn’t need to know that. Not that it’d matter, Izaya would see him dead soon enough, he promised himself. This situation was simply unacceptable; he could not allow Kindred, let alone himself be treated this way. He expected it would only get worse until he got his chance but nevertheless, The Mandarin was correct that he was…resourceful. This human did not even deserve his words…he wouldn’t speak to him any longer.

“Subject is by all definition…clinically dead. Hello, in there!”

Izaya rolled his eyes.

Unphased, The Mandarin continued.

“I’m going to run some tests on you. I’m interested in how you work. Simply put, it’s my task to find the most efficient way to kill your kind.”

‘You wish.’

“Please give me everything you’ve got! Begin the experiment.”

The room lit up brightly, and Izaya squinted for just a moment. His sight was quite sensitive now after all.

“Test chamber has been filled with ultraviolet light, releasing moderate UV radiation.”

“Does that burn at all?”

Though Izaya disliked the idea of allowing an enemy to gather data it really couldn’t be helped for now.
“Subject does not exhibit any sign of pain with minimal physical discomfort,” he sounded almost interested in his words. It was a strange feeling, being treated as an animal.

“Shut down the lights. UV radiation does not produce the desired effects.”

The lights were turned back off.

“Please, proceed to the next chamber.”

A sliding door opened to the next room, which was filled with horizontal lasers. Some moving in patterns, others turning on and off and still others maintaining a constant stream of energy. Still there was a window and he was being viewed once again as The Mandarin and the other human had walked over to see him again.

“Your kind is resourceful. If you cooperate, I will give you a dog for your good behavior.”

What…?

“Your survival instinct borders on animalistic. I’m curious about your innate abilities.”

So he was to be lead through almost literal hoops like a dog at an animal show.

Great.

“I find my subjects prefer dog blood over the rats I normally give them. Let us see what you can do.”

Izaya frowned this was most…annoying.

“The walls are reinforced concrete, several feet thick; there is no other exit, believe me, it is my design.”

Quite the arrogant prick. But it hardly mattered.

Izaya smirked. Fine, he wanted a show? He’d get one.

This was actually something he could have pulled off back in the old days on the Tokyo streets.

Diving and dodging, it took almost no effort at all to pass by the laser beams.

‘Oh, please, do try harder.’

He made it through the other side, where a door slid open to a short hallway, turning to another door that slid open to reveal a room of spinning blades on tracks, moving back and forth.

“Only the most simple creatures can survive dismemberment. I am told you can regenerate parts of your body; I’d much like to observe this.”

There would a be a way to beat this, easily enough. At one end of the room was clearly the functioning machines of the blades. They were behind some bars, but that was no big deal.

He had stowed away a gun on his person, after all.

“I wonder, how many limbs can you lose before you cease to function?”

Izaya pulled out the gun and wound his way between the blades.

It was a little tricky, but he was able to, well enough, shoot between the bars at the mechanisms
which stopped the blades from spinning, and the machines returned to one side of the room.

“You’ve shown great resilience so far. Let’s see how you do against some live targets.”

The door to the next room opened, which ended up being a large room, even with an upper balcony.

“Sometimes myths are constructed around legitimate observations. Let us find out if there’s any truth in an old superstition.”

“Initiate Van Helsing experiment. Don’t disappoint me.”

There was a man in full hazmat garb, standing in the middle, holding…a cross.

As Izaya approached, the man ran immediately to the other side of the room. Despite his garb, he was visibly shaking. As bad as he felt for the poor thing, he’d have to be eliminated.

‘Protecting the Masquerade, huh.’

What a damn pain. And the poor soul probably didn’t know what was going on, even. A shame he couldn’t just turn him or something.

Though, it was interesting in a way to find out that just a punch to the head was enough. Still…an unfortunate human.

“Van Helsing hypothesis tests false.”

But not as unfortunate as The Mandarin would find himself.

How dare he bring in innocent and unknowing humans into this?

“Well, when God fails, put your faith in the gun…”

“Proceed, Commander.”

And that was how Izaya found himself surrounded from above with multiple humans pointing guns at him as they all ran to different spots.

“These men are veteran mercenaries.”

This would take some effort, surely. Even so, Izaya would not fail here.

“Refined incendiary rounds are promising, suggest field tests.”

There was a single ladder attached to one wall, where there wasn’t any barbed wire, unlike the rest of the ledge that led to the upper area. Foolishly, none of the men had stopped too close to it. Shots were starting to fire, but no big deal. They weren’t shotguns, at least.

Izaya faced one of the men, dragged him behind a pillar, and drained him as quickly as he could. This meant he now had the spot behind the pillar and the others would be unwilling to come to close without shooting.

But here would be their downfall.

“What is it doing?”

Keeping to the shadows, he could sneak without the humans noticing, even with partial lighting.
And that was how Izaya found himself victorious over the mercenaries. He was able to stab most of them from behind, and slowly but surely the others began panicking and couldn’t find him despite how easy that really should have been.

Izaya smirked. He wasn’t Izaya Orihara for nothing, after all.

He jumped down by the ladder, smirking at The Mandarin through the window who was frowning.

“This calls for a more…drastic approach. Continue to the next room…I’m very enthusiastic about this next test.”

In the next room, Izaya found large steel rods protruding from the ceiling. They emitted high voltage to the ground on occasion, always hitting the same four spots, though there was also water surrounding those spots on the floor too.

“Many regimes use electricity to torture information out of their captives. It would be useful to if this applies to your kind as well, or will the voltage have results similar to fire? Let’s find out.”

‘Let’s not.’

Though it didn’t matter, Izaya knew better. He stepped onto the floor, confident as anything, and took out his gun once again. Shooting the part attached at the ceiling, Izaya was able to disable the machines.

This was getting pitiful, really.

“You have demonstrated considerable mental and physical acumen. And I’m quite perplexed how something that should be dead can display such strong survival skills. Let’s begin the final test.”

Hopping up in through the next door, there was another short, connecting hallway. Before the final door opened, he heard The Mandarin’s voice again.

“Standby…run a check on the extinguishers one more time.”

“I’ve already determined fire is a weakness of your kind; I would like to know more about the psychological effect it has on you and how it may be exploited.”

Similar to the laser room, this room had fire shooting across it at random intervals but there were small gas containers there where the fire was shooting out of.

This was just pathetic, now. Really.

As easy as crushing a cell phone under foot, Izaya took at shot at one of those canisters from the distance of the small hallway….and the room exploded.

Peering around the frame of the sliding door, Izaya saw that the window had been blown out the human that was with The Mandarin before was shooting at him. Well, again, not a problem.

Izaya darted out, leapt up and through the window, and attacked with a trust knife. It was unfortunate, but attackers would be eliminated. Being that they knew what he was, it was simply a done deal.

He searched through the rest of the floor, but primarily only saw through windows all of the rooms he’d gone through. There was one door that came bursting open, The Mandarin emerging with a machine gun.
So no more talk then, huh? Though Izaya would have preferred to obtain some information on the man, lest there be too many more people who knew of Kindred, it seemed that wouldn’t be happening.

Darting to the side, and making his way toward the man, Izaya got in closer, bearing with a few shots and ended up…cutting the man open.

‘He deserves it,’ Izaya thought. ‘Experimenting, imprisonment…calling me It.’

“Hmph.”

Izaya searched the rapidly draining body before too much blood could get in the way. And there was a key on his person. It’d probably be useful.

Beyond the door and a rapidly cooling body were stairs into a large warehouse filled with boxes.

‘This better not be a Foxy Boxes thing all over again…’

But at the bottom was a cell up ahead in which Izaya could see someone inside. It was just an outline, but they were just standing there.

The door to it did need a key, and they key he had fit, luckily.

Opening the cell door, Izaya met Barabus. He looked similar to Gary, though his ears were pointier, and he seemed to have more shadows under his eyes.

“They get you too?”

“In a way, yes,” Izaya explained. “I was sent to find you.”

“Ugh, I’ve got no excuse. A Nosferatu getting caught by a bunch of humans…ugh…this is a new low.”

“Gary send me to find you, Barabus, yes? Let’s get out of here.”

“Yeah. We can’t go yet, though. There are servers here. We need to hack in and delete their research. Should be a mainframe on this floor.”

Ah, that made plenty of sense. The Mandarin had seemed rather well-versed in Kindred; doubtless there was information sitting there.

“Let’s check the computers,” Barbarus suggested.

“Leave it to me, then.”

“Alright. Anything on Kindred needs to get wiped. If anyone comes along and interferes, you leave ‘em to me…if I tore the lungs out of everyone in this place, it still wouldn’t feel like revenge.”

Izaya grinned. “I get the feeling.”

They left the cell and made their way out of the warehouse on that bottom floor. There were some guards that Barabus took out easily and they gained a kay card.

They entered a couple of rooms and quickly, Izaya gained access into several computers, wiping out everything he could find. It wasn’t too hard, but it hadn’t been simple either.
Still, with another guard down thanks to Barabus and the code obtained to the last door they needed to escape thanks to Izaya, they were back into the big reception room.

“That’s everything, I’m out of here,” called Barabus as he began leaving.

“Just call Gary right away, yeah?”

“Will do, and…thanks.”

With that, Barabus was out of the building through the double glass doors.

Izaya sighed. That hadn’t been as bad as he thought it might’ve been, though it had still been rather annoying. Still, he’d saved one of his own and protected them all from someone he deemed truly sick. That being the case, it was worth it.

Still, it would’ve been…nice if…

‘Shizu-chan is better off not following me around, don’t think about it.’

Shaking his head, Izaya left the building as well. Only for one of the nearby payphones to start ringing.

Was it worth answering? Well, only one way to find out.

Answering the phone, a familiar voice rang out.

“You done real well, bringin’ our boy back home. I got your info, hero.”

No time for fooling around.

“Yeah?”

“The same information I gave your prince, I also traded to the Giovanni for a bit of juicy gossip. You both had an equal opportunity to take it, they just had a bit more…initiative.”

“The Giovanni?”

“If you’re going to play Jyhad, you need to do your homework. Knowledge is power and power has a price. But seeing as how I’ve already got what I want from them, I’ll give you a freebie.”

Izaya hated a lecture. He specially hated a lecture on something he already knew damn well. But aside from making unnecessary enemies, Shizuo was in good with Gary and that among other reasons it’d be more beneficial to remain on Gary’s good side. Or at least a neutral side.

“And what of these Giovanni?”

“Oh, you’re going to love this – they’ve got skeletons in their closet…literally! Incest, organized crime, death cults – that’s the Giovanni. Spaghetti and corpses, boss.”

Sounded like something high-stakes. But according to Gary, this would finally be the place to get the Ankaran Sarchophagus. Finally, he could return to the Prince with it and with any luck, be free of following orders.

“Now, the Ankaran Sarcophagus isn’t the only occult item they’re hoarding. I hear they’ve got a collection that’d make Aleister Crowley come back from the dead – that is, assuming he isn’t already sitting on a shelf somewhere over there.”
“Fantastic…sounds like a real party,” Izaya smirked. “And where are these Giovanni located~?”

“Oh, I’ll tell you. And if you’re foolish enough to go there, well, don’t say I didn’t warn you, boss. They have a mansion in the city,” Gary explained further the precise location.

“They’re having a long reunion these nights. Anyone who isn’t a Giovanni shouldn’t get within fifty yards.”

“A reunion…so, plenty of people, hm?”

Gary burst out laughing.

“Am I the only one who saw this coming a million miles away?”

“Perhaps not,” Izaya answered.

“You get ‘em boss. You give ‘em one for Gary! If you should survive and ever need any information, come back and see me. I’m always here. And everywhere.”

Izaya smirked. What a good ally Gary would likely be.

“I’ll certainly remember that Gary, thanks.”

“Oh…and since you’re actually going there, I’ll let your boyfriend know.”

Izaya gripped the phone. Very funny.

“I’m certain that won’t be necessary.”

A chuckle from Gary came through the phone. “I notice you didn’t deny that particular term.”

Izaya hung up. Anything to stop his face from heating up.

He got what he needed after all, and it had nothing to do with what Gary said either. He was simply…busy.

Yes indeed. Though rescuing Barabus had taken some time, he could at least check out the Giovanni mansion. It wouldn’t be hard to grab a taxi to the location Gary had given him, and he didn’t see why he wouldn’t be able to get through this next task before the sun came up.

~

“You sent him there?!”

“Hahaha, I didn’t ‘send’ him anywhere. This was all his own choosing.”

Shizuo had received a call from Gary during work. Letting his employees and Kasuka take the reins, he stepped outside in the back to talk. If Gary was calling, there might be something wrong.

He didn’t imagine Izaya would be the topic, however.

“Fine. You let him go to the Giovanni’s? And alone, at that?”

Not that there would really be anyone who could suitably help him out, even Shizuo; he had the strength, sure, but gaining access was an entirely different problem for him. Izaya would have to sneak in, as well as or integrate himself, and, from what Shizuo knew of the Giovanni’s, he’d have a
lot to fight too…

“Keheheh, well I’m not his babysitter,” Gary’s voice scratched over the phone. “Besides, he’s a big boy now, wouldn’tcha say? Braving the Kuei-jin, handling sewer monsters, barrages of bullets…I’d say he’s qualified for his appointed task.”

“Bullshit. *No one* is qualified for that,” Shizuo nearly shouted. “Much less a fledgling, even if it *is* Izaya.”

“Oh really, no confidence in your love?”

Shizuo flinched.

“It…it’s not that. If there is a fledgling that could pull this off it would be him, but…it’s the Giovanni’s…Izaya may be the smoothest talker around but if he can’t blend in or…or *something*…if he can’t manage to sneak in…if he can’t fight through *all* of them, then…”

“HahahahaHA!”

And there, Gary’s loud laughter through the receiver.

“Ah, you are truly in for it, aren’t you, Shizuo?”

Shizuo gripped he phone harder.

“Oh, you can’t have forgotten I know that, right?” Gary cackled. “You know all of us down here are well aware, right?”

Shizuo sighed.

“A piece of advice, Romeo, you’re creating a liability,” Gary explained. “Not just for you, but for him as well.”

“What…?”

“Heheh…why don’t you think about that while he’s gone.”

“…Don’t say ‘gone’ like that.”

A rumbling chuckle.

“Fine. While he’s away, then. Now then, I did say I’d call his boyfriend for him, you know. So, I’ve now completed my graciously undertaken task.”

Shizuo’s eyes widened. “You told him exactly that?”

“More or less verbatim.”

“And…how did he take that?” Shizuo tried not to let too much hope enter his voice.

“He hung up.”

Shizuo smiled. “Sounds about right.”

Even after they hung up, Shizuo couldn’t help but smile at the thought of a blushing Izaya.

Or at least, he hoped he’d blushed.
But what Gary said…

“…Liability, huh?”

~

The mansion proved to be one indeed, beyond the iron gate a long pathway circling a large water fountain which then led to a large mansion covered in white décor.

There were a few people standing around outside and among some cars that had pulled in. One was a bit off to the side and on her own.

And she was clearly already drunk.

Izaya could thank his lucky stars for this.

“Huh? Yes, oh yes…” the woman was already stumbling for words at Izaya’s approach. “Caviar and champagne, darling…you know how these things are. Got my invitation for the weekend right he—right here, love.”

That was it! Izaya couldn’t let his excitement show on his face. If this place was supposed to be so dangerous, well…he hadn’t gotten so far in his skills by behaving too dangerously.

“Ah, so you have an invitation.”

The well-dressed woman nearly stumbled in place…somehow.

“Did I just say I have an invitation? I thought I did…yeah, I got a invitation,” she slurred.

“Might I borrow it?”

He’d pushed too hard.

“Myyy husband’s…he’s a big tough guy…so you can – you can kiss my ass, honey.”

Time for a new approach.

Indeed, there was a larger man standing not too terribly far away. Perhaps that was him.

“Excuse me, is your wife alright?”

He’d have to use some of his abilities on these humans, it seemed.

“She’ll be fine…after I get a pot of coffee in her.”

Oh. Oh dear.

“I don’t know…if I were you, I’d take her home. I’d worry about her embarrassing me.”

The man seemed to be thinking it over.

“Well, she did pretty much cause the last function to come to a screeching halt. That woman has the self-control of a pubescent chimpanzee.”

That had been oddly specific.

“I’d hurry, I think she’s going to puke.”
Izaya had been exaggerating, but indeed, the woman did begin to throw up. Worse, it appeared to be bloody.

He’d been lying, but…apparently the woman really was ill.

“Come on, Maria, we’re going home.”

‘Home’ wasn’t the destination they should really be headed to, but the important thing was that a few pieces of paper were on the ground. In the man’s hurry to deal with his wife, a few things fell out of his pocket.

He’d just been trying to distract the man long enough to slip one of the invitations, but…ah, here were two of them now in his possession. Perfect.

He noticed there were names on them, Victor and Maria Rossellini, huh?

He’d have to use Victor’s then. He hadn’t realized the names were printed on there. Good thing he didn’t get Maria’s. Or only hers, anyway.

He walked up closer to the mansion. It reminded him of a hotel entrance in that there was plentiful space for temporary parking right in the front. A man was standing there, dressed to the nines.

“You have…invitation?”

Izaya pulled out Victor’s and handed it over.

“Hmm…please have…a wonderful time.”

That had been quite the odd way of speaking, but whatever.

Inside, everything was ornate, with pristine furniture, sculptures, and even a nice piano in the corner. And again, most things were white.

A woman by the piano, dressed in red, caught his attention.

Izaya approached, and the woman was quick to talk at him.

“Might as well be a costume party…everyone smiling, pretending this isn’t a pageant put on by the patriarch of this family. Fine. But this is a contest, and I came to win.”

Interesting…but he’d have to establish himself, and quick.

“I am Victor Rossellini…may I receive the pleasure of your name, miss?”

“Hmm…Mira. Mira Giovanni.”

“This contest…what would the rules be?”

She was forthcoming.

“They gather us up here to decide just who the best and brightest of this generation is. The lucky few are given the real power in this family. But some of us need to win more than others…oh, forget it. You’ wouldn’t understand.”

“Oh…but I understand more than anyone.”
She seemed slightly suspicious, but continued nevertheless.

“Uncle Bruno…since I was a kid, he’s been the patriarch of this family, except he hasn’t aged a day. I met with a Senator from Massachusetts who asked me if I was related to Bruno Giovanni…said Uncle Bruno helped him with his first campaign…back in 1950. We’ve all heard the rumors.”

Izaya smiled, hoping that’d be enough to spur her on. And it seemed it was.

“The core of our family…they never age. They’re secretive…whispers of blood magic and a kiss. Whatever it is, they pick the very best for it. I’d do anything to be picked. I’ve made some…errors in judgement, but I’ve lobbied hard for this family’s interests.”

“Might I ask what was faulty in your judgement?”

It was a risk, he knew it, but…

“What? Forget it, I’m not saying anything about that.”

“Ah, but mistakes are the bane of us all.”

“…I’ve just met you… I do like you, but I can’t tell anyone… it’s far too personal. Sometimes, you do things you regret… and if someone here found out, they’d use it to destroy my chances of the family ever letting me into their circle.”

“I bare mistakes of my own.”

“You couldn’t possibly understand.”

Well, then.

“All I have on my conscience is a jogger. On my car too. The family is safe though.”

It was an interesting way to put it but why not? It worked, in any case.

“I… well. I did something… because it made me feel alive. If you’ve never tasted it, you wouldn’t understand. But a few months ago, I shared a hit with somebody I thought was clean… I tested positive last week.”

“But if the family takes you in…”

“…Then I won’t have to worry about this disease. I won’t have to worry about a thing ever. I’m on a lot of politicians’ Christmas card lists and this family knows I’ve swung a lot of votes for it. But – I’ll spare no expense for a lock. I want to be in that circle of power, and I won’t let blood get in the way.”

So, this is where all of it was going. Could she get him deeper into the mansion if he helped her out?

“Of course, when your time comes, I’ll pay back the favor.”

She then pointed out two other poor souls who were standing there at different ends of the room. Christopher and Adam, apparently.

So… dirt on the other two then? It would be simple.

He tried Adam, a young man in a light suit. Otherwise unremarkable.
“Hey there, Adam Dunsirn. I don’t think we’ve met. You are…?”

“…My invitation says Victor.”

Well, that wasn’t a total lie.

“Victor, pleasure to meet you. What line of work are you in?”

Ah…ok, he was the type to not listen and continue talking. In fact, Izaya was sure of it…if he just…mumbled something, the man was bound to ignore it and continue.

“…Egg salad sandwich.”

“Myself, I’m an investment banker…great business, lot of potential. For example, I got the inside track of this company right now, and let me tell you, when this company goes public, everyone’s going to wish they had a piece of it.”

…He was right.

“Would you be interested in the opportunity?”

“Ah, an opportunity?”

“Well, it’s a biotech firm. You know, they’re working on growing replacement organs – fascinating technology. In a couple of years, I’d bet everyone will be going to them for parts. I figure an investment of $50,000 could be easily tripled in five years.”

“I see…I may have a sum such as that.”

Well…he used to.

“Do you have cash? Credit? We could set it up over the phone right now. You’d really be helping me out a lot and making a tidy profit to boot.”

“Helping you~?”

“It’s just that…business is a little slow lately – but you know how the economy is…it goes down, but it’ll shoot right back up again. And this is the horse to bet on – I guarantee it.”

This was obvious, but…

“You’re struggling for money, then, yes?”

Most people here, they’ve got cash they don’t know what to do with. And if one of us falls on hard times, don’t you think, as family, they’re obligated to help him out? Besides, I’m sure I get the kiss soon! Everyone will be investing with me.”

“Oh, really~?”

“In fact, if I could ensure my place at the grown-ups’ table, by say, drawing some attention away from my financial shortcomings, I’d be guaranteed in. Know any dirt about the others I could use? I can’t pay you, but…I got this watch, and this ring.”

He pointed out his jewelry. Izaya mentally passed on his offer but told Adam he’d be back.

He had a bad feeling about this.
Not at the difficulty of this little task but...the difficulty of the bigger task. Well...he'd speak with this Christopher and then decide what to do.

Izaya approached the man, who, amazingly, said nothing. He was dressed in an all dark suit, and seemed preoccupied.

"I need a name...and yours is the one I need more than any."

"...Oh. I'm Christopher...Giovanni. And...you are?"

"Call me Victor Rossellini, please."

"Another person at the party who’s not a Giovanni. I mean – forget it."

Ah. All three of them were oh-so secretive, but it didn’t take too much for Izaya to make them spill their guts.

"Hmm?"

"Call me paranoid, but how do I know I can trust you?"

'That’s not paranoid,' Izaya thought. ‘That’s normal for someone you’ve just met...’

"I have most familiar with keeping a secret. And harboring them too," Izaya explained.

"You go first. If it’s anything like mine, I’ll tell you what’s bothering me."

Fine then.

"I’ve been...God-free for a while now. Terrible addiction, that can be."

"Really? In this family, that’s...that kind of thing can get you excommunicated if you’re not careful. Well...alright then. You want to know what’s on my mind? I’ll tell you.

“I found out a few months ago...my mother had an affair before I was born. Turns out my father isn’t a Giovanni at all. My real father’s a writer. If anyone found out...well, I might never rise up in this family."

“Let’s say I could find some secrets about your fellows...would you...have something for me?"

He needed to get further into this place and quickly.

No...it was already too late. The sun would rise in merely an hour.

“Well...I don’t see a ring on your finger...perhaps we could...”

Oh, no. This again?

“I’ll...get back to you on that,” Izaya replied, with a smile.

If it were under any other circumstance, Izaya could simply say he already had someone, and well... he did.

But he’d gotten absolutely nowhere talking to these people. He learned a little bit more about the Giovanni, but that was about it. Unfortunately, he wasn’t able to get further into the mansion this way. He’d need to find another way...and it’d have to be tomorrow.
But…that didn’t mean he couldn’t have fun with Mira, Adam, and Christopher.

Telling each one of them each other’s secrets, was, indeed, fun. So was gathering items and money from Adam and Mira respectively.

As for Christopher, well…

“I’m taken.”

That turned out fine.

Each one of the three had rushed to the same place, presumably, in the mansion.

Izaya wished he could watch the chaos that had undoubtedly befall Bruno Giovanni, but…Izaya had to go.

~

Fuck liabilities.

Shizuo had practically run to Izaya’s haven and waited until he thought he’d drive himself crazy. Was this a wise thing to do? No, and he knew it perfectly well.

But still…this particular mission of Izaya’s…he knew where the Sarcophagus was and that Izaya’s mission was to retrieve it, but…somehow, he hadn’t actually thought that this would be the result. That Izaya would actually go to the Giovanni Stronghold.

It was risky, even for him. But by the time he was told about, Shizuo would be too late to do anything about it such as showing up there himself without completely ruining things for Izaya, if things were going halfway decent. The risk was too great, even for Shizuo.

But…all he had to do was wait. Izaya would come back.

He would.

He’d fallen asleep outside of Izaya’s door.

His dreams were restless if not frightening.

~

Izaya rode the elevator up to his apartment. It wasn’t long before sunrise now.

And who did he see right outside of his door? Shizuo, of course.

On the floor, slumped over a little in his sleep.

Izaya smiled. It was…nice to come home to someone, as it were.

“Hey…Shizu-chan.”
“Hnngh.”

‘Let’s try poking him.’

Izaya brought his index finger down to Shizuo’s face and poked his cheek, gently. Then, not so gently.

“Ow- who-?”

The Shizu-chan had stirred-!

Better yet, he was waking up.

Shizuo rubbed at his eyes.

‘Cute.’

Izaya wasn’t too shocked at his thoughts…even these…odd ones anymore.

But in a flash, the bartender was up and squeezing the non-life out of him.

“Izaya.”

Like a prayer, Shizuo had breathed Izaya’s name into his ear.

Izaya couldn’t hold back the shiver.

Especially because the blond kept on whispering his name in that baritone voice.

Finally, Shizuo seemed to bury his face into the crook of Izaya’s neck and just…kept hugging him.

All Izaya could do was hug him back.

Well…if he were honest, that was all he wanted anyway.

But it there was a window on that landing and Izaya knew it.

“Shizu-chan…we need to go inside now.”

~

“We need to go inside now.”

Shizuo knew that, and yet…

But he let go and allowed Izaya to unlock the door and head inside.

But the other side of the door was about as far as they got.

Shizuo latched onto to Izaya once more, pushing him into the door.

He just had to be sure.
“You’re…really here, right?”

~

What an odd question.

What an odd situation.

“Shizu-chan, this is my current home…why would I be anywhere else?”

It was strange, though…not unpleasant to have Shizuo attached to him.

He was being hugged again, though more gently this time.

It also seemed as though Shizuo was…sniffing him?

Just what was happening?

This might call for a delicate hand.

“I’m here, Shizuo…really.”

That was when Shizuo lifted his face out of his neck and their foreheads met, so that Shizuo was staring straight into his eyes. His hands had come up to cup Izaya’s face as well.

“You’re really here?”

He’d had awful dreams.

One in which LaCroix had instead killed Izaya that fateful night. One where Izaya was somehow trapped in the sunlight. One where he was burned at a stake. But the worst one had to be the one in which Shizuo himself had gone into Izaya’s apartment. And waited. And waited. And waited. And Izaya never came back.

He stared at Izaya, waiting for the obvious answer.

But a different answer came instead.

Izaya’s lips were soft against his.
The Giovanni are as much a family as they are a clan; the majority of their neonates are embraced from clan members' local descendants. These insular necromancers avidly pursue two goals: accumulating material wealth and learning the secrets of death itself. It is said that money spoiled the family, and they turned to necromancy out of perverse boredom.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments are much appreciated <3 Take care everyone!
He’d done this before.

Kissing Shizu-chan, that is.

But something was decidedly different about it this time. This time, he wasn’t uncertain. This time, it wasn’t a spontaneous or random action on his part.

This time, he really wanted it.

Shizuo was unresponsive, but looking into his eyes, Izaya could see the shock preventing him from taking action. That didn’t last long.

Izaya was pushed up against the door, Shizuo grabbing his wrists and pinning him there as he kissed back with a monstrous force.

~

Something had been pushed aside; and that something was the logic that might’ve prevented him from pushing Izaya against the door and shoving his tongue into that hot, wet cavern. Izaya’s tongue was pliant against his own and a moan from the ex-informant caused Shizuo to push himself hard against Izaya’s body.

He knew it – he knew that he shouldn’t push things with Izaya. That there was no way Izaya loved him so in the end, it’d be better to start creating some distance, so that he didn’t lose control and ruin everything.

But that plan wasn’t going so well, and he knew it. He knew the moment he had begun sprinting to Izaya’s place and seeing those nightmares he’d had while he’d waited for Izaya…he just couldn’t let go.

Similarly, he refrained from letting go of Izaya’s wrists, choosing to move both to one of his hands, so he could touch him. Just a little. He began fiddling with the hem of Izaya’s shirt and fingers worked their way underneath to touch the soft, smooth skin.

If Izaya was fine with it…then it was fine, right?

Shizuo opened his eyes to find red ones staring back at him…was that a contentedness he saw? Dare he say…happy?
They broke apart for just a moment before Shizuo saw acceptance in those eyes and kissed him again.

If this was what Izaya wanted him for, then that was fine too. It may not be love but...if Izaya would have him, then he’d gladly give it to him.

~

Izaya couldn’t believe what he was allowing to happen. He’d simply wanted to get Shizu-chan to believe that he was really there as his disbelief of such was beginning to become alarming.

But...he couldn’t help it. It was clear Shizuo wanted more and Izaya was not feeling particularly in the mood to discourage him. But was that why Shizuo still had his hands trapped above him? Was he afraid Izaya would refuse him once more? Did he think Izaya would make him stop so quickly again?

If so, those fears would be unfounded.

Izaya groaned, feeling that tongue against his own, pushing against it and sliding along it as Shizuo pushed a leg in between his.

They finally let go of that kiss, and Izaya spoke.

“Let go of my hands, Shizu-chan,” he whispered.

He was burning up at this point, and this would be the only way to fix it. The moment that hand loosened its grip on his own, Izaya tore free and wound his fingers into blond hair, pulling that face in again for an almost desperate meeting of lips.

He could feel Shizuo’s leg pushing gently into his groin, but it wasn’t enough. Not anymore. Izaya lifted one of his own legs and wrapped it around Shizuo’s hip. He pushed hard against Shizuo’s hips and the response was immediate.

“Nngghh,” Shizuo nearly growled at the sensation, sending vibrations through Izaya as well. Shizuo broke away from Izaya’s lips to look at him...and got confident smirk in return. Izaya’s voice was breathy.

“Don’t stop, Shizuo.”

Something broke in that golden gaze.

The hand under his shirt travelled downward and unbuttoned his pants. Though there was hesitation at first, the hand dipped down inside and grasped him firmly but gently.

Izaya choked on nothing, hands practically scratching at Shizuo’s scalp now. He hadn’t quite expected that and yet it was perfect. His hands travelled down, gripping at Shizuo’s shirt as the hand now on his shaft began to stroke him slowly but diligently.

“Ah-ahhhh…”

Izaya couldn’t hide that moan, much to his own surprise. But it seemed to inspire Shizuo to move faster.

He swallowed hard; Shizuo was good at this. He could feel already the tell-tale build up in his groin. He let his head fall back against the door, his eyes shut as he simply rode through the pleasure.
Pushing forward against that hand, he started to tremble as that blond head made a home in the crook of his neck, and that mouth did its best to mark him.

Izaya’s nails dug into Shizuo’s back, desperately clawing at nothing, trying so hard to straighten out his now muddled senses and failing.

Izaya whimpered. Of all things…but as his toes curled up inside his shoes, he knew he was already lost to it. Shizuo was about to make him come, and shockingly, Izaya had no intention of stopping him.

But that was when Shizuo raised his head from Izaya’s neck and kissed him again, staring into his eyes all the while. He pulled his hand out of Izaya’s pants only to use that hand to undo his own pants while the other pulled down Izaya’s.

Though this hadn’t really been part of Izaya’s plans upon coming home that morning…he was loathe to refuse. He’d felt Shizuo growing hard all the while, but it now struck him just where this was leading.

As Shizuo pushed their members together and as that hand curled around them both, Izaya’s mouth fell open in a pleasured gasp.

Which was when three fingers pushed their way into his mouth.

Izaya raised his eyes to see that dark gaze on his own. Unyielding, unflinching, and determined. He was a bit taken aback at the boldness, but Izaya wanted this. So, with little thought to it, he grabbed the arm in front of him and took the fingers in his mouth in completely.

As it was, Izaya was certain he’d come in just a matter of time but that was when Shizuo let go of their hard members, both now covered in pre-cum and simply pressed against him once more. Izaya sucked, licked, and swirled his tongue around the fingers until, it seemed, Shizuo couldn’t take any more and pulled them out of Izaya’s mouth.

Izaya wrapped his arms around Shizuo’s neck as a hand gripped his hip and the other the reach behind him, a finger beginning to prod at his entrance. Even though he was expecting it, Izaya hissed lightly at the foreign intrusion.

“Tell me to stop, and I will.”

That was voice was deeper than usual and came out between huffs. The eyes looked clearer than they had since Izaya had gotten home. But he didn’t want this to end, oh no.

He knew Shizuo didn’t want to hurt him. That must be the hesitation. But even if it hurt some, Izaya wasn’t about to refuse this. No…he’d acknowledged it already; he wanted this.

And badly. Izaya smirked.

“If you stop, Shizu-chan, I’ll kick you out.”

He wouldn’t, particularly since the sun was out now and they both knew it, but Shizuo got the idea and that was the point.

That one finger pushed further in, making Izaya grab onto Shizuo’s shirt, and he pushed his face against Shizuo’s chest as well the sensations becoming too much. It twisted, curled, and pulled out somewhat, only to shove right back in. Izaya bit at Shizuo’s shirt, just muffle the sounds coming out of his mouth. Only for Shizuo’s other hand to grab the back of his head and pull him away.
“No…let me hear you.”

Izaya shivered; he liked this animalistic side of Shizuo…perhaps a little too much as any pain he was feeling began to dissipate. A second finger joined the first and Shizuo began to stretch Izaya. Izaya was panting freely let his groans sound from his mouth. If that was what Shizuo wanted, well, he’d give it to him.

He was in love, after all.

When the third finger entered him, it was enough to make him writhe between the door and Shizuo; a certain bundle of nerves had been found, and Shizuo took full advantage of it, poking and prodding the spot to a rhythm over and over again.

Izaya was nearly shrieking, slight whimpers becoming near-screams.

Izaya squirmed at the loss of sensation when Shizuo pulled his fingers out completely. Izaya brought his arms back up around Shizuo’s neck, and he felt those hand grab him at the thighs, adjusting him so Shizuo could get into position.

Shizuo stared at Izaya, as though trying to determine something.

Izaya merely nodded, and that was when he felt something bigger than fingers pushing its way past his entrance, slowly, but surely.

But Shizuo had done well; he’d prepped him more than enough. Shizuo was able to fully encase himself in Izaya with relative ease. As Izaya was adjusting, he could tell just how much Shizuo was holding back for his sake. He did appreciate it, but…well, it was unnecessary. Still, it made Shizuo a man of his word. He truly didn’t want to hurt Izaya or do anything too…untoward, in Izaya’s eyes.

Izaya was gasping for breath now. Not that he needed it, but it just felt as though it helped him get his bearings. Gripping onto Shizuo’s shoulders, he leaned forward, appreciating the extra sensation that afforded him, and whispered into Shizuo’s ear.

“Move…and don’t you dare hold back.”

There it was again, a growl that was enough to set his mind to burn and had his legs tremble in Shizuo’s grasp. As Shizuo pulled out and pushed right back in, he had no more thoughts – the sounds that escaped him were completely mindless.

Shizuo could no longer help himself. He was screwed the moment Izaya had kissed him. He’d been able to hold back before…what was so different now?

But it didn’t matter. Not only did Izaya give him permission over his body, but it seemed he wanted his full strength. So, Shizuo did his best to acquiesce.

He thrust himself hard into Izaya, searching once more for that spot that made Izaya spout the most delicious noises. It wasn’t long before he found it, and Izaya’s eyes had rolled back into his head as he started releasing sounds that drove him to drill harder and harder towards his release, Izaya’s head dropping down onto his chest as Shizuo grasped Izaya’s hips so tightly it would certainly leave bruises, even at their increased healing speed.

Izaya’s body slid up and down against the door in time with Shizuo’s thrusts and Izaya was starting to shriek with pleasure. As he increased his pace, Izaya even let out little screams.
Shizuo moved in to Izaya’s exposed neck, attacking it with bites and licks as he reached back in front of them both for Izaya’s member and began stroking him in time with his thrusts.

That did it – Izaya screamed his name.

“S-Shizuooooo!”

Shizuo smiled against the skin of Izaya’s neck and continued his ministrations as he felt Izaya come in his hand with a violent tremble, only for Shizuo to feel his own release imminent. He thrust a few more times into that lithe body and held him in place as he came deep inside of Izaya.

They both panted with a sort of exhaustion, leaning against each other for support. It took some time, but eventually, Shizuo gathered himself enough to pull out of Izaya, who groaned ever so slightly. Their eyes were half-lidded and glazed over as their minds were still in a haze.

Shizuo put Izaya down, who simply slid down to the floor after doing his best to redo his pants. Shizuo joined him there, both of them sitting against the door as they waited to regain themselves.

After a few more minutes, Shizuo felt a weight pressed against his side. Izaya had, apparently, fallen asleep on him.

He couldn’t help but just sit there like that. He loved to see Izaya’s sleeping face so…he gave it a bit more time before he would pick him up. Izaya’s head lay against his shoulder and after a little while longer, Shizuo could have sworn he heard small mumblings of his own name. He smiled.

He picked Izaya up bridal style, noting the way Izaya nuzzled into him, making his heart flutter. They may have had sex, but just a small, gentle sign of affection meant so much. Even if Izaya didn’t know he was doing it.

He got himself and Izaya dressed to go to sleep upstairs in the bed and wrapped his arms around him. Inhaling Izaya’s scent, he slowly drifted to sleep, joining the ex-informant into the world of slumber.

~

The sun would be down now.

Was he still a bit sore? Oh, yes. But could he not work? Certainly not. He could talk, manipulate, dodge, fight, the whole nine yards. But

Izaya was up and at ‘em that night, ready to tackle the Giovanni task once more. He would make sure to stop by Fat Larry’s truck, as well as Mercurio’s place first. He needed to be better equipped, he just had a feeling.

But…he first left a note. Shizuo was still sleeping, after all. He still couldn’t quite say it, after all— not to Shizuo, and not even aloud to himself. So, he ‘fell asleep’ that morning to spare himself from having to figure out what to say to Shizuo. It was, however, he would admit, very comfortable being carried by the bartender…Even so, if Shizuo was so worried for him, he couldn’t let him know where he was off to again. Gary really must have called Shizuo the night before…he and Shizuo hadn’t talked but Izaya knew well enough that apparently, Shizuo was terrified for him. But…he had to do this. He’d never be free if he couldn’t accomplish at least this task…and judging what he knew about the Sarcophagus which wasn’t a lot, there’d probably be more, and plenty of danger…

Izaya shook his head. He needed to get going. After writing the note, he bent down over Shizuo, staring at those closed eyes.
‘I love you so much, Shizuo…’

He kissed the top of his head and made his way downstairs and out the door.

~

It took a while for a groggy Shizuo to fully wake up. It just felt to good to be snuggling with Izaya. But as he started to come back to full consciousness he realized…those were blankets and pillows…not another body, let alone Izaya.

Shizuo pushed himself up off the bed, looking around.

No…it couldn’t be. Could Izaya have gone somewhere again?

They hadn’t exactly chatted the morning before…was Izaya…was he not done at the Giovanni’s? No…could it be he hadn’t gone at all? But then…was he going there now – was he there already? And did anyone know…?

Shizuo sat back down on the bed, hand over his mouth with worry. That was when he spotted the note on the nightstand.

Desperately, he picked it up and read it…over and over again.

Shizuo,

Let me first say I apologize for not waiting for you to wake up. But as you might know…there’s a task that I must complete, and I must head there quickly.

I know we did not exactly…talk last morning, but…I just couldn’t bare to see your face and know that I couldn’t assure you that I wouldn’t be doing this. Lying often comes easily to me, as I know you know. But…I couldn’t do it. Not to you. Not anymore.

I can assure you, however, that I didn’t sleep with you merely for fun and that…it does mean something to me.

I want to tell you so badly, Shizuo, and yet…I find myself unable.

Perhaps there is a way.

Solve this, and I’ll tell you if you’re right when I see you again:

What is wholly mine that only you can have?

Izaya

Shizuo held the note close to his heart.

He had…a suspicion about the small little riddle Izaya left him…were it anyone else, he’d swear he knew the answer but…could it really be?

Any observer would call it obvious, yet Shizuo had the hardest time accepting it. Maybe it was true…maybe Izaya loved him.

But more than that – it was clear that indeed, Izaya was off to the Giovanni’s and judging by the time, he was doubtless already there.
Shit.

He didn’t want this. To be so close to Izaya’s heart, or so it seemed, and yet…he could lose him in one fell swoop.

This was just the kind of thing Kasuka had warned him about but…

How could he help it?

~

“Hi, I don’t think we’ve met before.”

Izaya had once again entered the Giovanni mansion as Victor Rossellini. He saw no sign of Mira, Adam, or Christopher, interestingly. He did run into a young woman in a white dress, however. When he approached, she greeted him first. Perhaps there was a chance that someone would bring him further inside after all.

“Victor Rossellini. And you are?”

“Nadia Milliner. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Victor. Are you from the Chicago Rossellinis?”

“I am.”

“Oh, you must give my regards to Great Aunt Francis when you get back. I stayed with her last time I was out that way. She was very sweet to me.”

“I certainly will. Might as I ask what you do?”

“I’m working on my Master’s out here – I’m from back east. The Giovannis have been nice enough to let me stay here while I finish up my studies. I’ve learned a great deal from them – like you wouldn’t believe.”

“Really? Like what, for example~?” Izaya put on a grin for her, in an attempt to dazzle. It seemed to work.

She opened a door near them and led the way. “I’ll show you something, but you can’t tell anyone.”

Inside the circular room was what appeared to be a study and…apparently, a secret lever on the wall that Nadia pulled to open a door across the room.

How had this been so easy but talking to the three from the night before had made things only difficult? Perhaps this Nadia was simply more naïve than they.

But the secret door led to a very long hallway that ran downward and turned to the right several times before opening into what looked like a rom that would be more suited to a funeral parlor.

“You know what they do in this room?” Nadia asked.

“Looks like an embalming room.”

“Mmm-hmm. Know what they do with the corpses?”

Anything Izaya could immediately think of, he preferred not to say.

“No idea.”
“I shouldn’t do this but…why don’t I show you. Gets pretty weird from here – don’t say I didn’t warn you. Oh, and be ready to run. You’ll understand when it happens. Follow me.”

They went through another door, and down a spiral staircase. There was an open cavern-like area waiting for them.

“Shh…they don’t usually attack, just don’t provoke them.”

Yet, inexplicably, these creatures were creeping toward them.

“What? This is…”

Nadia seemed genuinely confused.

“Nadia…go back upstairs.”

“What? But…”

“Just go!”

Izaya needed to push on from here but the girl should not be there.

She’d just shown him to the depths of the mansion, the least he could do was not allow her to be eaten by actual undead corpses.

That’s what they were, it seemed. Reanimated bodies. Growling and groaning, they shambled toward him.

Nadia ran back, as he’d said. Hopefully, she wasn’t going to alert anyone to his presence but even if she did, he planned to be long gone by that time.

With his trusty knives, he fought his way through the corpses he couldn’t evade, not earning a single scratch.

But beyond this room, he went even further down, and came out into what seemed to end up being a really large circle of stone hallways that had some grates along the floor, which allowed him to see further down.

But there were even more of these corpses to fight through down below when he wasn’t careful enough to not fall through the floor. Ultimately, the place was a maze including secret doors and creepy corpses that would lunge at him. Sometimes the circle would open up into bigger rooms filled with more of the creatures.

It took time, but he finally found another set of stairs leading downward again in a narrow hallway.

This opened up into a large circular room, in which he was on the ledge of. The ledge was wide enough to run around on, and over saw the main room below where – yes, finally, there was the Sarcophagus sitting in a carved-out part of the stone.

But there was a problem.

Two problems, actually.

One of them shouted up to him.

“Kindred! Your presence here violates the agreement between our leaders! Leave now or face the
consequences of your actions!”

There seemed to be a pair of Kuei-jin standing there without shirts, and had Chinese characters tattooed on them. Were these perhaps the agents Ming Xiao said she had looking for it?

But more importantly…and agreement, huh…

“Let’s discuss this problem, whatever it may be…”

Remaining vague but seeking more information.

“There is an alliance between your leader, LaCroix, and mistress Ming Xiao! You violate the agreement! If you do not leave, we are not responsible for your death!”

Izaya simply smiled.

“I guess I need a publicist; you two are obviously unaware of my reputation…”

He was joking, but the two were unamused.

“We’ll give you one more chance to leave this place and keep your life. You will go?”

“No.”

It wasn’t that this was what Izaya really wanted. No, he’d prefer to be having a semblance of his old job, spending his nights curled up with Shizu-chan. Instead, some asshole in a tower had the command of him.

But the truly interesting part here was that there was apparently an alliance going on? It could easily be a lie, sure. But there were little to no reasons for these two to be lying.

Now the fun part: Why would there be an alliance between the two leaders and what exactly for…?

But now wasn’t the time to think about it. It was fighting time, apparently.

“Then the time for decisions has passed. We Chang brothers accept your life graciously.”

Izaya smirked. “So sorry, but you won’t get it.”

Fighting the two proved to be more challenging than Izaya had anticipated. One had a large set of metal claws, while the other had a blade that did heavy damage. Heavy damage that he discovered the hard way.

Not only could the brothers teleport to his location, but their weapons were incredibly hard-hitting and not exactly fragile themselves. The brother with the claws was easier to handle. Although they’d frequently tag team him and teleport to where he was, Izaya was nothing if not agile and skilled at dodging. The clawed brother attacked at close distance which was Izaya’s specialty as well. Sadly, he had to dodge the other brother’s long-distance attacks too.

It didn’t take a long time, luckily, for Izaya to take out the claw-wielding brother. It didn’t mean he was unscathed, however. The clawed brother had gotten in plenty of hits, and Izaya was starting to become more tired. Putting pressure against a particularly deep wound, Izaya was panting lightly. He still had one more to go; it’d have to be good enough.

The biggest problem with the blade brother was that although he had what seemed to be a katana, he shot at him large balls of something that would explode into fire at him.
But that was where his newest gun was going to have to come in handy: a semi-automatic that he picked up from Fat Larry. Without having been heavily hurt already, Izaya might not’ve needed this to fight this brother, however, the clawed one had already hurt him too badly.

Shooting from on high, Izaya could see he was doing damage to the blade-wielding brother. It was taking quite the bit of time; however, it was working, he could see. That was when the blade brother teleported up next to him and sliced open his abdomen.

It wasn’t the deepest of wounds, but it would be quite the…hindrance. Taking out his own knives as he was down, he used his appearance of gravely wounded to launch a quick attack on the brother. And there – with his trusty knife skills, the other brother was finished, disintegrating into nothing like his brother.

Izaya slowly got up, which was more of a task than he would’ve liked to admit to. He’d have to feed as soon as he could, which was why he’d brought a couple of bags with him. Still, he couldn’t relax just yet. He’d need to make his way down into the inner circle room. He took in the blood bags, seeing as what he’d have to do was pick up the Sarcophagus himself to the outside, and fight his way through anyone who tried to stop him.

The blood was enough to restore his strength and close the deeper wounds on him. He’d have to feed a little more later, but this would be doable for now. He picked up the Sarcophagus that no normal human (save for Shizu-chan) would be able to simply carry and made his way backwards through the mansion. It took far less time than he expected, but the hard part would be fighting the family. He set the Sarcophagus down in the circular study, and made his way out into the party.

But in fact, they had not been very challenging. This was a shock to Izaya – the humans who were present had the sense to run at the sign of trouble, so many of the partygoers fled, but the Kindred there launched an attack. However, decades and decades old they might’ve been, but they were not on the level of those Kuei-jin, and they certainly weren’t on Izaya’s level.

Even so…at this point, Izaya was starting to become truly exhausted. Luckily, all he had to do now was fetch the truck he’d brought with him from outside of the property and put the Sarcophagus onto it. And so, he did.

All that effort better be worth it.

“Even still,” he mused, driving toward downtown and the prince’s tower. “I must be getting close to the end of this.”

It was true that now that he had the prince’s prize, he would at least be well on his way to being finished as an ‘errand boy’ of sorts. But Izaya wasn’t so skilled to not know that there was more to this. It wasn’t just his own instincts, but also what the Chang brothers had said.

An alliance. They had no reason to lie either…not really, anyway. But what exactly was it…?

In any case, he parked the truck in front of the tower once he arrived and brought the Sarcophagus straight inside. He had bypassed Office Chunk; the man couldn’t even see him, and he chose one of the larger elevators – it worked well enough to reach the penthouse level.

Izaya brought it into the large room where LaCroix was waiting. So was, interestingly, Beckett, who wasted to time with words and went over to the Sarcophagus right away, examining it himself.

“My wunderkind returns! In my entire court, I knew there was only one who could have succeeded in this task. Finally, the Ankaran Sarcophagus is ours!”
Izaya noted easily just how thrilled LaCroix was, that much was genuine in his voice. He was more thrilled however, than a concerned-about-these-rumors-is-all leader should have been.

“Come. I’ve granted Beckett’s request to study and document all the markings of the sarcophagus. You’ve met Beckett, haven’t you? Let’s go take a look inside and see what the commotion around the city has really been all about.”

But Izaya couldn’t help himself: he had to poke the snake pit.

“Before we do that, I require an answer – are in an alliance with the Kuei-jin?”

It was abrupt and very direct for Izaya, but he couldn’t help it.

“What? Preposterous! No Kindred would trust them, nor would they trust us. Did Jack tell you that? Because it sounds like you were taken for a fool.”

Ah…there it was. A slight panic in his voice, the prince couldn’t hide that. Not from Izaya. So, it was true.

Did he need to add this next thing? No, but…Izaya wanted more potential slip-ups.

“I was told by the Kuei-jin agents who were sent to steal the sarcophagus.”

“Hmph,” the prince was haughty. “And you believed them? They’ve been trying to take over LA for years. It’s a ruse – a falsehood, spread to undermine my rule and turn Kindred against each other – thin our ranks. They are duplicitous, evil creatures. Did they not try to kill you?”

Interestingly, there was a lot of truth to the prince’s words there. Not that Izaya needed help with determining the “duplicitous” nature – he had determined that easily from Ming Xiao herself.

But the alliance? No…that was truth. Interesting.

“Yes, quite so, but – “

“Insurance. They lied to you in case you lived through the encounter. They hoped to create dissension in the ranks, rumors. It’s a trick older than you or I.”

Ah, but there was the desperation. LaCroix was none too subtly trying to convince him of this flimsy lie. But he’d have to go along with it…as usual. For now, at least.

“I believe you,” Izaya smiled.

LaCroix appeared content with that.

They turned and walked to the sarcophagus.

“What have you assessed so far?”

Beckett responded. “Unfortunately for the heralds of doom, it appears we won’t be opening Pandora’s box.

“The markings are of Assyrian origin – an extraordinary piece, but nothing Earth-shattering.”

“I see,” the prince began pushing at the lid of the sarcophagus. “Then there is no reason why we shouldn’t open it.”
But it wouldn’t open.

“Beckett, do you see any mechanism for the lid?”

“I haven’t as of yet had a chance to pore over it with my fine-toothed comb. I think I left it in my other bag.”

“Ugh, why won’t it open?”

“And you,” he turned to Izaya. “I thought you said it looked as though it’d been opened on the Dane…I want it open!”

“You and Beckett find a way to open it.. I need to know what’s inside. I have other matters to attend to so come get me when a solution has been found.”

Beckett turned to Izaya upon LaCroix’s retreat.

“Ah, the depths to which I’ll sink to prove others wrong. The young ones get so temperamental. Fortunately for – Sebatian, is it? – I’d already made up my mind to open the sarcophagus, if only to show the city that Gehenna, contrary to popular belief, has not begun.”

“So…how do we open it?”

“Well, in the last few seconds I’ve had very few epiphanies. I may be old, but I didn’t build it. How knowledgeable are you on ancient Assyrian funerary constructs?”

Izaya enjoyed Beckett’s sarcasm, it was highly entertaining. Know many things Izaya did, but this was not one of them, no.

“Not very.”

“Hmm. Fortunately for us I know of someone who has distinguished himself in this field.”

At Izaya’s quizzical look, Beckett continued.

“His name’s Dr. Anders Johansen, a professor of archaeology from Norway. He was the one responsible for finding the sarcophagus, and as far as I know, the only authority on its origin and design.”

“But…he’s not here, is he…”

“Until yesterday, he could’ve been found in his suite at the Empire hotel, downtown. But when I stopped by earlier this evening, all I found was spilt coffee on a morning paper. Appears he’s been abducted.”

“Hmm,” Izaya thought for a moment. “Tell me he left some notes or a diagram or something.”

“I did find a pair of bikini swimwear and a book detailing the origins of various Turkish dialects.”

“Great…”

“I detected the scent of myrrh incense, which is usually burned in monasteries. Also, I found beach sand in part of a muddy footprint. Putting two and two together, I located a monastery near a beach in Malibu, where I believe hunters are holding Johansen captive.”

Impressive, those were excellent information gathering skills. If Izaya could make this lone-wolf
Beckett into something of an ally…

“And you figured out all of this looking around his room?”

He had to be sure.

“Actually, there were two hunters on the roof of the building opposite the hotel…who were positively delighted to tell me everything they knew, provided I stopped dangling them head first over the side.”

Ah.

“So, what do we do to get him back?”

“The hunters aducted Dr. Johansen for his own protection. Or at least, that’s how they’ve justified it. He’s being held by the society of Leopold and used, quite ingeniously, as bair for Prince LaCroix’s minions.”

“The Society of Leopold?”

“Sebastian mentioned you ran into one of the hunters from the Society of Leopold some time ago. They’re so secret a church organization, I don’t even think they know if they exist, but essentially they’re murderers for Christ or some such deity.”

Ah, that hunter Bach back at Grout’s mansion.

“So how do we…extract the good doctor?”

“You’ll have to go to the monastery and find a way into the tunnels beneath where the hunters are holding Johansen. I’m afraid I can’t accompany you, but then, it’s best you go alone anyway. Too many of us, would set them off, like fundamentalists on contrary opinion.”

Just for this, he’d kill whoever he needed to so as to get the doctor out of there. This was getting ridiculous.

“I wouldn’t recommend walking. Certainly, Sebastian’s already provided cab fare – I’m sure he always spares no expense when archaeology is at stake.”

“Before I go…anything else you can tell me about this Society of Leopold?”

“The Society, for the most part, knows very little about us, but they do know how to kill and torture us and that’s enough. Also, some of them exhibit powers that can make them quite formidable. Best not to announce yourself.”

“You spoke before that the sarcophagus may be part of Gehenna…do you believe that?”

“Well…if we open it up and the world ends, then yes. If we open it up and the world doesn’t end, then no. I’d wager the latter.”

“Right…then, I’m off.”

“Ah, remember – Dr. Johansen is an innocent – he has no idea we actually exist. Try not to put the idea into his head.”

Izaya smirked. “Oh, no problem.”
And he was off in a cab before he knew it. There was much to think about, but for now, he needed to find this doctor.

~

It was the middle of the night, and Shizuo had just called and talk to Kaz. Their club was doing fine, Kaz assured him, and he could thusly stay out longer if need be.

Shizuo spent time pacing Izaya’s apartment and trying to distract himself with tv or the radio.

“…I’m the creature that evolved out of your Mom…”

And he promptly turned the radio off. Just what was it with the media these nights?

But that clinched it. He called Mitnik…maybe he knew just what was going on. But the news was not what Shizuo wanted to hear.

Izaya was going into the home base of the most talented hunters, after all.

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**Auspex:**

Reveals the auras of the living & undead within a distance depending on the strength of the skill.

**Celerity:**

Allows Kindred to move at incredible speeds.

**Presence:**

Victims suffer a chance to be Mesmerized, a penalty to Strength, Wits, & Perception, and a reduced rate of attack.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading!! I'm gonna go roll around in the garbage where I belong now - excuse me.
Debilitating

Chapter Notes

This one is a liiittle shorter than usual, sadly. But- it has a speedboat! Who doesn't love a speedboat, huh? Huh? :D

Please enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The chill of the sea air wasn’t enough to hold him back.

His heightened sense of smell could long since smell it when the cab had begun to approach the large monastery. He’d had the cabbie drop him off fairly far out, still beyond the hills. As he made his way between them still hiding his presence, at least for the time being, scents including the ocean, sand, and humans mixed and made their way to him.

Izaya slowed his progress the closer he got to the scent of the blood of the hunters and he began the task of climbing on and around some ledges of rock and stone. These seemed to be a natural barrier for the monastery and trees seemed to pepper the area. It was a strange environment considering it was so close to the ocean.

Still, the sound of the waves and the chill in the air would only serve to help him; hunters may not be outside in full force, and the waves crashing against rock could hide any sound he might make.

Making his way between another round of rock formations, he saw a pair of hunters patrolling the area. Climbing up one of the rocks, he noticed he’d gotten considerably closer to the place than he had expected. All the better. He considered running and jumping between the rock ledges before realizing that there were a couple of hunters on the roof of the building. So that would be a no-go.

Even still, weaving between the huge rock ledges on the sandy grass would work just as well, so long as he didn’t run into hunters. He did, of course. But they didn’t seem to be on full alert, luckily. This made the task of sneaking around them easy enough. Izaya did note, however, that he’d had to be sneakier than normal; the hunters’ heads had turned in his direction at one accidental scuff of the foot, though they didn’t see him in the shadows. However, it seemed he wouldn’t be able to sneak in plain sight as he could with normal humans.

Still, they did seem to be, perhaps, on the lookout for something.

Odd, that.

But no matter. He had to get in there regardless of the hunters’ intentions. Izaya found himself having to wait for longer than anticipated for the majority of them to leave area immediately surrounding the monastery. Either they went farther away from the building or went inside. Regardless, Izaya found a chance to sneak in from the back of the place.

Inside, the place looked like a congregational church with a single hunter actively praying in murmur there. Luckily for Izaya that meant he could continue to sneak through the place uninhibited. Until he
got near the front entrance, there weren’t too many hunters to dodge and those that were present were either out of the way or otherwise occupied. Even still, the ones at the entrance hall which contained stairs proceeding both up and downward, were quite on guard.

Izaya had to figure out a way to reach the stairs to go down. After a brief moment of thought, he picked up a pebble nearby and threw it to make a tiny clattering sound to the opposite side of the large, stone room. All of the humans’ heads whipped toward the sound and that was when Izaya made his move.

So far, so good. Izaya smirked to himself, all was going his way for now.

On the stone steps laid what appeared to be a record keeper or maybe a journal of sorts. Picking it up, Izaya took it with him.

Reaching what appeared to be...a large wine cellar, he hid behind a shelf amidst distant shuffling noises and had a look.

The initials found were G.B. Would it be Bach’s? The hunter he’d met at Grout’s mansion? There were no dates listed in the journal, but it did seem to be exactly that according to the writing.

We have tracked LaCroix to Los Angeles. He has made his lair in the penthouse of Venture Tower, hiding behind some legitimate business front while commanding his legion of demons by cover of night. I pray to the Lord for strength in the coming days, but there is a shadow that hangs over my heart like the dark wings of Lucifer himself. It is not LaCroix I fear, nor his underlings, but there is fear in my heart nonetheless. An ancient evil is stirring. May God grant me the strength to overcome it

Woke up this morning, and the sun on my face was little comfort. We lost three of the Brethren last night in a fierce battle with some hellspawn...minions of the vampire we know as Alistair Grout. We have been unable to find his lair, but it is only a matter of time. May God have mercy on the souls of our Brethren.

The mystery surrounding the Ankaran Sarcophagus and the massacre on the Elizabeth Dane has my superiors troubled. I have been told to expect a package in the mail that may be helpful in shedding light on this artifact. Its arrival seems...convenient...in light of LaCroix’s recent arrival. Something is amiss, yet I cannot see what machinations are at play. I will wait and have faith that the Lord will see us through.

We finally found the lair of Alistair Grout, but it seems we were too late...the demon had already been sent to hell before I was able to dispatch him. I ran across a younger vampire who seemed unaware of Grout’s demise. No doubt one of his sucklings come to visit its master. I took care of that demon and destroyed the house. I thank God for his eternal watchfulness over me and the Brotherhood.

There seems a great unrest among the vampire blood here in the city. Perhaps the arrival of LaCroix was unwelcome to the rest of the Damned? I know not, nor do I care. They will all burn, whether by my hand or the Father’s.

The Ankaran Sarcophagus was stolen today from the Museum of Natural History. The police report we obtained leads me to believe that the demon spawn were behind it, and the book I received yesterday from the Vatican only reinforces that theory. I know now that these may very well be the end times, and the time of the final struggle may well be upon us.

I dreamed of LaCroix last night, of his hideous visage burned to ash in a great inferno. Mat it be that
this is a vision given to me by God, and that I will be the vessel oh his holy vengeance. The years have been long. Too long. Perhaps the soul of my father may finally rest in peace.

Brother Kriegler reported a disturbance at the vampire coven we have been observing at the mansion in Hollywood. It seems there was a party, and that something interrupted their fleshly rituals. He could say no more of the matter, but I smell LaCroix’s meddling hand in this. All the better. May the demons feed on themselves until the world is rid of their evil.

I had dreams of fires in Griffith Park last evening. I know not their origin, but I fear the worst. I received a letter from His Holiness, warning me that he is earful that the Apocalypse is upon us, and that my mission has become more important than ever. I hold his words close to my heart, and will fight for righteousness until I am no longer able.

I took Johansen from his hotel room last evening and brought him back here to the monastery. I am convinced that LaCroix will try to find him, as he is the only one with the knowledge of how the artifact can be opened. The Brethren have been warned to expect an assault on the monastery, and they are ready to die for His Glory, as am I. May the Holy Father bless us in these last dark days and may the children of Satan burn forever in the hellfires of damnation. Amen.

Izaya dropped the journal where he was, no real reason to take it with him. But they were warned, apparently. No wonder there were so many hunters outside as well as near the front entrance, all gathered around and tense. But they’d neglected to cover their bases properly, for he’d snuck in without too much trouble.

Further, Izaya was able to confirm Johansen’s presence there in the monastery. So at least this wasn’t a waste of time for certain.

Izaya found himself looking for an entrance to go lower, but that proved to be more difficult than finding a simple door. In the end, there ended up being a latched entrance on the floor underneath a barrel that was stowed away in a corner. But that hatch led him down, down, down stone steps in a spiral that led him into caverns with the occasional lit torch on the walls. There was little else to see, save for a rat or two until he came to a fork in the caverns. Using Auspex, he could see that the left produced a large cave with few people and nothing beyond it. Whereas to the right, there were a significant number of hunters in a cavern which led to another, larger cave in which there were only two people. That had to be it.

Heading to the right, Izaya immediately began sticking to the shadows and keeping to the walls as he emerged into the large cavern filled with hunters. It was rather well-lit, all considered. There was also, Izaya noted, what appeared to be a small lake with a short boardwalk leading to a speedboat. Is that how Bach had come back to the monastery with Johansen perhaps? The imagery in of itself was amusing, but now wasn’t the time to giggle and attract attention.

It took more time than Izaya would want to admit, but after finally creeping through the hunters, he entered a long hallway of stone before coming to a door. Through the door was a large chamber which was filled with what appeared to be some sort of training equipment and random pit falls. At the far side, a wooden staircase led up to what appeared to be a small chamber making use of the natural stone. That looked to be where Johansen was being kept. Further, there was one other. Bach had come out of the chamber and was now shouting down to Izaya.

“I knew Johansen would lure the servants of Satan. But I set this trap for the archfiend himself – where is LaCroix?!?”

“Hmph. You think LaCroix would actually come here himself?”
It wasn’t any kind of boast or defense in LaCroix’s name; Izaya was simply stating a fact.

‘As if he’d actually come out to do a task like this himself…even if all of his…workers…were gone, he’d never do something like this amidst his cowardice,’ Izaya thought to himself.

“Perhaps when LaCroix runs out of minions, he will show me his face. And God will guide my shots through it. Before I send you to eternal damnation, any last words?”

Izaya smirked.

“Last words.”

He darted forward, dodging bullets fired by the machine gun in Bach’s hands.

Ducking for some cover, Izaya pulled out a gun of his own along with a few of his trusty knives.

They fired back and forth, both of them ducking for cover fairly often. But Izaya had his abilities on his side. He could dodge bullets quickly, and his own speed would go unmatched. This being the case, he didn’t have to rely on his own gun too much, just enough to force Bach to hide behind whatever cover he could in the training ground.

But that was enough opportunity to allow Izaya to get ever so closer and corner Bach into close-quartered fighting. Despite his gunshots, Bach was defenseless against Izaya’s well aimed blows and swipes of the knife. It wasn’t long before Bach lost consciousness and fell to the ground near the staircase.

Izaya knew time was not on his side so he hurried up the steps to find the Doctor. It seemed there was a bedroom inside of the manmade carve-out of the stone dwelling. The grey-haired Johansen was standing there in what appeared to be some kind of ceremonial robe.

“I’ve told you everything – there’s no reason for you to keep me here! Let me go!”

Just to make sure… “Dr. Johansen?”

“I am an archeologist! You can’t hold me here like this, I am a hostage! I do not need protection – bring me back to my hotel at once!”

Well that settled that.

“I have a wife and children…I want to see them again…please help me.”

“There’s no need to worry…I hate to worry you, I do not need protection – bring me back to my hotel at once!”

Well that settled that.

“I have a wife and children…I want to see them again…please help me.”

“There’s no need to worry…I hate to worry you, I do not need protection – bring me back to my hotel at once!”

There was no need to be that impatient, Izaya could get some answers and get them out of there in a timely enough fashion.

“Ok, anything. Just promise you will get me out of these caverns and away from these crazies…I think I’m starting to get pneumonia.”

“I promise,” No reason not to. “Tell me what you know about the Ankaran Sarcophagus.”

“The sarcophagus? You went through all this trouble for the sarcophagus? Ja, I’ll tell you, but, don’t you think it would be better to get out of here before those men come back?”

“I dealt with them, there won’t be any problems.”
“Alright. Where should I begin?”

“What can you tell me about the sarcophagus?”

“Let’s start with the history. That is a long and interesting legend, lost and found throughout the ages. Tell me, are you familiar with the Assyrians?”

“Familiar enough.”

“Ah, well, the markings on the sarcophagus seem to hint that it is from some time between 1050 and 800 B.C., which was a period of fierce expansion by the Assyrians. Oddly, for those years, only one king shows up on the historical record.

“While most likely he wiped all evidence of his predecessors’ existence or passed the name to his heirs, one monarch, Messerach, the one-eyed king, is given credit for the territory and achievements of this time. But he would have had been over 250 years old! Like a Dracula or something.”

Izaya grit his teeth with slight anxiety. “And?”

“I find it hard to believe a sarcophagus with a person as important as Messerach could remain in – oh, what is the word? – pristine or intact for so many years, but this is who is believed to be contained within.”

“…and was he a vampire?”

He really didn’t want to have to do anything to the doctor but…

“You know, it is interesting that you ask me that. The goddess on the outside of the sarcophagus was Lamastu. In Assyrian myth, Lamastu was an evil demoness who preyed on humans. Many people cite her as the mother of vampire myth, and…

Well, the engravings on, and found around, the sarchophagus portray a regal figure drinking the blood of his enemies. Now, this image is found in many cultures, specifically among those of royal lineage…but there is a quite scientific explanation.”

“Which is?”

“A disorder known as porphyria. In short, it is caused by deficiency of the iron in the blood, and in many cultures, for the nobility that could conceivable get away with thecure, the treatment was to… drink human blood.”

“So Messerach drank human blood?”

This was getting dangerous but maybe Izaya could turn it around.

“Perhaps. Drinking the blood of your enemies is, if nothing else, symbolic. It can inspire fear in your foes and dissidents. Don’t misunderstand me, I in no way believe it was a vampire. Vampires…that’s what caused this whole mess – these maniacs believe they exist!”

He didn’t seem to be lying.

“I see…yes, it is quite foolish indeed,” Izaya smiled easily in relief. “How does one go about opening the sarcophagus?”

“Ah! Quite interesting. There is a surprisingly complex mechanical lock on the face of the sarcophagus. By sheer luck, we were able to find the key not far from the sarcophagus. Why no one
ever found it and robbed it – it’s perplexing.”

“I see, so there is a key of sorts.”

“I haven’t seen the key since it was loaded onto the Elizabeth Dane in Turkey. It was stolen before the sarcophagus, even! I am still hopeful that the police find both pieces before the contents can be disturbed. It’s actually very sophisticated and I meant to study it at the museum.”

‘So, it was stolen…and we have no idea who has it.’

That did not bode well.

“I’ve answered all your questions. Do you think, now, you could please get me out of here? I don’t care who you are or why you’ve had such interest in the sarcophagus – I just want to leave this place.”

It should be just enough to be able to keep him alive. He knew a lot, but he didn’t believe in anything supernatural.

“There’s a boat nearby, we can escape on it.”

“Thank you, my friend…I don’t know where you came from, but I will never forget this kindness.”

The doctor was so heartfelt, that Izaya couldn’t help but smile back.

They made their way over to the door leading to the wooden stairs only to find Bach, crawling up the steps, emerging with something in his hand. It was some kind of mechanism with a button on it and Bach pushed it as he croaked out one last sentence.

“Your time of judgement is here.”

As he collapsed, there was an explosion that sounded nearby, and the entire area began to tremble.

They might only have a few minutes to escape. Izaya turned to Johansen. “We don’t seem to have much time. I can get us to the boat quickly, so climb on my back.”

To his credit, Johansen didn’t hesitate.

Izaya made sure not to use his full speed, but he did make use of some of his ability in order to get them there quickly and safely. ‘Even if he comes to the right conclusions, I don’t believe he’ll say anything.’ Izaya was confident.

He loaded Johansen onto the boat, and off they went, speeding out of the caves not long before a vicious explosion rocked the night’s sky.

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Shizuo had just gotten close enough to the monastery to be nearby to feel all too well the explosion shake violently through his core. After removing his hands from his ears, he looked on in confusion, pain, but most of all fear as the place began to burn to the ground in the midst of the high flames.

Izaya was there. What had happened to him??
Shizuo felt frozen by inaction. He was trapped between the desire to run into the flames as if it would somehow lead him to Izaya and the instinct to flee the area as human firefighters and other support would no doubt be there soon enough.

That was when he felt a debilitating hit to the back of his head.

He was unconscious before he hit the ground.

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After a parting at the hotel with Johansen, Izaya made his way to LaCroix’s tower. He had maybe an hour or so before he’d need to get home. Back to his dark home usually containing a Shizu-chan.

Izaya couldn’t help but smile, just a little. Eyes softening even as they looked at the ground in that moment, a light flush spread across his cheeks in response to the thought.

But what was this?

When he approached the tower there were police cars and what appeared to be large hunks of metal and brick littering the area. The officers on the scene seemed otherwise preoccupied with other onlookers, so Izaya slipped by and inside. Chunk was not awaiting him, if fact, nobody was. Nobody aside from an atrocious amount of blood and the corpses of police officers, though he noted that Chunk was not among them. Nevertheless, he had to make his way to the elevators, and arrived at the penthouse floor.

Izaya passed Beckett and upon reaching LaCroix, the man practically exploded himself.

“With whom do they think they’re dealing?!! Attack me in my own building? They’re desperate… ha, they’ve shown their weakness. A last ditch attempt to steal the prize…”

“Someone made a mess downstairs.”

“The Sabbat. A pack of shovelheads with cheap pistols was all they could muster. Two got a few stories up, but I took care of them. And my sheriff brought the rest their Final Death in the lobby. Sabbat animals.”

Strange. Izaya could connect the dots well enough, but it was better if he could squeeze some information out of the situation.

“So, the Sabbat attacked? Why?”

“Why else? The motive of every Kindred in the entire city these last few nights: The Ankaran Sarcophagus. They’ve been misled into thinking the sarcophagus holds a sleeping ancient, their most coveted feasts. Diablerists!”

Now this was new.

“Diablerists?”

“The Sabbat’s infamy is in no small part due to their practice of diablerie – that is, drinking the blood of other Kindred, especially older ones, until they are dead. Diablerists gain the power of those they’ve fed upon. In the Camarilla, this is an act punishable by death.”
Izaya felt his throat close up in slight terror and he resisted the urge to let it show on his face, at his fists, or in his body in general.

The picture was becoming clear.

But LaCroix continued in ignorance to Izaya’s mounting terror.

“For the moment, we’ve manipulated the press into reporting tonight’s events as a terrorist attack. Their soldiers may be no danger to me, but their threat to the Masquerade is abundant. As my best agent, I’m sure you can guess my course of action.”

Luckily, Izaya was present enough to have followed the topic and he forced out an answer.

“You want me to take out the Sabbat…”

“Yes. I need someone with your nerve to guarantee success. The Sabbat have been a threat for far too long.”

Izaya swallowed. “Where are they?”

“The Sabbat have made their haven at the Hallowbrook hotel – right under our noses, here in downtown. Kill their leader; the rest will scamper out of the city. This is the last time they ever set foot in Los Angeles.”

Izaya nodded in response. He understood all too well that this was going to be one hell of a task. He felt confident enough to be able to pull it off at this point. Though he felt like more of a pawn than ever under LaCroix’s thumb. He looked forward to the night in which he could end his charade and, at the very least, have his own unlife under his control.

“Ah, before you leave for the day, Beckett told me you went to the Society of Leopold. Did you find out how my sarcophagus is opened?”

Was that an intentional slip…? Izaya couldn’t fathom a reason why LaCroix might make a slip of the tongue like that on purpose. None at all whatsoever. It had to be accidental, which was no less alarming.

“Indeed, that crate that was also missing from the Dane – it’s a key to the sarcophagus.”

“A key? Where? Do you have it?”

“Unfortunately, no. That’s everything I know,” Izaya lied. “Though I do have other good news – Bach is dead.”

“Ha! Not only did you infiltrate the Society of Leopold, but you managed to kill their greatest hunter! You certainly are developing a legend for yourself. Superb. A toast to you…and to victory over the Sabbat. And to Bach may all his progeny meet such fates.”

The Prince certainly appeared to be about as happy as a little girl.

Just a little more before Izaya could go home and deal with what he’d come to realize.

Izaya smiled. “Any hunters that cross my path are dead. Same goes for the Sabbat.”

“Get rest for tomorrow night, the Sabbat must be taken care of before the next dawn. Then, when you come back, we’ll begin the hunt for the key.”
“Understood.”

Before leaving the tower, however, Izaya stopped by the sarcophagus to speak with Beckett again.

“You can always count on the Sabbat to do the wrong thing for the right reasons. They’re reckless, but they don’t normally try to attract this much attention. This carelessness warrants observation…I hope it doesn’t become pandemic.”

“How do you mean?”

“The Sabbat’s goal is to stop Gehenna, which is very similar to my own goal, though they choose to do so through more violent, fanatic, and flamboyant methods. The Camarilla on the other hand, suspends belief entirely…or so goes the party line.”

“So…you’re not Camarilla?”

“What I am is Kindred. How others choose to categorize themselves only concerns me where local customs are concerned. Individualism is a path fraught with obstacles, and sometimes angry mobs, but for all its hardships it is the only one worth taking.”

Very interesting…that was something Izaya could get behind.

“I met with Johansen.”

“And what did he have to say?”

Izaya told him about the key.

“The lock and key. An invention as ancient as greed. I should have guessed. All we have to do is find a victor in this nonsense – they’ll be the one with the key.”

Izaya told Beckett of Messerach, whom Beckett had no info on, and Lamastu.

“Lamastu? She was a Lilith figure. They represent empowered women and the threat of such women to male-dominated society. Strange she would be engraved on a king’s tomb.

“In any case, your information is appreciated. I’ll need to do a little more research.”

Now it was time for Izaya to dig for some info.

“So exactly why are the Sabbat so desperate for the sarcophagus?”

Izaya could guess this easily enough but it was better to confirm his assumptions.

“It’s simple. Someone’s misled them into believing there’s an Antediluvian in this very room. Antediluvians – the supposed 3rd generation of vampires after Caine. The Sabbat, and I suspect most Kindred in this city, would love to sink their stakes or teeth into its imagined occupant, if indeed rocketing it to the moon was out of the question.”

Suspicions confirmed.

Izaya said his goodbyes to Beckett and made his way out of the tower. Quickly now, he had to reach his apartment before the sun came up.

Making it in the nick of time, Izaya was surprised to find that Shizuo was not there.
He told himself that he wasn’t disappointed. After all, it meant he wouldn’t have to confront his feelings out loud much less to Shizuo himself. Not that he wasn’t aware of his feelings at this point, but…

‘Somehow, it’s still…frightening,’ he thought to himself, pacing in a circle around the living room. His anxieties were getting the better of him. Shizuo had already said he’d loved him…so why was the idea of openly reciprocating that scaring him so much? Was it change? Ha. As if he’d not endured plenty of that. Was it perhaps…the vulnerability of it. That sounded closer to home. In fact, that was probably it.

Izaya rubbed his face with his hands. Even though between the two of them, they’d only existed for a few decades…Shizuo felt like what Izaya needed for an eternity. The feeling was somewhat debilitating when he didn’t keep it in check.

Izaya sighed. Why was he worrying about something that was inevitable? Not to mention that it was nothing immediate.

Really it was almost more worrying that Shizu-chan wasn’t there than anything else.

But of course, his Shizu-chan was more than capable. Probably he was just taking care of his club, right?

Izaya got ready for bed and reminded himself that he’d need to focus on the task at hand, and not thinking about how LaCroix was undoubtedly trying to become a Diablerist…if he wasn’t one already.

Things were starting to come to a head, he could feel it.

But it was going to be fine, he’d ensure it. There was nothing to worry about.

Surely not.

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**Diablerie**

The consumption of another Kindred's blood, to the point of Final Death.

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading- as always! I'll do my best to get another one out as soon as I can~
Izaya awoke after an uneasy rest. Something just didn’t feel right, and it was, to put it simply, troubling. The very noticeably empty apartment was no different from how he’d left it the previous morning when he’d returned. It was somewhat of a letdown. Yet why would anything be changed? Even if Shizu-chan wanted to suddenly show up at his place during the day, he physically could not. Even the sewer connections would be risky for that. Therefore, there was no reason for anything to be changed in his apartment and that included the number of occupants inside of it, much to Izaya’s disappointment. Yet, the seed of anxiety in his heart was growing. Did Shizuo not want to see him? Or could it be…?

Izaya shook his head. There was no point in dwelling on it. He had a task to do, after all. Izaya was no fool, however. He was noticing that he was quite obviously eliminating, slowly but surely, enemies of LaCroix’s. That much was obvious. He knew that he himself was still a young vampire, so it was odd that LaCroix kept sending him on these missions. Izaya could only think of a few reasons as to why that might be, and he didn’t like any of the conclusions.

Getting himself ready and packed up, Izaya made sure he was well-prepared for this. He picked up and strapped on…a flame thrower. Yes, a flame thrower. If he were taking on the Sabbat’s leader, he’d need something damned powerful and that would be the thing to do it, with thanks to Mercurio the other day.

Heading out, Izaya took a few back alleys as a shortcut to reach the hotel. It was one of the many in the area, but most noted for the fact that it had been abandoned quite some time ago. The Hollowbrook Hotel was a mere few blocks from LaCroix’s Venture tower, and thus not very far from Izaya’s own dwelling. However, the front entrance to it was quite sealed off, as might be expected seeing as it faced a main road. Moving around the building, Izaya saw, of all things, a window cleaning lift. What it was doing there was anybody’s guess considering the windows at the higher levels appeared to be boarded up. Perhaps the Sabbat used it to enter their abode. Well, that meant Izaya could use it too, was the logical conclusion. So, he used it to enter and actual unobstructed window on a high floor. A little higher up than he liked, being that it was the top floor, but it was, at least, an entrance.

Crawling through, Izaya noticed right away that beyond the only door in sight were…a lot of Sabbat crawling around. Some of them literally.

Though, the only sources of light in the entirety of the building he’d come to find save a few exceptions would be oil drums that were on fire, placed scattered throughout. That meant sneaking about proved to be, luckily, easier than he thought it would be. There weren’t exactly a small number of Sabbat in the hotel after all. He couldn’t very well eliminate them all, that would be ridiculous. He could, however, fight off whoever he’d need to and then kill the boss should he be noticed.
Sneaking through the top floor, he eventually came to an open area inside the hotel that appeared to be the most inner part of it; he could see the main stairs and elevators below down on the main floor. He was touching the railing that oversaw the whole thing, including the lower floors. The hallway he was in certainly was grand…at one point in time. As it was now though, everything was dilapidated. It was likely that the entire structure was not safe to inhabit at all. From his short time as an informant in L.A., Izaya knew the place was scheduled to be demolished…eventually. Though it seemed that there were recently constant delays. He now knew why.

Making his way through countless hallways, Izaya actually found himself descending by going through holes in the floor. He did end up, unfortunately, running into a Sabbat soldier now and again. But what was worse than that were the monsters from the sewers. Even those were making an appearance. The odd thing about that was Izaya didn’t imagine the Sabbat would keep those around in their own dwelling, so it was rather surprising, not to mention illogical.

Still, he moved about in mostly silence, not having to fight too much. Aside from the main area, the rest of the building compromised of crumbling walls, piles of twisted support beams and metal, crumbling carpet and rugs, and general rubble everywhere between hallways and rooms. If he didn’t know he were in a hotel already, Izaya speculated that one would have no idea what the place originally used to be otherwise. Heading down further once again, Izaya was almost ambushed by a group of Sabbat, but with his quickness and agility, he was not overcome and defeated them with his trusty knives. He was able to sneak away before more came to the area to investigate the noise.

Izaya could acknowledge that he’d become quite skilled despite how little time had passed since he’d been Embraced in that alley that night. For all Izaya knew, this was normal for fledglings…but something told him it wasn’t.

‘You’re absolutely perfect.’

That’s what his sire had said…now, more than ever, Izaya wish he knew what he’d meant…but maybe he was getting an idea.

What a twisted and tangled web he was caught in.

After what felt like a mini eternity and passing by and sometimes through Sabbat, monsters, even humans, Izaya had reached a basement level, what looked like previously a ball room. There was certainly no lacking in blood; there were not just pools of it underneath the broken wooden flooring, but Izaya speculated there were actual ponds in there.

Going through the double doors of the other side, a large room made of mostly a pit of stone and blood with the occasional torch along the walls was right in front of Izaya. There were a few chandeliers with the grotesque bodies of humans strung along them hanging down. What kind of creature made its home here?

Izaya would soon get his answer.

From one of the upper tunnels that led to the room, out stepped a figure…draped in red.

Andrej.

The Sabbat from the mansion out in Hollywood, the one Izaya thought he’d killed…but not so.

Andrej’s glowing eyes zeroed in on Izaya, and he spoke.

“I recognized the smell of your blood, young Cainite – very potent, greater than our last meeting. I could smell it, even over the flood of my fallen brethren. Doesn’t that make you wonder?”
This was the guy who had seemed interested in Izaya previously. Did he hope to recruit him? That would not happen. Izaya had his own intentions.

“Hmph, it hardly matters, Andrej. What matters is that I kill you this time.”

Andrej frowned. “Puppet! The strength of your blood is all that’s saved you from yourself. Wretched weak-minded mongrel! The blood is wasted in you. Wasted!”

“A puppet, hm? Oh, I’m well-aware. You need not concern yourself with that, however. It isn’t your business.”

“Ah…but perhaps this makes it my business?”

Andrej pointed to one of the lower walls.

Shizuo.

He was pinned into the wall inside of the empty pit. The pit contained more stone for a bottom and actual deeper pools of blood. Shizuo was staked by the limbs and heart into the wall. He looked like he was merely sleeping.

Izaya didn’t hesitate.

He leapt down into the pit, barely stopping to think.

Reaching up to Shizuo’s face, Izaya was able to confirm that Shizuo was, in fact, alive. Well, alive for a Kindred.

Izaya looked to the ground, his fists clenched. When he spoke, it was a deadly quiet whisper.

“What do you want?”

Andrej smirked.

“What I want is you, Fledgling.”

Izaya looked at Shizuo’s still face.

“Like hell.”

Not for a moment was Izaya convinced. He would not be bought by any means. Especially not this way.

“You’ll never get me…or him,” Izaya gestured to Shizuo. Izaya took out his flame thrower. What the hell was Andrej’s intention? Did he really think this would work?

“I will purify you myself if I must – and you will be purified. It is the blood that he is speaking through, the blood of all pawns! It all must be purified!”

And Andrej lunged, jumping down into the pit, even into a pool of blood, coming back up through another one to try to attack from behind.

Defending himself, Izaya managed to spin around and block the attack. Following that, he brought up his flame thrower and launched it at Andrej. It did much more damage than he expected.

Thus began the dancing fight filled with fire. The more Andrej dove into the pools of blood, the
more he seemed to heal. At the same time, Izaya’s knife skills combined with his fire attacks slowly wore Andrej down.

And then finally, finally.

Andrej was burnt to a crisp and dissipated.

Panting a bit, Izaya was finally able to relax. He’d spent a considerable amount of effort over this after all. He had also had to expend the effort in making sure to keep the battle away from Shizuo the best he could, and to keep Andrej away from him in general. As if fighting the Sabbat leader hadn’t been hard enough on its own.

Still, that… creature had the nerve to take Shizuo and harm him. He had to be eliminated no matter what. But now, there was no time to waste.

As soon as he could catch his breath, Izaya was back in front of Shizuo, pulling out the stakes that were holding him there…and the one through the heart that had him paralyzed. Shizuo came down, and Izaya held him there in his arms, just clutching at him as if he might float away.

He’d not even known that Shizuo had apparently been attacked and captured…and it may have been to get to Izaya. Izaya’s fingers trembled and clutched Shizuo’s shirt tightly.

Could Shizuo have known something like this might happen? Izaya himself should have, he thought.

Izaya sat there a while longer, just holding Shizuo close. He still wasn’t stirring and there weren’t many ways to tell if he were alright.

He’d get him back to Hollywood. To Shizuo’s club where Kaz would be – he’d know what to do, surely. And there were few people Izaya could trust with himself and Shizuo. Kaz would be one of them. As he did down in the sewers, Izaya picked Shizuo up and carried him on his back.

It took a little while longer, but after passing through a few more rooms that were clearly part of some dilapidated structure, they emerged out onto a street, still close to the hotel.

Yet almost immediately, someone appeared before them. Ming Xiao.

“Be at peace, Kindred, you stand amongst friends now.”

Now that, Izaya knew, was not the truth. He tightened his grip on Shizuo.

“Is that so?”

“Your foes all lie vanquished, Kindred. I come to help. Be at peace, trouble is nothing but yours to give.”

Izaya frowned. She was trying hard.

“A true friend in death is as true love: precious, rare, and sweet. Pray your senses have not gone so languid that this blessing cannot be savored.”

Izaya shot back, “A true friend or a friend of convenience?”

“We are in a position to help each other, yes? Is it impossible, then, that my admiration is genuine, Kindred? Can friendship truly be founded on nothing? Or must there be nothing to gain in order for friendship to be true?”
“Your agents from the Giovanni mansion did not share your views.”

“Indeed. The Chang brothers, my greatest agents, undone by the young soldier of LaCroix. It was obvious your path was greater than I, or he, anticipated.”

She was good with words, he’d give her that. But...he could smell her true intentions like a single drop of poison in a glass of wine. Time to get down to it.

“What’s this about an alliance between you and LaCroix?”

“We did have an arrangement, LaCroix and I. A mutually beneficial pact to drive the lesser factions from the city.”

“And you did not tell me of this before…”

“Again, Kindred, I could not have guessed the significance of your path. My arrangement with your prince was too sensitive to reveal.”

“And...what happened to this arrangement?”

“LaCroix’s zeal in recovering the Ankaran Sarcophagus has been to the exclusion of many relationships...mine included. And I, like yourself, have been used by him in his desperate quest for power.”

“How was that?”

“LaCroix feared Alistair Grout, the Malkavian primogen – for the cursed insight of his bloodline was strong and brought him uncomfortably close to the truth about LaCroix’s ambitions.”

Her words were confirming his own suspicions. It was possible she was lying about this, yet it seemed to line up too well with what Izaya had concluded about LaCroix himself.

“And so?”

LaCroix saw an opportunity to rid himself of two problems – a hardened rebel leader and a problematic primogen – in one fell stroke. And as you can see...I was integral to his plan.”

As she said this, she looked around, and, seeing no one close enough nearby, Ming Xiao...transformed into a perfect replica of Nines Rodriguez.

So...that was the Nines he’d met with outside of Grout’s home that night.

“LaCroix convinced me that an alliance with the Camarilla could strengthen the position of the Kueijin. And so, with my help, your prince framed Nines Rodriguez with the murder of Alistair Grout.”

“So...it was you I saw.”

“Yes. You were to be made to be the witness, for your political naivete put your word beyond reproach; no one would believe you’d devise such a story. LaCroix used you and once again turned a problem to his advantage.”

There was one thing left.

“Why are you telling me all of this?”

“You need to understand that you are a liability, Kindred. Once LaCroix finds the right moment, you
will be disposed of... just as he did with Alistair Grout, Mr. Rodriguez, your sire, and countless others.”

Izaya knew this. Or at the very least, even if he didn’t, he could have guessed as much. LaCroix never wanted him around in the first place, after all.

“Hear these words, Kindred. The sarcophagus is sealed against the ages; only the proper key will break this seal. That key now lies safely in Kuei-jin hands. Your prince’s prize cannot be had without it.”

“I see. It is appreciated.”

“I hope you recognize my sincerity, Kindred. I would like to see you reach your destination before your path is cut short. I hope when next we meet, it is again as friends.”

And she disappeared, as quickly as she had appeared before.

Izaya hailed a taxi the moment he was able and got himself and Shizuo inside. He instructed the driver to head to Shizuo’s club, and there he’d bring him to Kaz.

At this rate, it was nearing dawn, though there was still some time left.

Luckily, upon reaching the club, patrons were quickly leaving it; apparently, it was late enough that the club was closing.

Getting out of the cab and into the club, Izaya sprinted up the steps with Shizuo as quickly as was reasonable to a human’s eyes and burst into the office where he’d sensed Kaz was.

Kaz got up immediately, and Izaya hurriedly explained what’d happened the best he could.

Kaz examined Shizuo once they’d laid him down went to get some blood for him. He left in a hurry and didn’t say anything.

Izaya sat next to the laying Shizuo, who had still not come to.

He brought up his hand to Shizuo’s face, caressing it gently.

Would he wake up...?

No, he had to. He just had to.

Izaya stared into Shizuo’s face, looking for a sign of stirring, but saw nothing.

“Shizu-chan... I don’t know what he did to you but please... please wake up.”

Not even a twitch.

“I looked for you for years, you know,” he started, hoping that maybe someone it would summon Shizuo was from this state and awaken him. “There were so many times I thought I might give up and those times were the hardest for me, you know.”

Izaya shifted in his seat. He felt embarrassed saying all of this, but it just poured out of him.

“I did, too, you know. In the haunted hotel, back then. Before we ran into each other, and before I knew you were Zen. I was just barely coming to terms with the idea... and then you came crashing through... literally.”
Izaya smiled at the memory, now grateful for it.

Unbeknownst to Izaya, Shizuo fingers shifted.

“I was so happy deep down, you know. When I knew for certain it was you,” he sighed. “But I was so scared, too, Shizu-chan.”

“I was afraid of those feelings,” he smiled wryly. “While I was looking for you as a human, it was easy to keep telling myself it was over my pride but…at that time at the hotel I had to start coming to terms with it. And it wasn’t just my own feelings, but I was scared of yours too.”

The way Shizuo smiled at him, the way he talked to him, the things he’d said…

It was so much to bear. But Izaya now welcomed it.

“I was always denying it…what I felt, I mean. Always, always pushing it away,” Izaya explained. “To the point that I didn’t even know myself how I felt…about you, that is.”

Izaya swallowed.

“I…”

He hesitated for a few moments, his mind churning and racing with thoughts of all kinds.

But…even though Shizuo was out, he just couldn’t bring himself to say it.

Shizuo had heard most of what Izaya had said…so he took a chance.

Frustrated with himself, Izaya stood up quickly, turning toward the door to see if Kaz was on his way back, when a hand snatched his wrist so quickly, Izaya jumped a little.

That’s when a sound came from Shizuo. But despite his advanced hearing abilities, it was still too quiet.

“Shizu-chan, you’re-!”

Izaya cut himself off, seeing Shizuo’s mouth moving, his eyes opening. He hadn’t realized that Shizuo’s wounds appeared to have healed up during all that time.

And then, those golden eyes staring into his own and the softest whisper followed.

“…heart.”

“What?” Izaya was confused. Was there something wrong with Shizu-chan’s heart?

“…your heart,” Shizuo said.

Seeing Izaya still puzzled, he spoke once more.

“The answer to your note…it’s your heart,” Shizuo smiled. “‘What is wholly mine that only you can have?’ The answer is your heart, isn’t it?”

Izaya felt a piercing heat in his chest that spread out through his body rapidly. All he could do was stare at Shizuo, his mouth open as if to speak, but no words would come out. All he could do was give a tiny nod.
Shizuo chuckled, which elicited a tiny whimper from Izaya. Raising a now-healed hand, Shizuo cupped Izaya’s face, his thumb making small stroking motions along Izaya’s cheek.

Izaya closed his eyes against, leaning into the touch, as he brought up a hand of his own to curl around Shizuo’s. His sigh was one of contentedness.

Opening his eyes again, Izaya was weak to that stare that met his own.

“Izaya…I’m so relieved you’re safe,” Shizuo started. “When I saw that monastery blow up, I…I thought you had…”

Izaya shook his head.

“No, Shizu-chan, I’m perfectly safe,” he smiled reassuringly.

Shizuo was stricken with something by that smile.

“I’m so glad…I feared the worst.”

“As it stands, Shizu-chan…it’s you who was kidnapped, you know,” he explained. “The Sabbat leader kidnapped you to try to gain me as a follower.”

“I was afraid something like that might happen…” Shizuo winced. So that was what happened when he was knocked out. He’d feared something of that nature might occur, but he’d thought that it would be Izaya in the greater danger, not himself. After all, he was, generally speaking, off of most Kindreds’ radar. Usually he and Kaz were considered less active members of the Anarchs by others more or less so they were typically left alone. Shizuo had let his guard down.

“Don’t think you’re responsible, Shizuo…so long as I’m on LaCroix’s leash, I think…this sort of thing can’t be helped.”

“Then we need to do something about that ourselves.”

It sounded dangerous as all hell. No, it was dangerous as all hell.

But Izaya couldn’t allow anything to happen to Shizuo, especially not because of him and…it seemed likely that Shizuo felt the same about him. Besides, it was always Izaya’s goal to get out from under LaCroix’s thumb, but he’d thought he’d end up having more time to be able to plot that out himself. However, at the rate things were going with the increasing difficulty in his missions as well as LaCroix getting ever closer to being able to open the sarcophagus, it did indeed seem like time was running out.

Izaya had to make some choices, and he was starting to run out of time to do so.

“Yes,” Izaya agreed. They’d have to make a plan.

The door opened, and Kaz walked in.

His timing had been…a little too fitting.

Well, whatever. If Izaya had it his way, Kaz would eventually be his brother-in-law anyway.

Though Kaz gave no indication of having overheard them, Izaya was certain he had. Either way, Kaz was thrilled to see Shizuo awake, who apologized for worrying him as he drank the blood packs Kaz had brought back.
It was morning now, so the three of them went to sleep for the day. Izaya, of course, sharing with Shizuo. They held hands in their sleep.

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The next night, Shizuo and Izaya agreed that they would need to appear as though everything was still going as LaCroix was planning. Izaya would go to him and complete his next task, and then the two of them would use whatever they could to turn it around and strike back at LaCroix.

Izaya had killed the leader of the Sabbat…no easy feat. With both of them together, they had a shot at taking out LaCroix. They’d have to plan out the finer details later once they knew more of what was going on with the other Anarchs, LaCroix, and others as well before they could plot to the best of their ability.

So, Izaya was about to set out for downtown alone when Shizuo stopped him at the entrance.

“Hey.”

Izaya turned, to find Shizuo running a hand through his hair. It was a relaxing sensation.

“I love you, Izaya.”

Izaya bit his lip against the sensation that was a mix between needing to cry and needing to hold Shizuo and never let him go.

“I…I…” Izaya looked away. He…he just…

“I understand,” Shizuo said. “I can see it in your eyes, Izaya…that’s enough for me.”

With another dazzling smile, Izaya was fully disarmed. But he was prepared for the incoming kiss.

Returning it with everything he was, Izaya sighed into the kiss with pleasure. Shizuo groaned, pushing harder against Izaya. He moved to Izaya’s neck, planting kiss after kiss, and bite after bite. Izaya shivered in response, making small moans now and then.

Shizuo took Izaya’s head in his hands, kissing him once more.

“You’d better go…”

Izaya frowned, reminded of what he was having to do. “Yeah.”

Shizuo watched the taxi containing Izaya until it was out of sight.

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Chunk was there.

“Oh, am I ever glad you’re safe, cinnamon bun. I was…on sick leave, when I heard about the attack. I worried you might’ve uh…well, anyway, your security stud’s here to protect you now, don’t you worry.”
More of this.

“I need to see LaCroix, cupcake…morsel.”

What was he even saying?

“I guess you can go up. He wasn’t expecting you, but it should be alright.”

“Thanks~”

That had been relatively painless. And yet, Izaya was actually glad that Chunk hadn’t been killed. ‘I guess his presence has grown on me a little.’

When he reached the penthouse floor, LaCroix wasted no time, as per usual.

“The Sabbat?”

“Done.”

LaCroix actually smiled.

“Another obstacle removed. From the anomy, we resurrect a new order. And this, in no small part, to your service,” he then spoke to the Sherriff who stood next to him as always. “Did you hear that? You were never able to wipe them out completely.”

He turned back to Izaya. “Keep it up and you may have HIS job.”

Izaya didn’t believe it. He would never take that post even if it were true and besides…they were taking steps so that it never got that far.

“My unstoppable crusader…my victories in this city are in no small part due to you. You’ve done what I’ve asked without question, and you’ve done it well. Take this small token of my appreciation – we’ll rule this city side-by-side, you and I.”

LaCroix gave him hundreds of dollars.

Well then. What Izaya needed now was more information on LaCroix’s next plotting so that would require a concession from him.

“I know where the key to the sarcophagus is.”

It was true, and Ming Xiao hadn’t had any real reason to lie to him. About the key’s location, anyway. Everything else, well…

“You found the key? Where? Who has it?”

The prince was so invested in this, his worried and hungry expression made Izaya feel a little sick.

‘Well…here goes nothing.’

“Ming Xiao has it. She also told me to tell you the alliance was off.”

“This nonsense again! Look, I told you before: no Kindred would ever ally themselves with those…demons. This is a subterfuge, a trick to start a civil war…and apparently it’s worked.”

Time to keep playing along.
“Then…Nines is innocent. She took his shape. She killed Grout.”

“As of this moment, there is no blood hunt against Nines Rodriguez. The Kuei-jin have revealed their plot. They want us to war against each other?!? Well, to that I propose an alliance with the anarchs. Together, we Kindred shall drive out these foreigners once and for all!”

“But…will the anarchs really trust you?”

“It’s not a matter of trust…it’s a matter of who they dislike more: The Camarilla or the Kuei-jin. The Kuei-jin killed their last leader and threaten all of our kind. I think they’d agree to an alliance.”

‘I see where this is going…’

“How do you expect them to agree to an alliance?”

“Go to the Last Round, immediately. Tell them the Kuei-jin have admitted to killing Grout and that the blood hunt against Nines Rodriguez is officially over. Tell them I have realized the true threat the Kuei-jin pose and wish to negotiate a pact.

“You will be my emissary for the alliance, so naturally, you speak on behalf of the Camarilla. Choose your words carefully. I will begin organizing plans for war. Good luck 0 the prosperity o all this city’s Kindred depends on your success tonight.”

Izaya merely smiled. “No pressure.”

Upon leaving, Izaya noted that Beckett was no longer there.

First stopping at Fat Larry’s truck for more knives and protective clothing he could wear underneath his own, Izaya then cut through the alleyway that would lead him to the bar. On his way there, however, someone called out to him.

“Wait…!”

It was Beckett, who ran right up to him.

Strangely, Beckett seemed…nervous.

“Umm…about the sarcophagus…”

“What is it?” This was quite strange.

“Don’t open it. Whatever you do, do not open the Ankaran Sarcophagus.”

Very strange.

“But…you were saying there was nothing to worry about.”

“Well, eh, despite what I said…if that sarcophagus is opened, there will be disaster. In what form, I cannot be sure – but after studying the evidence, I’m convinced now that it is better left undisturbed. And anyone who’d pursue any other course is deserving of the consequences.”

Interesting.

“Why did you change your mind?”

“There’s an intangible sensation I haven’t been able to put my finger on since I came to town. I still
don’t know where it seeps from, but if the sarcophagus is a possibility, to eliminate that chance, it should remain closed."

“Do believe in the ancients after all?”

“I never said the danger came from an Antidiluvian, did I? It’s merely a possibility, a fraction of a percentage chance. My instincts tell me something is wrong here, and that sarcophagus seems to be the nexus. I’m distancing myself from it – you do as you see fit.”

“Thank you for the warning.”

“I thought you deserved a chance. There’s a good possibility we may not meet again. Goodbye, young one.”

Izaya nodded seriously. “Goodbye, Beckett.”

Beckett ran back toward an alley, and all Izaya heard after that was a howling.

That was certainly something to think about. If Beckett thought it best not to open the sarcophagus, then that was truly something he ought to remember.

Reaching the bar, he ran into a woman inside who identified herself as Damsel. She had bright red hair, and quite the attitude. There were no other Kindred there.

“Ugh, Cammy.”

So…an Anarch who thought he was in LaCroix’s pocket. Well…he’d certainly intended to appear that way.

“I need to talk to Nines. The prince wants an alliance with the anarchs.”

“LaCroix…an alliance with us? Ha! Has he- The Ca- You’re fucking with me, right? Do I look like a goddamn source of amusement for you?”

A fair enough reaction.

“The bloodhunt with Nines is off. Xiao killed Grout – she’s a shapeshifter.”

Damsel burst out in a rage.

“WE TOLD HIM NINES DIDN’T DO IT! That son of a…and that Kuei-jin bitch! If I ever get my hands on her, I’ll tie her eyelashes to her ass hairs and bowl her ass into a car compactor! Demon…whore!”

Quite the attitude indeed.

“Now you see why I need to talk to Nines, yeah? Where is he?”

She rubbed her temples. “Okay…alright, I’m fine. Nines…yeah…I can’t believe it’s come to this, but ugh, I hate those goddamn devils even more than I hate that fascist dandy prince! Goddamn Xiao! If Nines hadn’t told me to watch this place, I’d be over there right now making skank sushi.”

Damsel sighed. “I don’t know if I should be telling anyone but…Nines is hiding out in Griffith Park. If Nines agrees to the alliance, guess that means me and the Cam’ll be on the same side. Think I’ll go eat something so I can vomit.”
“Got it. Thanks, Damsel.”

Izaya hadn’t been out to the park himself, but he did know where it was. Like much in the city, he’d need another taxi to get there.

The way to the park was by taking an enclosed tram from the city’s level all the way up to a mountainous region surrounded by forest. That was the actual park. After being dropped off by taxi, Izaya entered the building where the tram was, and waited the long wait that it took just to get up to the end of the line.

Exiting that building into the park, Nines was actually standing not too far away, near a different building.

“Good to see ya again, kid. Heard you made quite a name for yourself – no small feat in this city. I hear LaCroix needs us all of a sudden. Hmph. Well I’ll be damned.”

“He proposes an alliance with the anarchs to get rid of the Kuei-jin.”

Izaya did not miss the fact that getting rid of the Kuei-jin would be furthering LaCroix’s goals once more.

“Does he, now? You know, we just ended a war with them and we kost a lotta people – too many. Does he expect us to do all the fighting while the Camarilla throws mean looks from the sidelines? Or are they ready to go toe-to-toe with those goddamn devils?”

“The prince wants the Kuei-jin dead as much as you.”

“I still don’t trsut LaCroix. But then again, the Camarilla didn’t wholesale slaughter us upon arrival,” he sighed. “Goddamn it…I’m stuck between a rock and a son of a bitch.”

“Your people…our people need a leader now more than ever.” Izaya would drop that implication to him.

“Hmm…it seems strange, LaCroix wanting to go to war with them all of a sudden.”

It was indeed. A very fast change of pace. Izaya had been suspicious from the start with LaCroix, and that hadn’t changed.

Nines was looking around, and behind Izaya.

“Something’s not right…”

Izaya sniffed the air…there was something…

“Smell that? Smells like smoke.”

Yes, that was it.

“We gotta get outta here.”

Izaya looked behind him and saw it.

“Kid, we’ve been followed. That fire’s coming from all directions; it’s man-made. We gotta get outta here – this is bad.”

“But the fire is far off, we should be fine, yeah?”
“No, kid, you don’t understand. The fire wasn’t set to kill us. Come on, we gotta get to the tram.”

As they made their way over, Izaya responded.

“So what’s the issue?”

“I didn’t hide out here because it was a nice view. I did it because no one would come lookin’ for me in these parts; this is werewolf country.

“So the wolves will be out for blood for that fire. We gotta move faster!”

“We can’t talk to them?”

“They don’t talk to us, they just kill on sight.”

“We can’t fight?”

“No. No, we can’t. You don’t understand what these things are capable of. Guns are useless and getting close is suicide. The only thing to do is run. Now let’s get to the tram, fast.”

But the tram had begun leaving already.

“Shit! It’s leaving, come on, kid, we gotta – “

And that was when a werewolf came out of nowhere, snatched Nines in its jaws, and leapt off the side of the cliff.

Shit.

Not only was that plainly horrifying, but there was another one emerging from the fire. It truly was huge, and all it did was roar as it charged Izaya.

The tram building had a timer on the side, showing the five minutes he’d have to survive until another tram arrived.

Good thing Izaya was used to running.

Blood Hunt:

A blood hunt is an order given by the prince of a city, calling for the Final Death of another Kindred. Such an order is usually given whenever a Kindred has committed a serious offense, such as kinslaying, diablerie, breaching the Masquerade, invasion of domain that has resulted in any of the above offenses, or any other behavior that a prince deems to be a sufficient threat to the safety of the Masquerade and the Kindred of the city as a whole. Any Kindred who hears the order for a blood hunt is expected to participate, although it’s not required unless the Kindred in question has committed truly serious offenses.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks as always for reading, commenting, kudos...-ing. :D <3

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