A madman haunts the streets of the Whitechapel district in London. His trail of blood leads to a most unlikely victim. When Isis suddenly goes missing, Malik is convinced Jack the Ripper has targeted his sister. All doubt him except the eccentric Detective Ryou, who is determined to capture this serial killer. The two race against time to save Isis, neither prepared for what lurks in the shadows…
A damp, cold air hung in the night, like a mist wrapping the city. She pulled her shawl a bit closer, her blue eyes darting about as she traveled under the light of the lamppost. The winter air still clung to the darkness, warding off the promise of a spring thaw. If Isis had been wiser, she would have brought a coat.

Isis sighed, her breath warming the air in front of her. Her meeting ran much longer than she had intended; what would have been a brief examination ate up her entire evening. She couldn’t blame her boss, though. Isis had a habit of losing sense of time while working. She hoped that her brothers hadn’t waited up for her. The hour grew late and their supper would have long gone cold by now.

Isis glanced up, the dark, cloudy sky of London greeting her. Even after years in London, she struggled with the cold weather. There were times when she ached for home, of warmth and sun. Yet she couldn’t be angry at their lot in life. For all that had happened, the English had treated her family quite well. Her little brother might disagree, but Isis liked this life they shared.

Isis rummaged through her pocket, pulling out a pocket watch. It was just past midnight. No cabs ran this late, at least not in this part of town. A foul scent of smoke and alcohol leaked into the air. Isis noticed a couple of women, walking down by the corner. Their lack of clothing despite the cold revealed their occupation.

Isis said nothing, her eyes focused ahead as she passed the night workers. She suspected that no one would bother to focus on her when there were other opportunities nearby, but that still didn’t ease the tension in her body. Isis couldn’t shake the feeling that there were eyes on her, even this late into the night.

Isis quickened her pace, not wishing to linger in the red-light district any longer than she needed to. She swore under her breath in irritation. She should have just tried to find a room for the night instead of wandering halfway across London. Granted, finding a hotel at this hour probably wouldn’t ease her brothers’ concern either.

Regardless, Isis was of a stubborn mind. She wouldn’t slow down her pace—the comfort of her own bed became too alluring at this point. Isis sighed, pulling her shawl a bit tighter to keep warm. She adjusted it so that it covered her head, a knitted cloak offering her warmth.

Without realizing it, the movement of adjusting her shawl caught her bracelet. She felt the silver chain slip. Before she could grab it, her own foot incidentally kicked the broken piece of jewelry forward in her rush to get home. Isis scurried forward and knelt down. The bracelet had been a gift—she didn’t dare think of leaving it behind.

Just as Isis knelt down, a glint caught her eye. Her breath stopped in her throat when she heard the click. A gun. Isis froze, not daring to move. In her periphery, she could see a shadow from the alley. She knew screaming or running would end up with a bullet to her temple. Despite the terror clawing at her chest, Isis forced herself to remain calm.

“What do you want?” she whispered, speaking to the stranger that had her trapped.

“If you wish to live, you’ll stand and walk towards the alley.”

Isis’s hand trembled around her bracelet. She didn’t want to. She knew the moment she left the street, she would not be found. It was a death sentence to leave the security of the lampposts lining the roads. But with the barrel of a gun glaring at her, she was forced to comply. She slowly rose to her feet, ducking her head down and turning towards the darkness. Though she faced death, Isis refused to accept her sentence so easily.
The lamplight receded, the darkness draping onto her as she walked down the alleyway. Her eyes couldn't see into the pitch black, unable to find the gunman. Her struggle for sight was a fool's errand, Isis flinching at the barrel suddenly pressed against the small of her back. Her hands clenched her shawl tightly, Isis trying to think of some means to escape.

She felt the barrel nudge her, forcing her to take a blind step forward deeper into the darkness. She wasn't sure where she was heading. They travelled in silence. Isis's eyes widened, searching for any light to guide her path. Perhaps if she caught a glimpse of her captor, she might be able to-

Isis felt a hand grab her arm gruffly, bringing her to a halt. She stumbled to catch herself, thrown off balance by the tight grasp on her. The shawl slipped off her shoulders, her raven black hair blending into the night around her. She blinked, disoriented for a moment. The iron grip that held her grew slack, falling away.

"Wait…"

Isis felt the gun slip away from her back. For a split second, the barrel of the pistol caught a glimmer of light, a silver flash before disappearing into the darkness. The man's voice trembled beneath his growl. Isis barely registered the command, realizing the gun was no longer aimed at her.

Isis realized this was her chance. She didn't have any time to think. She lashed out, twisting around. Her captor stumbled back, gun flying free from his hand. Isis raced away from her kidnapper, running blind into the night. An angry yell echoed after her, Isis sprinting as best she could to put distance between them.

Where would Isis go? How would she escape? Isis knew she needed to find someone, anyone. Desperation plagued her, as she skidded against the cobblestone wall. She struggled to keep her balance, turning down what she believed was an alleyway.

The man appeared suddenly, hands gripping her arms tightly. Panicked, Isis writhed around, bracelet flying from her hand in her frantic attempt at escape. Her captor was stronger, his hands like a vice on her. Still, Isis thrashed about, her hair wild, her necklace clinking, her shawl now torn away. She struggled fiercely out of fear of the unknown. Isis twisted her head around, eyes wide in terror, trying to catch a glimpse of the man from the shadows.

Isis's breath caught in her throat, her words lost as she tried to pull away. She tried to scream, but her voice would not come to her. Before she could escape, the darkness consumed her and everything fell to black.
Chapter 2

Malik jumped out of the carriage before it came to a stop, tipping his driver without sparing a second glance. He growled under his breath, pushing past a group of people congregated at the entrance of the police station. He had tried to remain patient like Rishid suggested. He knew Rishid was just as worried as himself. But Malik couldn't sit around any longer.

Three days had passed since Isis went missing.

Malik had expected to receive word from the station after reporting the case. The inspector at the front desk had promised to update him on their progress. The commissioner had urged him and Rishid to remain calm and to "let the police do their damn jobs." Malik hadn't exactly left a favorable impression on the officer in their first meeting, though he had deferred to his judgment for the time being.

And as much as Malik would rather not meddle in affairs that were not under his expertise, this involved family. He couldn't let this go any longer.

So despite his brother's suggestion to follow the commissioner's orders, Malik decided to find some results himself. He pushed past the heavy doors, eyes adjusting from the sunlit morning to the shadowed office. Malik wandered about, eyes flicking back and forth in his search for the police commissioner. He noticed the curious stares in his direction, but Malik didn't pay any notice. He had more pressing issues to attend to.

Malik spotted the nameplate while perusing the offices down the hallway, alerting him to the commissioner's whereabouts. The door was closed, but that didn't dissuade him. He made a beeline for the private office. He knocked firmly, glancing over his shoulder to see a secretary eyeing him. Malik glared at him until the man blushed and snapped his gaze away.

Malik turned back, sighing in annoyance. His lavender eyes narrowed as he leaned against the door, pressing an ear to the wood, listening for any noise inside. He pounded on the door again.

"Kaiba, I know you're in there!"

"It's been three days. Have you gotten nowhere?!"

Kaiba frowned, his annoyance seeping through. "I said I would fill you in on the progress of the case. Now be on your way!"

"What part of a locked door was so difficult to understand, Mr. Ishtar?"

Kaiba scowled, his annoyance seeping through. "What part of filling me in on the progress of the case is so difficult to understand, Commissioner Kaiba?"

"I have proof! Just let me speak to the inspector in charge of the Ripper case and he can decide if my evidence is enough to tie the two together," Malik argued, trying to get somewhere. He suspected this was all connected.

"It's been three days with no word from her. Isis's not one to just up and vanish. That's why I brought it to your attention. I think my sister's disappearance is related to the serial killer case."

"What part of filling me in on the progress of the case is so difficult to understand, Mr. Ishtar?"

Kaiba narrowed his eyes, his anger evident. "I did tell you to report the case. That's all you need to do!"

"This is a missing person's case, Mr. Ishtar. These things can take time. If this were a murder case, then you would likely be receiving news far too soon. And frankly, the murders in this city are more concerning than your sister having a late night out," Kaiba snipped, a harsh glint to his eyes.

Malik firmly stood his ground. "It's been three days with no word from her. Isis's not one to just up and vanish. That's why I brought it to your attention. I think my sister's disappearance is related to the serial killer case."

"I have proof! Just let me speak to the inspector in charge of the Ripper case and he can decide if my evidence is enough to tie the two together." Malik argued, trying to get somewhere - anywhere for his sister's sake.

Kaiba waved a hand to dismiss Malik. "My team working on the Ripper case is far too busy to waste time on false leads. I told you when we get any leads on your sister's whereabouts, we will inform you immediately. That's all I have for you, Mr. Ishtar. Now be on your way."

"I have proof! Just let me speak to the inspector in charge of the Ripper case and he can decide if my evidence is enough to tie the two together," Malik argued, trying to get somewhere - anywhere for his sister's sake.

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"I have proof! Just let me speak to the inspector in charge of the Ripper case and he can decide if my evidence is enough to tie the two together," Malik argued, trying to get somewhere - anywhere for his sister's sake.
Malik glanced down, finally paying attention to Kaiba's original visitor. He blinked at the crown of black and violet hair with blond bangs, a curious look on the visitor's face. Even though he was sitting, Malik could tell he was of short stature. Malik glanced over to Kaiba, whose expression remained frigid. "Tell me what?" Malik inquired, wondering if he could get information out of this officer.

"Yugi, shut it," Kaiba snapped, a scowl growing on his face.

Yugi gave the commissioner an unamused look. Malik half expected Kaiba to throw him or Yugi out of the room but raised an eyebrow when Kaiba didn't stop Yugi from speaking: "The reason he doesn't want you to relay your case to the Ripper case is because that team is understaffed."

Malik blinked, turning back to Kaiba, who looked pissed as usual but kept his gaze focused on the file in his hand. He looked as if he just wanted to get this conversation over with. Malik crossed his arms, eye narrowing. "Why cut corners on your most needed team? That hardly seems wise."

Kaiba glared at Malik, but he wouldn't back down. He wanted to get to the bottom of it. If it was a matter of too few bodies, then that wasn't a reason to dismiss a possible lead in the case. At least, to Malik it wasn't a good reason.

Kaiba sighed, standing up from his desk. He towered over Yugi, accentuating his rather impressive height as he walked to the door. He slammed it shut, trying to fix the lock that Malik had broken past. As soon as they were alone, Kaiba turned around, raising a hand to rub his temple. He sighed, finally conceding as he divulged information on the operation.

"We initially had a team of a half-dozen detectives and a journalist collaborating on the case. This was back in August when the murders had just begun, and we had recognized the pattern. The case progressed as much as it could. However, after a nasty post in the paper, the journalist on the team was suddenly killed in the same manner as his other victims. Leaving no question who had committed the murder."

Malik kept his gaze locked with Kaiba's. Malik understood the message the killer was trying to send in the journalist's death. He suspected that his death hadn't been reported to avoiding creating a stir. Most of the public had assumed he only targeted prostitutes in the dead of the night.

"So the killer cares about his public appearance, then?" Malik asked, still somewhat surprised that Kaiba had told him this much.

Kaiba sighed, glancing away. "Perhaps. No one really knows what goes on inside a killer's mind. The team continued to investigate, but a few weeks later two of the investigators were brutally murdered on the same night. Same way as the journalist. We had initially figured Jack the Ripper went after the journalist because of the article he published."

Malik swallowed, his stomach feeling uncomfortably empty. "He'll kill anyone who might be a threat to him."

Kaiba nodded. "We thought he didn't care if we gave chase. He seemed to have encouraged it initially. But upon those three deaths, the other investigators asked to be transferred from the case. No one wanted to be targeted by a madman killing whores at night."

Malik glared at Kaiba, swallowing against the bile filling his chest. "So they would rather be cowards and let a murderer go free?"

Kaiba snapped back, his eyes a cold, icy blaze; "If they haven't gotten the resolve to catch this serial killer, then I don't need them wasting my time. Be careful about judging others while you live comfortably away from the dangers of the city."

Malik had a retort ready on his lips, unafraid to face a madman if it meant saving his sister. Perhaps it was a brash statement, but he felt it in his entire being. His family meant everything. His family was all he had upon moving to England, his one constant. He refused to give up on them even if the world was determined to.

Before Malik could argue back, Yugi caught his attention. "You know Seto, it might be preemptive to say, but perhaps. Malik could help in the case. If his sister's disappearance is related to the Ripper case, slim as that may be, it would be a major boon. It would be better to play it safe than potentially gloss over a possible lead."

Malik glanced down at Yugi before returning his gaze to Kaiba. The commissioner let out an annoyed sigh, his expression bitter. Malik waited for Kaiba to reject the advice. The man was stubborn and irritable as it was. But as if by some magic, his stature caved. Malik didn't know what sort of power Yugi had over the anal commissioner, but he could definitely learn a thing or two from him.

Kaiba raised a hand to push back his bangs, messing up his neat hair. His eyes settled on Malik. "You enjoy causing me trouble, don't you Ishtar?"

Malik shrugged. "I'm just trying to find my sister. Through whatever means necessary."

Yugi smiled at Kaiba, almost disarming in nature. "Surely you can understand that, Seto?"

Kaiba gnashed, rolling his eyes in some unspoken defeat. "Yugi, you're just as big of a pain as the Ishtar family."

Malik raised an eyebrow at the insult, but Yugi didn't seem put out by it. Kaiba glared at Yugi a moment longer before walking over to his desk. He grabbed a spare sheet of paper, scribbling down what looked like an address.

Malik straightened up as Kaiba handed him the note. "For better or for worse, I have one detective still working on the case. Ryu's office is on the second floor in the east wing, but your best bet is to try his flat. He prefers to research there since he prefers working late into the night and, frankly, I have too much on my plate to worry about that aspect of protocol."

Malik's brow furrowed as he studied the address. He was familiar with the street, though Malik didn't frequent the area all too often. If he wasn't in his office now, then Malik would make the trek out.

Kaiba fell back into his chair, brushing his hair back into place as he tried to regain some semblance of control. "Now both of you get the hell out of my office. I have business I need to attend to."

Malik reverted, wondering if Yugi would actually listen. To his surprise, Yugi stood up, placing his files back into his briefcase. He still wore that winning grin on his face. "I'll be back later to discuss more on the hospital and police department plans."

Kaiba didn't even acknowledge that he heard Yugi, leaving the two to make their way out of the
office. Malik examined the address once more as he waited for the shorter man to close the door behind him. He glanced back, a small smile on his face. "Thank you for the help back there with Kaiba."

Yugi shrugged, turning to head out of the building. "Not a problem. Seto can be harsh, but his heart's in the right place."

Malik shoved his hands in his pockets, trailing along for a moment. "I'm surprised he heard you out as it was. I thought he was about to have a stroke back there, he was so worked up."

Yugi laughed at that, a sly grin growing on his face. "I think the only reason he listened is because my elder brother works for the State Department and is, by extension, his boss. Stuff like that gives me the sway where I need it."

Malik chuckled, thankful for his timing. His stubbornness and determination paid off unexpectedly. He looked back over at Yugi. "Then it was lucky that I ran into you today, er… Yugi, was it?"

Yugi nodded. "Yugi Muto. And you are?"

"Malik Ishtar." He offered out a hand.

Yugi raised an eyebrow, switching the briefcase to his other hand so he could shake. "Ishtar as in the archaeologists?"

Malik gave a sheepish chuckle, feeling his cheeks heat up. "It seems you've done your reading."

Yugi laughed, giving him a big smile. "I remember seeing news about your family's work in the papers before. My brother is also familiar with Pegasus from previous state events."

Malik hummed thoughtfully, thinking how oddly coincidental it was that his boss knew Yugi's older brother. "Small world we live in."

"It feels that way, doesn't it? Granted my work makes me feel like this city is too big for its own good."

Malik winced as he realized that he probably made Yugi's job more difficult by intruding on his meeting. "I'm sorry for interrupting you, back there. I needed Kaiba's attention and I don't always think through my plans."

Yugi gave a small shrug. "I don't mind. I get the sense that Seto wasn't really paying attention. It's hard for me to do my job as a city planner if I don't have the cooperation from all party members."

"City planner, you say? My condolences – you must have a lot of work as of recently."

Yugi sighed heavily, lifting his briefcase to gesture to the papers inside. "That's an understatement if I ever heard one. Ever since the dock fires last May, we've had to consolidate several departments into fewer buildings until the damage is assessed and repaired. Seto is annoyed that he has to work around these inconveniences, but it is what it is. I'll have a plethora of pleasant conversations with Seto ahead of me yet."

Malik smirked at that. He imagined that Yugi had his work cut out for him as a city planner. Many state officials claimed the fire to be the worst fire of the century, but then again, London did seem to have an arson problem.

Yugi and Malik arrived at the atrium. Malik offered his hand, feeling awkward as soon as he did. "Anyway, thank you for the help today. It was a pleasure meeting you, Yugi."

Yugi smiled, his expression lighting up the dimly lit foyer, grasping Malik's hand. He pumped their hands vigorously. "Likewise. I wish you the best of luck. I hope you find your sister."

The mention of his sister came like a shadow over his mind. Malik's smile tightened, unable to hide his anxious thoughts. "I hope so as well."

Yugi nodded before turning to leave the police station. Malik glanced down at the note he received, reading the address listed. Kaiba mentioned that Ryou preferred to work from home. Malik would check out his office, but he was already anticipating catching a cab back towards the detective's neighborhood.

Malik wasn't entirely sure what he would accomplish, but if Ryou believed him, then perhaps they would finally find some indication of his sister's whereabouts. Much of what convinced Malik that Jack the Ripper had a hand in this was based on speculations. But Malik trusted in his intuition. His instincts told him that his inferences and analysis weren't off.

He could only hope the detective felt the same way.

Malik shoved the note into his pocket, making his way upstairs to meet Ryou.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ryou wasn’t in his office.

Malik had expected that, but spending half an hour travelling back across the city to the detective's house left him slightly miffed. He was grateful for the dry weather, as London seemed to be under perpetual rain. Even in summer, the Northern air chilled Malik to the bone. If there was one thing about Egypt Malik missed, it was the warm weather.

Malik stepped out of the carriage, glancing around at the apartment building. Even though the neighborhood should have been a tip off, he was surprised the place seemed to have a damp, dark feel to it. It would hardly be considered shabby, but Malik still didn’t want to linger on the streets any longer than he needed to.

Shaking off the foreboding feeling that clung to him, Malik entered the building, climbing to the third floor. He narrowed his eyes at the dim lighting, growing uneasy at the darkness. Despite the bright light outside, there were no windows to let in the natural light. Malik took in a slow measured breath to calm his nerves, focusing on the door at the end of the hallway and not the shadows around him.

Malik stopped in front of the door, spotting the nameplate for Detective Ryou. He recognized it as one of the same nameplates that he saw at the office at the precinct. However, he had noticed that Ryou's nameplate was missing when he stopped back at the police department. Malik supposed that was one mystery solved.

Inhaling deeply, Malik knocked firmly, standing up straight as he waited for the detective. Malik waited only ten seconds before knocking again, his hand trembling with urgency. He heard rustling from the other side, someone undoing the latch on the door.

Malik blinked as the door swung open. In front of him stood the detective, or at least he assumed. His eyes immediately focused on the startling white hair, which had fallen out of the ponytail put up hours ago. The vest had been done up, though off by one button, giving it a lop-sided appearance. The word "disheveled" came to mind as Malik glanced over the detective.

Yet Malik felt most confused by the soft, feminine features.

He hadn't realized that Ryou was a female name. But Europeans had odd names to begin with.

"Can I help you?" A voice interrupted his thoughts as Malik realized he had been staring. He shook his head slightly, gathering himself.

"Are you Detective Ryou?"

The albino stood up straigher, a tired look haunting his features. "Yes. Do you have business with me?"

Malik glanced over Ryou, his eyes lingering on the dark, brown eyes that lacked any light to them. He felt perplexed by them. A cough reminded Malik that he was staring (again) and he fought a blush now growing on his face. "Yes… Sorry, I wasn't expecting you to be a woman."

The dull eyes flashed with anger. Ryou stood back, arms crossed. "I'm not a woman, so fuck you. Go to the precinct if you have any business."

Malik swore, now certain that the blush on his face overwhelmed even his darkened features. "Shit! I'm sorry, it's just… you're not quite what I expected from a detective."

Ryou rolled his eyes, a testy note to his voice. "And what were you expecting?"

Malik figured telling him that he expected someone more manly and older wouldn't do him any favors. He was normally more eloquent and better put-together than this conversation would make him seem. Malik sighed, cover his face with his hand. "Look, I think we started on the wrong foot. Can I start again?"
Malik licked his lips, not willing to drop his case. “Perhaps, but a murderer can make a mistake. Prostitutes predominately, though he has no qualms killing anyone who gets in his way.”

Malik lowered his hand, relieved that Ryou had given him a second chance. He wasn’t sure why he felt so flustered and out of sorts today. He supposed recent events had him feeling overwhelmed. “My name is Malik Ishtar. I have information pertaining to the Jack the Ripper case.”

Ryou's expression slid into a more neutral expression, though Malik had difficulty deciphering his poker face. While Malik felt confident in masking his own emotions and reading others, the detective before him was trickier to figure out. Ryou glanced over Malik once before asking his question; “Information in what regards?”

Malik reached into his satchel, pulling out a picture of him and his siblings. The picture was the most recent one of their family, taken shortly after they had arrived in London a few years back. He offered the picture to Ryou, who looked down but didn’t take it. “My sister disappeared three days ago and no one can find her. I believe she was kidnapped by the serial killer.”

Ryou didn’t say anything, his dark eyes boring into Malik. A few long seconds of silence passed before Ryou reached into his pocket to pull out what looked like a letter. Ryou tugged out a pair of glasses that had been hidden atop his head, turning to read the parchment. “I see. Well, if you could fill out a report with the police department, I promise I’ll take a look at it as soon.”

“Hold on! I didn’t walk half way across the city for you to ignore me!” Malik snapped, not about to be dismissed like a child.

Ryou huffed derisively, his attention shifting more towards the letter at hand than to their conversation. “No offense, but I doubt your sister's disappearance is related to my murder case. Unless your sister turns up as a corpse, that is. All missing persons cases are handled down at the precinct.”

Malik put his hand on the door so that Ryou couldn't shut it on him. A strange desperation welled up in him. “Will you at least hear out what I have to say?” Malik spoke slowly and deliberately, his voice trembling near the end of his question. As tempting as it was to scream at the detective about his proof, he had already pissed him off with his mistaken identity. He needed to stay in the good graces of the detective to get his help.

Ryou rolled his eyes, the hand holding the letter dropping to his side. He shifted his gaze to Malik. “You know you’re rather stubborn.”

Malik shrugged at the accusation. “I may have heard it once or twice in my life.”

“You're not going to leave until you've said your piece, are you?”

Malik smirked. Ryou let out a loud sigh as he pushed off the doorframe, stepping back into the flat. He didn’t bother to check to see if Malik would follow him as he walked over to his desk. Malik glanced around, curious to see what a detective's apartment looked like. He hadn’t expected it to be so… messy.

Papers scattered everywhere in the flat—across the desk, pinned on the wall, collecting dust on top of an untouched piano. Malik didn't see any form of organization, but he assumed Ryou had a system as he watched the detective take the letter and slip it into a folder sitting on his chair. Ryou barely spent a moment tidying up, just enough so that he had a spot to sit. Malik decided to say nothing, sinking into the dark red sofa facing the desk.

Ryou spun the chair away from his desk, his back to the wall as he turned to study Malik. Malik noticed a half-eaten meal had been shoved onto the coffee table separating the two of them. Based on his unkempt appearance, he suspected the detective didn't sleep much or simply didn't care about his appearance. He wasn’t sure which of the two was more likely.

Ryou frowned, still studying his guest. Malik wasn't sure if he should explain his case, so he decided to wait and watch to see what would happen. Ryou reached behind him to grab a cup of tea. Ryou took a sip before scowling at his tea, which Malik suspected had gone cold awhile ago. Ryou set the cup down in front of him with a bitter sigh.

“Okay. Tell me what you know and why you think this relates to the Ripper case.”

Malik nodded before reaching into his coat pocket, pulling out a small notebook. Perhaps he fancied himself a junior detective, but he had gathered notes beforehand to argue his case. “My sister went to go meet with Mr. Pegasus at his estate in the East End of London on March 22nd 1889 at 5 pm. They had dinner and she was going to appraise several Egyptian artifacts he had in his care.”

Malik pulled out a note that he had folded into the notebook, not looking up to meet Ryou's gaze. He didn’t want to lose his nerve now. “Pegasus had a telephone line installed, so Iis called my brother Rishid who was still at the university to let us know that she would be home, ideally before midnight.”

Malik sighed as he set his papers down on the table. “As you can guess, she didn’t make it. I spoke to Pegasus, who confirmed that she left quarter to midnight, which meant she stayed later than she intended. Knowing my sister, she would have decided to take the quickest path home rather than stay outside any longer than necessary. I paced the distance between our home and Pegasus’s estate, and the quickest path, without question, takes us right through the center of Whitechapel district.”

Ryou nodded, leaning forward as he examined the map. “Which is where all the murders have been taking place. The time frame lines up as well.” Ryou muttered to himself, his expression thoughtful.

Malik perked up, hoping this meant the detective believed, though he noticed the furrowed brows. Ryou leaned back, taking off his glasses and rubbing at the bridge of his nose. “There’s only one problem with your theory. Your sister doesn’t match Jack the Ripper’s typical target. He targets prostitutes predominately, though he has no qualms killing anyone who gets in his way.”

Malik licked his lips, not willing to drop his case. “Perhaps, but a murderer can make a mistake.
Ryou narrowed his eyes, his hair wild around his face. "Even so, why keep her alive? There's nothing to gain from keeping victims. Even if we assume Jack the Ripper chose her as his next victim, there's no reason to assume she's alive."

"But her body hasn't shown up. And Jack the Ripper has never tried to hide a corpse before. He always wants his victims to be found," Malik argued back. Whatever happened, he refused to believe his sister was dead. He knew she was still alive. It was a matter of finding her and getting help to her.

Ryou stared at Malik, his expression hard. After a moment, Ryou turned back to his desk, looking at his own notes. Malik stayed quiet as he waited for Ryou to gather his thoughts. It took him a couple of minutes to realize that the detective wasn't planning on talking to him.

"So?" Malik asked, pushing Ryou for an answer.

Ryou remained quiet for a few moments but had learned his lesson the first time trying to ignore Malik earlier. He dropped his file atop of the map. "Not enough evidence. I don't have time to waste chasing after your sister when I have a murderer to catch. I'd recommend updating the missing person's file at the precinct. In any case, you know where the door is."

Malik stared, slack-jawed and at a loss of words. They came flooding back in a flash of anger.

"Wait, what? But the evidence—"

"Is all conjecture," Ryou interrupted, his gaze sharpening. "I've been at this a little longer than you. If we're to believe it, we have to assume Jack the Ripper chose to kidnap a woman, knowing it would draw police attention, and leave clues that would connect him. If he kidnapped your sister, that would raise questions of whether he knew this specific victim. Furthermore, we have to assume that Jack the Ripper does not kill all his victims."

Ryou leaned back, raising a hand to brush through the tangled mess of hair. "While I suspect your sister was kidnapped and that's why her body hasn't shown up, I doubt Jack the Ripper is connected to this case. Your time and mine would be better spent on our respective, separate searches."

Malik stared blankly, trying to think of an argument back. He had to figure out something, anything that might link Isis to the Whitechapel murders. Ryou was rational and was thinking about the case objectively. And perhaps instinct was a terrible way to run an investigation, but Malik knew, he knew, that the two were related.

Malik shook his head, staring down at the papers he had gathered. He needed help. His sister needed help right now. He couldn't waste time – the police were no closer to figuring out where Isis could be. In a few weeks, they would write her disappearance off as an unsolved murder, her name and memory nothing more than a fading relic.

"Malik?" He snapped his head up at the question, noticing the curious look Ryou gave him. He knew that the detective was trying to figure out if he was okay. Malik didn't want to leave – there was something he was missing.

Malik sighed, leaning back into the couch, his eyes narrowed. Perhaps it was all conjecture. Perhaps he didn't know everything on the case, but he didn't need to solve it now. He just needed to provide enough evidence to connect the two for the detective. If Ryou believed Isis was related to the case, then he would help.

Malik took a breath, not sure if this further conjecture would help, but it couldn't hurt at this point.

"What if he didn't kill my sister because she's valuable as a hostage? The Ishtar name is fairly well-known in educated circles."

Ryou grimaced, a pitying look crossing his face. Before Ryou could reject such a claim, his expression changed, as if something had dawned on him. Ryou sat up, alert to this change. Ryou snapped around, standing up as he darted to his desk.

Malik decided to take a chance, getting up to look over Ryou's shoulder as the detective scoured through his folders. "Why didn't I think of this the moment I saw you?" Ryou muttered out loud, his eyes gleaming as he pulled out a folder. He opened it, a slight flick of his head inviting Malik to take a look.

Malik's heart raced as he came up to the desk, wondering if perhaps the detective figured out something. Ryou flipped through the papers until he found what he sought. He pulled out a photograph, showing it to Malik. "Does this mean anything to you?"

Malik pulled the picture from the detective's pale, shaky hands. He narrowed his eyes, confused as to what he was looking at. After a moment, he recognized the symbols, baffled by the image. "Yeah, this is Egyptian hieratic. But this isn't papyrus or stone. Where did you get a preserved piece of wood with the language?"

Ryou raised a hand to his mouth, biting on the nail of his thumb. "I didn't. This was found at the scene of the crime of his seventh and most recent victim."

Ryou shifted the papers, revealing another photo. Malik gasped, an intense queasy feeling rocking his stomach at the murder scene. The woman looked as if she had been dissected, skin peeled back with organs missing. The blood drenched her bed sheets, the woman bleeding out the night before.

Malik glanced away, sickened by the scene. Ryou ignored his discomfort, pointing to the bedframe. "If you look here, you'll see the hieratic carved on the bedpost. I had thought that strange – of all things the murderer has done, I feel like this is our biggest clue. There's no question that this murderer is highly educated based on his knowledge of human anatomy and eloquence of speech, but his knowledge of ancient languages I thought was especially curious."

Ryou turned around, leaning against the desk and staring at the floor, his expression lost deep in thought. "Malik, you and your siblings work in at the university in historical preservation, right?"

Malik blinked. Apparently, this was a day of people recognizing his family name. "Uh… yes. We moved from Egypt a couple years back to guard the various artifacts that were being moved from our country. We were asked by the scholastic community to help in translation and studying relevancy."

Ryou dropped his hand away from his mouth, his brown eyes meeting lavender. "So that means your sister is deeply knowledgeable on ancient Egyptian history, yes?"

"Obviously. We all are."
Ryou nodded, turning back to three other files. He pulled out three more photos of what looked like a language, but Malik didn't recognize them. They weren't hieratic. Ryou held up these photos, a small smirk playing across his face. "For three other victims, he has left messages written in Latin, Cuneiform script, and Biblical Hebrew. I don't think it's a coincidence that his last message, written in Egyptian hieratic, overlaps with the disappearance of a famous Egyptian scholar. In fact, that seems too good to be true. What's he trying to tell us?"

Malik raised an eyebrow, unsure of the question that Ryou asked at the end. Perhaps he was reading into his tone, but Ryou sounded almost... happy and excited. He didn't see why he would be excited, but Malik buried those thoughts. What mattered was that Ryou was considering the connection between Isis and Jack the Ripper.

"Does that mean you believe?" Malik pressed, an eager look on his face. Ryou shook himself out of his stupor, looking back. Their eyes met, but instead of feeling challenging or dismissive or belligerent, there was this sense of understanding. Slowly, Ryou chuckled, a dry smile sneaking onto his face.

"I suppose I can buy into this theory. There might be some weight to what you're saying. In any case, I can't ignore this if there's a possible lead," Ryou admitted. Malik grinned, his hope assured.

"Let me help you on the case!" Malik blurted out, his face burning following his sudden request. His intense feelings caught Malik off guard, but he couldn't sit idly by regardless. He never did well letting matters sort themselves out. He was nosy and stubborn and needed to be involved whenever possible. If there was anything he could do to help in the case, he would make sure to do it.

Ryou laughed, a surprisingly delightful noise escaping the detective. He shrugged as he turned back to his cold cup of tea. "Sure. Why not? I get the sense you'll just argue with me until you get your way."

Malik smirked as he watched the detective leave to drop off his dish in the kitchen. "I'm glad you're recognizing my better traits."

Ryou gave him an odd look before rolling his eyes. He brushed through his hair with his fingers before pulling it back into a ponytail. In a matter of moments, Ryou neatened his appearance, adjusting his shirt and rebuttoning his vest, shifting from disheveled to presentable in a matter of seconds. Malik chuckled, amused that the detective apparently could clean up if he wanted to. He waited until Ryou walked to the door. "Where are you going?"

"To investigate. You coming?"

Malik had expected more of an argument, but didn't see any reason to stay. He had no idea where they were going, but figured the detective had a plan. He stepped out, following the albino down the stairs as they began their search for the murderer.

Chapter End Notes

Link to artwork [here](#)
Chapter 4

Ryou waited for the carriage to pass in front of him before crossing the street, the wind threatening to shove him about. He left behind the homes of wealthy auteurs and politicians in favor of the slums that remained hidden away. The people of London found it oddly intriguing that Jack the Ripper would target people in such a scuzzy part of town.

He supposed that was why people were so intrigued with these murders. Everybody loved a scandal.

Ryou passed by a familiar lodging house, one that he planned on visiting later after he finished checking out the potential crime scene. For a supposedly educated murderer, Ryou didn't understand how the killer chose his targets. It seemed too simple to just kill brothel workers because he knew it would draw attention.

Perhaps Isis Ishtar would provide light on the whole scenario.

Ryou glanced to his side at Isis's little brother who had joined him. He had heard of the Ishtar family in the news. They had done tremendous work helping to recover and preserve Egyptian artifacts as well as translate previously unreadable texts. The three siblings had moved to London five years ago, Isis leading the archaeology team.

Her name would have been known to the public, which meant Jack the Ripper would have known about her. And his interest in dead languages was intriguing already. It was certainly serendipitous that the lead Egyptian historian in London disappeared shortly after Jack the Ripper left a message in Egyptian hieratic with his last victim.

Coincidence didn't seem likely. The murderer was more cunning and clever than that. He had always been careful and deliberate in his actions before. He had a collected and informed approach to his appearance that sent a clear message to those who paid attention. Each murder victim was like another note left for Ryou to decipher.

He intended to figure out the mystery around Jack the Ripper.

Ryou slowed down his pace, glancing around and spotting a street sign for Commercial Street. The drab houses and buildings pressed together indicated that they were in the Whitechapel district. "This is where she would have passed through, right?"

Malik nodded, turning right and looking down the main street. "Yeah. She would have taken this road all the way up until the intersection. So there's any indication she was here, we'll find it along here."

Ryou rolled his eyes, immediately trailing off the main road down one of the side roads. A smile grew on his face when he heard Malik call after him. " Didn't you hear what I said?"

Ryou snorted, keeping his smile pleasant. He knew Malik was trying to be helpful, yet ironically questioned the detective's methods. Still, Malik was oddly persistent and there was something refreshing about him all the same. "I heard you. But chances are, the killer interacted with your sister. Which means she may have wandered down a side road. We need to examine every possibility."

Malik frowned, a speculative look on his face. "So, you're going to wander down every alleyway in Whitechapel until you find something?"

Ryou shrugged. "If you don't want to look, that's fine. It's only your sister we're talking about."

He knew he was pushing his luck, but he could tell he hit a nerve by the Malik bristled at that remark. Malik crossed his arms, brushing past Ryou and searching for any indications that his sister might have been there. Ryou resisted the urge to chuckle, focusing on any missing tokens or hints of a struggle.

The morning fell into afternoon, the two unceasingly searching along the various side roads. Ryou frowned, annoyed by the lack of evidence. It really did seem like Isis had disappeared, though that seemed unlikely. He bit back a sigh of disappointment -- perhaps this was a red herring. He had been sure that there was a connection. Maybe he had just wanted a sign, anything, to indicate that this case hadn't reached a dead end.

He glanced behind him at Malik, who continued to kick debris as he looked for clues. Perhaps he wanted the two cases to be tied because he really did want the Malik. He seemed so desperate to help his sister that Ryou was willing to consider a connection. He did have a soft spot for family, and he admired Malik's tenacity.

Even if he couldn't differentiate between male and female. Ryou was less than forgiving towards his remarks.

Still, Ryou knew to keep his own personal thoughts out of his work (or at least he thought he did). As Ryou turned around to call off their search, Malik knelt down, tilting his head back. "I found something!"

Ryou ran over to catch up to see what Malik found, his heart racing. He knelt down next to the blonde man, narrowing his eyes. Malik extended a hand, holding a few dirty pebbles. As Malik's thumb brushed the dust away, Ryou noticed the blue shine. "A gem, of some sorts?"

Malik nodded, his fingers digging into the dirt as he found a few more pieces. "Sapphires. I found a broken silver chain. I think this was my sister's."

"You think?"

Malik raised a hand to brush back his bangs. "My sister used to wear a silver bracelet from our late mother. A parting gift."

Ryou leaned back on his haunches as he considered the evidence. It was a bit of a stretch, since there was no way to confirm whether these were real sapphires or if it was even the same bracelet. But it was at least a start.

"Let's keep looking around here," Ryou decided, standing up. He turned down another alley to keep searching for clues. If they could find something a bit more concrete to tie the two together, that would help, but as far as he was concerned, this could be the evidence necessary. He didn't express one thought that lingered on his mind…

Chances were, the broken bracelet meant there was a struggle.

That information wouldn't help Malik at the moment. Ryou didn't know how the man handled stress and didn't want to waste time calming him down. He suspected that Malik was mostly even-
tempered, but there was no point in causing him worry when he needed his focus on the case. Despite not being an officer, Malik willingly hopped onto a case chasing down a madman to help his sister. That spoke enough about his character.

Ryou continued down the narrow alleyway, glancing at the locked doors around him. He couldn't help think that these various houses would make for a quick escape from curious eyes. Perhaps he should consider looking into who lived in these residences. He would have to see if Yugi could help him out with that and the whole legality part of the issue. A glint caught Ryou's eye as he turned, spotting the peculiar sheen hidden in the shadows. Ryou crouched down, digging through the trash. His heart started to race when the glint revealed itself to be gold.

"Malik!" Ryou's voice sounded small in the narrow alleyway. He narrowed his eyes and called again until he caught his partner's ear. Malik ran up to catch to him, his jaw dropping at the necklace in Ryou's hand.

"I trust you recognize this?" Ryou asked, carefully studying Malik's face. Malik nodded, his brows furrowed as he reached out for the necklace. His fingers trailed along the gold chain until they fell on the golden eye, the pendant that hung at the center.

"This is the Sennen necklace. It was an artifact that Isis was holding on to at our brother's request. Pegasus, our boss, wanted to study the historical implications of the item and asked Isis to bring it with her that night." Malik spoke softly, his expression softer in retrospection. His fist clenched around the chain, holding it tight as he met Ryou's steady eyes.

"And I'm guessing it's one of a kind?"

Malik nodded. "You're not going to find another necklace like this in all of London."

Ryou nodded, a hard look crossing his face. Perhaps it was a jump, but most detective work was deduction and guesswork. It was a lot about making inferences and postulating theories to explore possible avenues of thought and character. One had to make assumptions in order to move forward. One had to think like the killer did if they were to catch one.

In Ryou's mind, he was fairly certainly Isis and Jack the Ripper were tied. The question now was why and how.

Ryou turned back to leave the alleyway, ignoring the exasperated sigh behind him. "We need to go back to the precinct. Let's go catch a cab before the offices close."

Two men blocked the entrance to the precinct, chatting outside in the late evening. How the day escaped Ryou was beyond him, but frankly not a huge concern. He squeezed past the strangers, Malik following close behind as he found his way to the atrium, traffic fairly sparse at this time. With the fading sunlight dimly lighting the room, the ball appeared dark and shadowed despite its relatively open appearance. Ryou heard Malik swear behind him, but didn't spare a moment to check on his companion. Instead, his eyes scanned the officers milling about, searching for his superior officer. It wasn't too difficult to spot the tall brunette, who never seemed to find time to rest. Despite his disagreeable personality, they had at least that in common.

Ryou trailed after Kaiba, whose long gait outpaced most on the task force. He followed him back to his office, catching the door before he could shut it. Confused by the pressure on the door, Kaiba turned to glare at the albino.

"Detective. Finally at work, I see."

"It's good to see you too, commissioner. I was wondering if you could do me a favor," Ryou asked, his expression still pleasant and soft. This sweet and kind disposition usually worked on most people, but Kaiba was a tough nut to crack.

"Depends on the favor. I have to finish this budget for the next quarter and don't have time to waste running errands," Kaiba snapped, his blue eyes flicking behind him to Malik.

Ryou stepped back, standing next to Malik. He noticed the Egyptian man smirking at Kaiba and figured he didn't want to ask about that right now. "I need the case file regarding the disappearance of Isis Ishtar. I have reason to believe that she's tied to the Jack the Ripper case."

Kaiba blinked, opening his mouth to speak before narrowing his eyes. He flicked his eyes between the two, his question a low growl. "What made you reach that conclusion?"

Ryou fiddled with a strand of hair that had fallen out of his ponytail, twirling the white lock around his finger. "We were able to figure out where she was before disappearing. The physical evidence suggests a struggle and character of the location and timing aligns with Jack the Ripper's usual murdering spree."

Kaiba crossed his arms, still looking annoyed. It was as if his face was permanently stuck in that position. "You're certain about this? You're not doing this as a favor to Ishtar and wasting time away from the Jack the Ripper case."

Ryou sighed, dropping his hand down. "Nothing's ever a sure thing, commissioner. You know that. It's more about figuring out how the killer thinks and piecing together a picture. Right now, I have reason to believe that Jack the Ripper abducted Ms. Ishtar. If the evidence discards this theory, then we dismiss it and continue to move forward. Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Ryou knew that wasn't the answer Kaiba wanted. The commissioner didn't like to waste time and resources on dead ends. Ryou felt the same way in many regards, but the air around the situation was suspicious enough to consider seriously. In the end, nothing Ryou said would convince Kaiba. It was really a question on how far he would argue.

And based on his expression, Kaiba was feeling rather aggressive this evening.

Kaiba scowled as he walked into his office, trying to dismiss the detective. "If it turns out Ms. Ishtar isn't connected to Jack the Ripper, then that's days spent chasing after a false lead. Days that we don't have. I don't need you taking on this case just to be nice to some poor fool who duped you into helping him."

Ryou heard an exaggerated sigh behind him. "Can you not talk about me as if I'm not here, Kaiba? I can hear you. Git."

Ryou bit back a smirk at the snark. He didn't know much about Malik, but he was certainly fun company if he could make Kaiba bristle. Almost enough to make Ryou forget his earlier comment about looking like a woman.
Kaiba gave Malik a death glare before snapping his gaze back to Ryou, as if trying to freeze him to his spot. "I don't need you pursuing any distractions, detective. I've overlooked your past behavior; I won't turn a blind eye to you wasting my time."

Ryou frowned at the implication, a flicker of anger passing briefly through him. So that's what Kaiba was implying. Ryou crossed his arms, a hard look appearing on his face to replace the genial smile. "I know how to do my job, commissioner. Now are you going to let me get back to the case?"

The two gave each other a long hard glare, waiting to see which one would blink first. Ryou could feel Malik’s eyes flick back and forth between the two of them. Kaiba raised a hand to rub at the bridge of his nose, squeezing his eyes shut. After a long sigh, his eyes fluttered open, Kaiba stepping over to his desk. He rummaged around until he pulled out a key.

"Third floor. Room 203. The file should be under active cases, organized alphabetically," Kaiba stated shortly.

Ryou took the key and pocketed it. As Ryou turned to step out, he paused, another thought crossing his mind. "Do you know when Yugi will next drop by?"

Kaiba snorted, sitting down at his desk to study his outline. "You just missed him today. He should be back later this week to finish business. We were unable to complete his analysis due to a certain interruption today."

Ryou smirked at the pointed look that Kaiba gave Malik, who just rolled his eyes in response. He decided to file this information away. Perhaps Yugi could do him a favor and help him research more into who owns the apartments around various murder locations.

Ryou gave a soft farewell, which Kaiba ignored in favor of his work. He stepped out of the office, shutting the door once Malik followed suit. He gave him a dry smile, raising an eyebrow. "So I see you've met the commissioner."

"Met. Pissed off. Same difference really." Malik shrugged, a smirk on his face.

Ryou chuckled, deciding that he wouldn't dare ask their history. It was more fun not knowing. "Come on. Let's pull up your sister's case file."

The two climbed the two flights of stairs to the third floor, which was nearly empty as most people had left for the evening. Aside from several officers working night shift, this floor was relatively quiet and the archive room, vacant. As Ryou unlocked the door, he saw another shadow come join them. He jerked his head back, his momentary panic disappearing when he recognized the crazy, spiked hair.

"Namu? What are you doing here?" Ryou asked, finally unlatching the door.

Namu just snorted, his blond hair glowing a strange amber in the gaslight. The doctor had a tired, rather worn expression on his face. His sudden appearance distracted Ryou before he realized Namu was holding a file. Ryou noticed that the name of one of Jack the Ripper's victims was written on it.

"Trying to track you down, but that's a lost cause. Do you ever come into the office?" Namu snapped, practically shoving the papers into his hands.

Ryou chuckled, a light blush on his face. "It gets too crowded around here. It makes it hard to think."

"Makes it difficult for me to do my damn job." Namu growled, running a hand down his face.

"I suspect me not being here has little to do with that," Ryou teased, flipping through the file. Inside, he noticed the new notes that Namu had added in, including potential weapons that the killer might have used based on the serrated edge of the knife and the depth of penetration. He smiled, grateful for Namu's quick work.

Ryou realized that he had someone with him and he was probably being rude. He closed the file and turned back to Malik. "Forgive me, Malik, this is—"

"Namu, you work for the police?" Malik asked, a strange look on his face.

Ryou blinked, glancing over at Namu, who seemed equally as awkward. "Hi Malik. It's been awhile. I'm a coroner for the police department."

Malik gave a quick nod before glancing away. He looked almost embarrassed as he coughed. "I see. I suppose being a doctor wasn't a good match?"

"More a matter of natural affinity. I'm good at what I do. Though I don't get much opportunity to help people nowadays," Namu frowned, his face stuck in a permanent scowl. Then again, Ryou figured Namu felt frustrated with his job. He had mentioned wanting to get back into working at a hospital, but it had been difficult to get the job transfer solved.

"That's fair. Well, I'm glad to see you're doing well," Malik stated cordially, though the formality felt stiff. Ryou said nothing as Namu shrugged, granting something resembling a farewell.

Ryou reached out, grabbing Namu's shoulder before he left. He turned back, violet eyes watching the albino. "Not to keep asking for favors, but could you do me one more?"

"Would you be able to provide a list of all missing organs from each victim?"

"Sorry, not, but I don't mind filling you in. " Ryou shrugged, knowing that his request was already going to prompt questions out of Malik once Namu left.

"Don't bother. I'll do it. Though I'll need a few days to complete it."

Ryou nodded. "That's fine. I'll be back later this week to see Yugi. I need to ask him a favor and it's easier to track him down here instead of the state building. He practically lives at the precinct nowadays."

"Everybody lives at the precinct. Yugi needs to hurry up with repairs and get all these extra people out of my building," Namu snarled, shrugging off his jacket as he walked away. Ryou smiled, amused by the doctor's annoyance. Since one of the other offices had been deemed structurally...
unsound, the police force had been forced to split up the officers in that office to various precincts around the city.

This unfortunately meant several dozen new faces and not enough space to house them all. Ryou didn't mind since he could research and do his work away from his office. However, for someone like Namu, who had to be at the precinct working down in the morgue to identify corpses, having people go in and out all the time would be rather grating.

It certainly didn't help that the doctor had a short temper. Though he was still better composed than Kaiba seventy percent of the time.

Ryou opened the door to the archive room, lighting a lantern first before attempting to read any of the names. He heard Malik follow him in, though Ryou didn't bother turning to face him. "You know Namu?"

Malik grunted, Ryou noticing how his companion stood close to the lantern, watching him. "Old family friend. He moved to London half a year before we did."

"I didn't realize that. What are the odds you'd run into a fellow Egyptian?"

Malik snorted. "My thoughts exactly. We were pretty close as kids, but when we got older... well, our lives took very different turns than we expected so we fell out of touch."

Ryou smiled, his face was hidden from view. "No time like the present to catch up!"

"Maybe. I don't know. A lot has happened. I'm definitely not the same kid I was back in Egypt. And... I don't know. He was always a bit odd."

Ryou rolled his eyes, a smirk on his face. "Does that put you off? Strangeness?"

Malik seemed to rethink his response. "Not necessarily, but first impressions do last."

"Indeed. You made quite the first impression today."

Ryou stole a glance, smiling when he saw Malik looked away to hide his embarrassment.

"Is there any way I can help?"

Ryou returned his gaze to the files, flipping through these folders until he drew closer alphabetically. "I was probably going to head back to read up on the case file. It's getting pretty late and I imagine you'll be wanting to get home soon."

Malik shrugged, shoving his hands into his pockets. "My brother usually works overnight at the university. I won't be missed. If there's anything I can do to speed up the work, I'd be more than willing to oblige."

Ryou blinked, leaning back to study Malik. He couldn't tell if his companion was tired, but he seemed alert and determined. Ryou had figured Malik would want to get some rest, but then again, this was his family at stake. Ryou wasn't sure how his new companion could help since a lot of it was speculation and piecing together the evidence to form a picture.

At the thought of a picture, Ryou perked up, an idea forming in his head.

"Do you think you could translate the hieratic I showed you earlier?" Ryou asked, snagging the file in question.

Malik flicked his eyes up in thought, raising a hand to scratch at his chin. "It might take a while, more than one night even, but I think I could do it. There's a chance the killer would try to use modern grammatical structure, so I'm not sure how accurate it'll be to his message."

Ryou shrugged, moving to leave the room. "Anything's better than nothing. Perhaps it'll help provide some insight."

Malik gave a slow nod, a more vigorous one following as he grew certain. "I'll do it."

Ryou nodded, a smile growing on his face as he contemplated his new partner. He had never had consistent help on a case before. He was usually left to his own devices, but the extra hands on deck would certainly help him get more research done. Who knows? Perhaps the translation would reveal the killer's identity for all they knew. It was worth a shot.

Ryou closed the door, pocketing the key and turning back towards Malik. "Okay. Let's head back to my place and start researching."
Malik's eyes burned as he stared at the photo, trying to decipher the carved symbols. The lighting was poor in the photo, as it appeared to have been taken before dawn. It also didn't help that the serial killer didn't understand the basic grammatical structure of the dead language.

Malik jumped back and forth between modern Egyptian Arabic and correct (for the time) hieratic inscription, a migraine beginning to form. Ryou had made both of them tea, but Malik's cup had gone cold hours before. Malik leaned back, stretching from his spot on the couch in Ryou's flat. The muscles in his neck twinged, a sharp pain shooting down his spine.

Malik sighed, rubbing at his neck and then his temple. He had called his brother Rishid to let him know that he had gotten in touch with the detective responsible for their sister's case and was now helping him. He had expected Rishid to argue otherwise, but perhaps everyone recognized how stubborn Malik was. It was just easier to let him do what he wanted.

Malik leaned back, studying the albino who sat in a crimson armchair. He held the file open in his lap, occasionally leaning over to pull his notes from his desk or write in other details. Malik tried to ask about his companion's progress, but Ryou had an unbreakable focus once he set his mind to a task. Nothing seemed to break him out of a task while he worked.

Malik wasn't so lucky in that department. He often felt distracted, exhaustion catching up to him. He glanced up, startled that the clock told him it was past one in the morning. He looked back at the detective, who didn't seem any worse for the wear.

"Do you ever sleep?" Malik asked loudly, knowing it was the only way to get Ryou's attention.

The albino didn't look up, still reading through the police report. "... I sleep when I get tired. I'm not tired right now."

Malik snorted. "Really? You have shadows under your eyes."

"They're always there. Intelligence comes with a price."

Malik rolled his eyes, holding the picture up again. "I imagine those would go away with a few nights of rest."

Ryou turned his head, cracking his neck before turning the page. "I don't have time to rest. Every day I don't catch Jack the Ripper is another day he might kill another innocent."

Malik blinked, surprised by the tone. Ryou didn't sound angry or irritated, but more resigned. Kaiba was always so brusque and short-tempered, but the detective seemed rather quiet and determined. He offered the facts as plainly as possible, leaving the invitation open to Malik to keep working with him.

And Malik knew every day that passed meant another day his sister may not live to see.

"How's the translation going?" Malik turned his head, noticing that Ryou had moved to sit next to him on the couch. His eyes lingered on the sallow look in his cheeks. The detective could stand to gain a couple of pounds. No matter the importance of the case, he really should be taking better care of himself.

"Slowly. The killer doesn't really know how to use the language. It's more his attempt at piecing together a message. Grammatically, it doesn't make much sense," Malik explained, frowning at the various combination of sentences for the same line.
Malik nodded. "Yeah. According to myth, when a person died, they had to be judged. He would take their heart and weigh it against Ma'at or, rather, an ostrich feather. If a person's heart was found to be good, honest, and weighed less than the feather, they would ascend to heaven. If their heart was too heavy then their soul would be eaten by Ammit."

Malik frowned, leaning back as he rubbed his temple. "I don't see how this has anything to do with his murders though. Does he fancy himself a god among men? What the hell is that sort of logic?"

"The logic of a madman," Ryou murmured, a worrying grin on his face. Malik narrowed his eyes, watching Ryou chuckle to himself. The detective stood up to grab a couple of photos. Based on the delighted look on Ryou's face, Malik questioned which one of them was the madman.

Malik glanced down, shaking his head. "No, thanks. I'd rather just focus on finishing up this place, ignoring the shiver that went down his spine at the sound. Ryou gave Malik a small smile. Ryou stood up, stretching his arms above his head. Malik could hear the bones cracking back into place, trying to hide his own bewilderment. Ryou smiled, a gleeful look on his face. "Wouldn't it be interesting if the killer kept those hearts?"

"Of course, they're missing organs. I got the picture. What point are you driving at?" Malik cut Ryou off, glancing away to focus on the albino next to him. Perhaps he wasn't cut out for a murder case. He could only pray that his sister wouldn't receive this sort of treatment.

Malik narrowed his eyes, noticing how the detective was suddenly hyper conscious of his presence. Malik glanced away, stomach squeezing with nausea. "Do I have to look at those again?"

"Okay, they're missing organs. I got the picture. What point are you driving at?" Malik cut Ryou off, glancing away to focus on the albino next to him. Perhaps he wasn't cut out for a murder case.

Malik watched over Ryou, an odd grin on his companion's face. Malik's brows furrowed, turning away. If he didn't know better, he would think Ryou was... too intrigued by this killer. He seemed to have this strange closeness to the murderer that was concerning, to say the least. He felt like he should address this.

"It sounds like you have a personal interest in the killer," Malik stated cautiously, trying to gauge Ryou's reaction.

Malik nodded, stepping into the kitchen to heat himself up a new batch. Malik watched himself, trying to shake the odd feeling he felt regarding the detective. Ryou was an odd bird, and Malik

Ryou rolled his eyes, a smirk on his face. "Idiot or not, perhaps this is a clue. Anubis would fry the souls to the afterlife, yes?"

"Well, more peculiar than his other habits.

Regardless, Malik figured he could ask the question on his mind. "Even if what you're saying is true, I fail to see how knowing his personality gets any closer to finding my sister." Malik glanced away, stomach squeezing with nausea. "Do I have to look at those again?"

Ryou looked shocked, stunned by this claim. "Malik, figuring out how the killer thinks is how we'll find your sister. Evidence is only so good if it helps us find the killer. But hard evidence is few and scarce. If we want to know what the killer will do next, we have to think like him. We have to get into his mind and understand how he operates."

Malik watched over Ryou, an odd grin on his companion's face. Malik's brows furrowed, turning away. If he didn't know better, he would think Ryou was... too intrigued by this killer. He seemed to have this strange closeness to the murderer that was concerning, to say the least.

Malik nodded. "Yeah. According to myth, when a person died, they had to be judged. He would take their heart and weigh it against Ma'at or, rather, an ostrich feather. If a person's heart was found to be good, honest, and weighed less than the feather, they would ascend to heaven. If their heart was too heavy then their soul would be eaten by Ammit."

Malik nodded, stepping into the kitchen to heat himself up a new batch. Malik watched himself, trying to shake the odd feeling he felt regarding the detective. Ryou was an odd bird, and Malik

Malik narrowed his eyes but said nothing. The parallels implied were far too disconcerting in Malik's view.

Ryou stood up, stretching his arms above his head. Malik could hear the bones cracking back into place, ignoring the shiver that went down his spine at the sound. Ryou gave Malik a small smile. "Can I make you any tea? I imagine yours has gone cold."

"No, thanks. I'd rather just focus on finishing up this transition."

"Okay, they're missing organs. I got the picture. What point are you driving at?" Malik cut Ryou off, glancing away to focus on the albino next to him. Perhaps he wasn't cut out for a murder case. He could only pray that his sister wouldn't receive this sort of treatment.

"Okay, they're missing organs. I got the picture. What point are you driving at?" Malik cut Ryou off, glancing away to focus on the albino next to him. Perhaps he wasn't cut out for a murder case. He could only pray that his sister wouldn't receive this sort of treatment.
sensed that the members of the police force were put off by his behavior. Malik couldn't blame them.

The quicker he did his work, the faster they would find Isis and Malik could distance himself from the detective.

Ryou was pleasant enough and despite their rough meeting, he had been willing to overlook the slight about his feminine appearance. But Malik couldn't ignore the warning signs that Ryou was unhinged and not in a good way. More like, dangerous in the "potentially becoming a serial killer in two years' time" sort of way.

Perhaps it was a jump to make such an assumption, but the warning flags he got from Ryou were… confusing. For such a charming, intelligent person, he seemed perfectly normal and socially adept. He had his quirks, but could hold a conversation well enough and had no issue adjusting to the demands of society when need be. But it was in the small inflections and interactions that Malik had started to see the cracks in this appearance.

Malik shook his head, his focus returning to his translation notes. Worrying wouldn't help either of them now. Malik needed Ryou's help and it was clear that Ryou excelled at his job. He would do everything he could to help the detective and if meant translating this document, then so be it. Malik narrowed his eyes, ignoring the burn of tiredness as he studied the ancient script.

Malik felt warm, almost like he was floating. Aware that his eyes no longer stung, a new ache caught his attention. He squirmed, trying to release some of the tension in his shoulders. His scars were acting up again and he knew that their late night of studying hadn't helped.

Remembering the previous day's work started to wake Malik up, his eyes blinking open. He stared at the red couch, the leather sticking to his cheek. Malik peeled aware from the fabric, leaving a sticky residue that had Malik longing for a bath. It took him a moment to realize that this wasn't his couch, let alone his home. He sat up, rubbing the sand out of his eyes, looking around and reorienting himself.

He had forgotten that he had fallen asleep while translating. Eventually his lack of sleep caught up with him, causing him to pass out. He didn't remember when it happened, but it must have been after their conversation, probably before two am. As Malik moved to stretch, something in his lap caught his attention.

He stared at the blanket that had been bundled around him, brows furrowed. That was odd – he hadn't remembered grabbing one. He would never have gotten one in the first place, opting to return home than risk being lured in by sleep. He turned around, noticing a pillow that had been dislodged as well. Malik started to piece together the picture, noticing a plate of food set up for him for breakfast.

He sighed, a small smile on his face. "Idiot." Malik muttered, unable to bite back a strange sense of gratitude and guilt. Despite claiming not to have any personal investment in the case, Ryou cared a lot more than he let on. The thought of the detective prompted Malik to look around, trying to see where he had gone.

It took a few moments for Malik to realize that Ryou was still in the same room as him. The turned chair had blocked his view. It was only after Malik stood up to move towards the kitchen did he spotted the mess of snowy locks. He chuckled at the detective, who had slumped back in his chair, white hair a frizzed mess, papers strewn across his lap. He had apparently fallen asleep in the middle of his work.

"You're hopeless-" Malik rolled his eyes, pulling the blanket off the couch. He felt a guilty twinge of his late-night suspicion of the detective (although he was not yet convinced that Ryou didn't have deeper issues that needed to be addressed). But, more importantly, Ryou really ought to take better care of himself. Little wonder Ryou resembled a corpse more than the living.

Still, it was difficult to be mad at him when he saw the relaxed, content look on Ryou's face. Malik draped the blanket over the detective, careful not to wake him. He glanced at the clock, noticing it was just shy of seven am. He figured some more sleep would be good for Ryou, suspecting that he hadn't gotten a full night sleep in a while.

The detective was an odd bird and, sometimes, too close to unhinged. But seeing him with his guard down made Malik feel soft. He wasn't sure what to make of that feeling. He had never really had this sort of impulse with anybody before and it was… strange to say the least. But not unpleasant, per se.

It was something he needed to figure out… at a later point — his stomach rumbled for food and drink.

Malik chuckled, watching Ryou's content expression a moment longer before leaving to make himself a cup of tea.

Chapter End Notes

Link to artwork here.
Ryou didn't remember falling asleep, but tried to hide his embarrassment when he realized he had passed out on the job. He occupied himself with gathering up his notes for the day's work, avoiding eye contact with his companion. Malik didn't say anything, but watched him with curious fascination. Ryou spent some time gathering himself -- he didn't want to think of the disappointment his client felt at his less than professional behavior.

Normally, Ryou didn't care about how he looked, but there were several people he needed to talk to today, and he suspected that it wouldn't hurt to clean up a bit. He brushed out his hair, regaining some of the luster it had lost over the last few days. Malik quietly tidied up his appearance as well, trying to brush out the wrinkles in his shirt.

"Remind me to grab a set of clothes next time we're near the university. Not all of us enjoy looking like common riffraff."

Ryou pressed his lips together, hiding a smile as he watched Malik button his vest. Despite a night on the couch, Malik managed to still look beautiful, even with all the wrinkles. Ryou didn't voice these thoughts, changing into a new shirt. He had offered Malik a change of clothes, but his companion was a bit too tall to fit.

Once they had finished getting ready, Ryou grabbed the keys on his desk. He pocketed them, pulling on his coat as he glanced out the window. The sunlight peaked through the window, teasing a warm spring day.

Without another word, Ryou started his hunt again, Malik close by. He wasn't really sure what to say. He had many theories and thoughts about the killer, but he needed to find more evidence. Hard evidence outside of a personality diagnosis. The file regarding the disappearance of Isis Ishtar remained pitifully empty of useful information. They couldn't deduce where she had disappeared, nor did they have any suspects.

Well, aside from the usual delinquents the police kept their eyes on.

Still, one of the suspects listed might actually be of some use.

Ryou pulled out a journal, crammed with photos, notes, and any other pieces of evidence he could fit between the pages. A voice interrupted his thoughts; "So what's the plan for today?"

Ryou named back to his companion. He paused, noticing how the sunlight restored some of the color in Malik's appearance. He still looked rather tired and haggard (though Ryou suspected no more tired than himself). Still, the light made his hair shine, a stunning glow to his skin. Ryou felt a twinge of something resembling jealousy -- his pale features were sallower in the light. At least in the dark, he could pretend the shadows caused his ghostly appearance.

Ryou gestured to his notebook, a couple of names written down. "We're going to talk to some people who might be able to help on the case. Going off the police report, there's only one person of interest who might actually have information. And I know a gal who lives near where your sister was kidnapped who might have seen something. I'll be worth checking to see if these pull up anything."

Malik nodded, eyes furrowed. "When you say person of interest…?"

"He's listed as a suspect, but, I can assure you, the only thing he's guilty of is being a prat."

Malik raised an eyebrow, trying to see if Ryou was joking. He wished he was joking. Still, the man had his uses for all the pain and headaches he caused the police department.

Ryou didn't know where his suspect lived, but he decided to visit a few places he knew he liked to linger. As he followed along the Thames, popping into a few of the suspect's favorite haunts, he decided to at least attempt small talk. He couldn't bear the awkward silence hanging over them.

"So, when did you move to London, Malik?" Ryou asked, eyes skipping over the crowd of people walking by.

Malik tossed some bread crumbs to the birds in front of them, accepting the fact that they would be lingering here until Ryou was satisfied. His lack of complaints about Ryou's methods was a plus in Ryou's books. "About five years ago. Me and my siblings have been working at King's College since then in the history department. Consider us resident specialists."

"Do you like your work?"

Malik narrowed his eyes, shrugging. "I suppose. It's not bad work and I get to stay with my family. I do miss home a bit. It's a lot warmer there than it is here."

"So I've heard. I can't imagine your reasoning for leaving Egypt for this dreary city."

Ryou snorted, annoyed at the cloud passing over the sun. It was so rare that they didn't have a cloudy day -- he wanted the warm spring day to last.

Malik let out a short, barking laugh, a harsh look in his eyes. "It's not like we had a choice. It's my family's duty to protect the relics belonging to a long dead king. When the Brits came and started taking stuff out of the country, we did what we could to keep everything there. When it became clear that our duty meant nothing, we decided it would be better to stay with the king's relics and guard them away from our homeland."

Ryou blinked, startled by this information. He had no idea about this. The news coverage on the disappearance of Isis Ishtar siblings framed them as educated foreigners who had chosen to work in their fine city. He should have figured that was a skewed truth. "My condolences. That hardly seems fair to you."

Malik sighed, giving a weak smile. His expression softened a touch. "It's okay. To be fair, I never wanted to protect the Pharaoh's treasure. Duties of a firstborn son, I suppose."

"I thought you had an older brother?"

"He's adopted. My family line is confusing."

"So it seems. I take it you're close to your siblings, though?"

Malik nodded, a soft look on his face. "Very. Despite my own grievances with family lineage and inheritance and duty, my siblings have been my one constant through it all."

Ryou nodded, but said nothing. He sensed that there was more that Malik wasn't telling him, but
knew better than to ploy into business that wasn't his to know. He respected Ryou's loyalty and love for his siblings. It reminded Ryou that he needed to do his best to help him find his sister.

Malik stretched his arms over his head, finally finishing tearing up the bread for the birds. He cracked his neck. "Do you mind if I grab us some food? I don't think you've eaten anything today and I'm starving already."

Ryou blinked, now suddenly realizing the hungry pit in his stomach. "Uh yeah, actually, that sounds great. I sort of lost track of time."

'I noticed you do that a lot," Malik stated, lingering over the words. Ryou paused, confused by the smirk Malik gave him. He shook his head and reached into his pocket.

'I know there's a place around the corner that sells meat pies. The shop should be open by now. Let me just give you some cash," Ryou muttered, struggling to place his wallet. He could have sworn he had grabbed it this morning. He checked the other coat pocket before checking the pocket on his vest.

'Forgot your wallet?" Malik asked, glancing around as he waited for Ryou.

Ryo's head snapped up, his eyes narrowing in thought. "More like lost it, but where—"

He swore, face burning at his mistake. He leapt up from his spot sitting on the small stone wall by the river, marveling at his stupidity for missing the very suspect they sought. He gritted his teeth, swiveling his head around as he scoured the crowd. He heard Malik asking what was wrong, but a low cackle caught his ear.

'Bakura, damn it! Give me back my wallet!" Ryou jerked back, glaring at an albino who snuck his way in behind the two.

Bakura just gave him a cheeky grin, hands stuffed into his black overcoat. A quick glance might have confused the two for each other, though the subtle differences became apparent as they drew close.

'Wait, who the hell is this?" Malik asked, eyes darting back and forth between Ryou and Bakura in confused alarm.

Ryou raised a hand to cover his face, his irritation seeping through his usually detached façade.

'Malik, this is Bakura. He's a cheater and a thief and a dick."

Bakura made a mock gasp, a facetious grin growing on his face. "Ryou, I'm horrified to hear that you think of me in such a way! What have I ever done to you to deserve such treatment?"

"You keep stealing my shit and interfering with police cases! Now give me back my wallet!"

Ryou growled, reaching out to grab the thief's arm.

Bakura stepped away, dancing away from Ryou before quickly moving in on Malik. He wrapped an arm around Malik's neck, pulling him in close. He smirked at Ryou as he made light of their antics. "At least do me the honor of giving me a proper introduction. The name's Bakura and I specialize in fraudulence and alternative knowledge."

Malik blinked, trying to squirm away from the friendly albino. His eyes narrowed as he realized his implications. "You're a con man."

"In a way. I like to see it as giving people a new way of thinking about life!" Bakura explained, his lips drawing close to Malik's ear. Ryou swallowed as he watched Malik shiver involuntarily, his irritation reaching a peak.

"Stop trying to rob my friend and give me back my wallet!" Ryou snapped, walking back over to the two.

'I don't know what you're talking about." Bakura grinned, a knowing look on his face.

Ryou walked right up to Bakura, reaching his hand out. The thief turned back as if expecting him to reach into his pocket, but Ryou knew better. He dug his hand into Malik's right pocket, which Bakura had slipped his hand into. He clenched the pale wrist, frowning while Bakura's grin widened.

'The hell?" Malik snapped, twisting out of Bakura's grasp and pulling away to check for all of his belongings. Ryou stood there, still holding the thief's wrist waiting to get his wallet back.

Bakura smirked, winking at Ryou. "It's been awhile. Ryou. Did you miss me?"

'Don't flatter yourself. I don't have time for your shit."

'You do seem rather busy. What're you working on nowadays?"

'The Jack the Ripper case. But you already knew that."

Bakura shrugged, a light smirk on his face. He raised a hand up to trace the circles under Ryou's eyes with a curious fascination. Ryou jerked his head away, not wanting to play the thief's games today. Bakura chuckled before glancing behind Ryou at his Egyptian companion standing close by. "Who's the beautiful eye candy?"

'Ryou scowled. "His name is Malik and he's my client. His sister is involved in the case."

'So you're not bedding him. Good. That means he's free—"

Bakura made a mock shudder. "At least do me the honor of giving me a proper introduction. The name's Bakura and I specialize in fraudulence and alternative knowledge."

Malik blinked, now suddenly realizing the hungry pit in his stomach. "I notice you do that a lot."

'The Jack the Ripper case. But you already knew that."

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'So you're not bedding him. Good. That means he's free—"

Ryou twisted Bakura's wrist, a small twinge of satisfaction as he saw the man hiss in pain. It did little to ease his irritation. "What did I say about not having time to deal with your bullshit?"

'T get at! Geez, just let me go!" Bakura hissed, yanking his wrist free. Ryou let him go, eyes carefully scrutinizing the thief. He was aware that Bakura still had his wallet, but, more than that, he might also have answers.

'I noticed something interesting on the case file for Ms. Ishtar. It listed you as one of the suspects who might have kidnapped her. Any idea why?" Ryou asked, watching Bakura's reaction. This man normally had an excellent poker face, but even Bakura didn't know how to mask all of his emotions.

Bakura shrugged, shoving his hands in his pockets. "Perhaps because I'm their go to suspect for any thing that goes wrong in this city. Logically, I'm responsible for every burglary, murder, and arson problem in London."

Ryou rolled his eyes, turning back to Malik. If Bakura was going to be difficult, perhaps Malik might be able to fill in the gaps until they saw the whole picture. "Hey, Malik, did your sister have
Malik frowned, thinking for a moment. "Well, there was the incident at the university last year. Someone broke in and stole the king’s scepter. We never recovered it." Malik stopped, eyes flicking up to Bakura.

The thief shrugged, wearing a neutral expression. "That could have been any thief. The university doesn’t have very good security."

Ryou looked down at his notebook to the small list he had comprised. "You’ve been charged with the theft of multiple rare artifacts in the past, Mr. Bakura. This is nothing new in your behavior. But I find it interesting that only one of the charges ended with jail time for you and that was the theft of an Egyptian artifact."

Ryou closed his eyes, a small smile on his face. "And not long after you got out on parole, women started being murdered. You were found near the scene of the crime of two of the victims, yet you were released due to a lack of evidence. But what I find most suspicious is how the top historian in Egyptology suddenly goes missing a few months later.

"What a smart cover-up to draw us away from your real intentions of getting revenge on Ms. Ishtar, wouldn’t you say?"

Bakura glared, eyes flicking between the two men in front of him. Ryou noticed Malik tremble next to him, quickly raising a hand to calm his companion. Ryou knew that the thought of his sister’s kidnapper being right in front of them was torturous to Malik. But Ryou saw the bigger picture. He saw how he could manipulate information until he got the truth.

"Piss off, Ryou. You know I didn’t do it," Bakura snapped, annoyance seeping through into his voice.

Ryou flipped through the pages, stopping at the photo near the end. He pulled it out and passed it to Bakura. "Then tell me what really happened. Tell me about any and all interactions with Ms. Ishtar and what you observed from the two crime scenes you were found at. If you weren’t the murderer, it’ll be made apparent by your honesty. As hard as that might be for a con man like you."

Ryou smirked, chuckling when he saw Bakura’s eyes flash with anger. After dealing with numerous cases involving Bakura and usually getting the short end of the stick, it was good to see the man cornered and squirming under scrutiny. Bakura raised a hand to brush back his wild hair, only for it stick right back up into place once his fingers had passed through. His eyes settled on the picture as he studied the woman, nodding while he thought to himself.

Bakura let out a loud sigh, hand dropping to his side. "I never met Isis, sorry to disappoint. I only knew of her because her family works there, so I was familiar with the staff and their working hours. I was caught because the police were already on alert when I arrived at the university to do my usual shtick."

"Already on alert?"

Bakura nodded. "Yeah, it was already a shit show before I even arrived. I ran, but the police arrived later with an arrest warrant. After they raided my home and some other trinkets that I have no idea how they got there showed up, I was sentenced to a short interim in jail, but nothing substantive."

Ryou noticed Malik clenching his fists, lavender eyes narrowing. While it would sound like motive to most people, Ryou knew better than to think so. Bakura wasn’t one to seek revenge on his brother because he was sloppy on the job. He knew that was how Bakura viewed the whole situation. Had he done a better job covering his tracks, then he would’ve never been caught.

"So you weren’t arrested for theft of an Egyptian artifact?" Ryou asked, curious about this new detail.

Bakura laughed, his face a cross between annoyance and amusement. "I never even got my hands on what I was looking for. I had planned to make off with a few jewels, but I couldn’t find anything of precious metal. As for the scepter, I have no idea where that ended up. Maybe she lost it while cleaning up – who knows?"

Ryou furrowed his brow. He had assumed Bakura had stolen it because that would make sense for him. Bakura even admitted to having planned on stealing the item. So if he didn’t take it, where was the scepter now?

"So after you got out from petty thief charges, why were you near the murder scenes so shortly after the murders?" Ryou asked, curious about the possibility that he might already know the answer.

Bakura smirked, a gleam in his eyes. "Because I do my best work at night. You know that. Petty thieves steal small during the day – legendary thieves make history in the night."

Ryou rolled his eyes. "You dramatic moron. I figured you would say something like that. Did you perhaps see the murderer?"

Bakura shook his head. "When I stumbled upon the scene, the women were already dead and the killer gone. Sorry to say that I don’t know much else outside of that. I know that’s not what you wanted to hear."

"Not really, but I’m getting used to the whole ‘no witness’ ordeal that is this case. Mind if I ask one more question?

"Yeah, I do mind, but I get the sense you’re going to ask anyway."

"Are you Jack the Ripper and did you kill any of these women?" Ryou pulled out the seven photos tied to the serial killer case. Bakura took the photos, staring unflinchingly at the gory bodies that had been brutalized before death. His expression was harsh and jaded, accustomed already to such violence.

"First, that was two questions. And second, does me saying no really indicate that I’m innocent?"

Bakura handed the photos back to Ryou. "No, I’m not Jack the Ripper and no, I did not kill these women. I’m a connoisseur of alternative knowledge and perspective, not a murderer. Now, whether you believe me is up to you."

Ryou took the photos back, sliding them back into the notebook after he finished writing down his notes. He sighed, shaking his head to flip his bangs out of his face. "Okay. That’s all I have for you now. You don’t suppose I could bug you if I have more questions?"

Bakura just cackled, turning away to leave. "Fat chance. I’ve got places to be, money to be made, lovers awaiting – How about I’ll bug you when I need a distraction, okay?"
Ryou let out an exasperated groan, storming after Bakura. "My wallet, you ass!"

Bakura grinned, raising his hands up as if to feign innocence. Ryou rolled his eyes, reaching into the black trench coat and locating his wallet. He struggled to pull it out of the pocket when he felt Bakura lean in close, his lips close to his ears.

"You sure I can't help you take your mind off things?" Bakura purred, the facetious grin on his face.

Ryou snorted, yanking his hand out of Bakura's coat pocket and leaning back to check if he still had all of his money. As far as he could tell, nothing of value was missing. "Can you please shut up for five minutes?"

"Geez, you're turning into a real anal son of a bitch. You need to stop spending so much time around Commissioner Kaiba."

Ryou knew he shouldn't have laughed out loud, but the sound escaped before he could stop it. He covered his mouth, trying to scowl while Bakura grinned at him like Ryou was the main course.

"Is there anything about you that isn't sarcasm and snark?"

Bakura gave a low chuckle, slowly stepping away. "You know that's what you like best about me. I'll see you around, Detective Ryou."

Ryou watched him step backwards, quickly disappearing into the throng of travelers. Despite his rather distinctive hair, he had a gift for losing himself in a crowd and Ryou quickly lost visuals on him. He sighed, raising a hand to rub at his temple. He heard Malik walking up to him, glancing back to see his companion wore a rather bewildered expression.

"That was... wow."

Ryou snorted, nodding. "Yeah, he's a real pain in the ass. I've dealt with him long enough to know that and not much else about him."

Malik frowned, raising a hand to pull his hair back into a ponytail. His brow furrowed as he regarded Ryou. "You don't really think he's Jack the Ripper, do you?"

Ryou smiled, glad that despite his early display of aggression, Malik seemed to have reached the same conclusion. "Not likely. While he's most certainly guilty of... lesser crimes, as you've heard him admit to, he's no murderer. It would have been nice if he had seen the killer, though I'm not surprised. No one's come forward saying they've seen Jack the Ripper yet. Perhaps one day we'll actually have a witness."

"Preferably sooner rather than later," Malik muttered, eyes gazing around the cobblestone streets. There were more people milling about as it grew closer to noon. Ryou was relieved that he hadn't needed to waste the entire day trying to hunt down Bakura. That gave them the afternoon to talk to another potential witness.

He heard a loud grumble next to him, his eyes shifting to stare at Malik's stomach. His companion's arms shot to his midriff, an embarrassed look crossing his face. Ryou smiled, giggling at what he was sure was Malik trying not to blush. "I'm sorry. You're probably still hungry. Let's grab some lunch, then. Hopefully it will be Bakura-free."

Chapter End Notes

Link to artwork [here](#)
Malik wasn't entirely sure what to make of the thief that had so rudely interrupted their quiet morning. Even more shocking that Ryou seemed to know Bakura, and, by the way Bakura teased and flirted, Malik suspected that it hadn't always been strictly business.

That was a line of thought that he didn't particularly want to continue. Malik had remained polite and collected throughout lunch, asking about other cases the detective had worked on. Ryou had been involved in several murder mysteries and famous burglaries in the city of London. If there had been an unsolved case of mysterious circumstances, Ryou had taken on the challenge.

Ryou had also explained that was how he (unfortunately) met Bakura.

Malik laughed at that, teasing Ryou for his friendly acquaintance. Ryou had been somewhat mortified at how Bakura behaved, specifically towards Malik. And while Malik had reassured his companion that he was quite fine, he was still trying to process what exactly transpired the hour prior.

After Malik and Ryou finished their meal and went back on the road, Malik was left to ponder the strange albinos. Like Ryou mentioned, he suspected the man hadn't kidnapped his sister, but he didn't believe he was entirely innocent. Ryou probably already knew, but Malik suspected that Bakura was still hiding something.

As for his flirtations behavior, Malik had no idea what to make of that.

The idea of courting a woman never really appealed to Malik. The idea that a man might express romantic interest in him was even further from his mind. He hadn't known London to be that sort of city, but then again, he supposed anything was possible in a city where a serial killer hunted prostitutes.

Perhaps that was a bad comparison to make, but then again, Malik had other things on his mind as of late. Any frivolous thoughts would have to be put on hold until his sister was found. How could he think of selfishly indulging in his own desires when Isis's life remained in peril?

That constant reminder weighed on Malik, souring his mood and leaving him more stressed than before. Malik sighed, glancing around and noticing Ryou had led him back to the Whitechapel district. He caught up to the detective. "Are we looking for more evidence?"

Ryou shook his head. "No, there's someone I want to talk to who might have seen something around here. She should be home right now."

"A local to the area?"

"In a way. I hope she's around," Ryou muttered, trailing off as he approached the alleyway where they had found Isis's necklace. Malik passed as he saw Ryou walk up to the apartment complex, just off the main road, the door hidden from clear view. He blinked and followed the detective, not remembering this entrance from yesterday.

Ryou knocked on the door, a relaxed look on his face despite the grungy world around them. Malik stood close by, watching the pedestrians pass on the road not far from them, their eyes dead, focused on the path before them. Despite their apparent of lack of interest, Malik couldn't shake the feeling that they were being watched. A serial killer had once been through here only a few nights prior.

Ryou knocked again, a bit louder the second time. Malik continued to gaze around, eyes sharp for any sign of danger. The sound of a lock shifting caught his ear. Malik turning sharply to watch the door crack open. A busty woman with curly, dirty blond hair stepped into their frame. Her violet eyes flicked over Malik for a moment before settling on Ryou. A eyebrow raised upon recognizing the albinos.

"Detective Ryou? I didn't think you'd be knocking… and at this time of day no less."

Ryou laughed, a grin breaking out on his face. He gave an apologetic shrug, though Mai's knowing smile matched the detective's. Ryou certainly seemed more relaxed around Mai than he did Bakura. "Don't worry, Mai, it's not one of those calls. I'm working on a case and thought you might be able to help me."

Mai snorted, resting her shoulder on the door frame. "Don't tell me – the Jack the Ripper case?"

"In a way. I hope she's around," Ryou muttered, trailing off as he approached the alleyway where they had found Isis's necklace. Malik passed as he saw Ryou walk up to the apartment complex, just off the main road, the door hidden from clear view. He blinked and followed the detective, not remembering this entrance from yesterday.

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Ryou nodded, sitting down next to Mai at a small round table. Malik took the last spare stool, feeling a twinge a disappointment for not moving quickly enough. He knew if they sat here for a long period of time, his back would probably ache, but he trusted Ryou to make an effective use of their time.

Ryou raised a hand to twiddle a stray piece of hair that had fallen out of his ponytail. Malik had stared to suspect this was an old habit that the detective couldn't shake. "What do you know about the Jack the Ripper case, Ms. Valentine?"

Mai sniffed, her shoulders slouching. Sitting at the table, Malik could see the crow's feet at the corners of her eyes. Mai finished her brad, resting her chin on a propped-up arm. "Only that he has it out for prostitutes. Just what this business needs."

Ryou furrowed his brow, his voice lowering to a soft murmur; "… Did you know any of the victims?"

Mai paused, considering her words. She glanced away to look at the kettle. "I knew Mary Anne Kelly. Not well, but I was none too pleased to hear what happened to her. Such a charming young lady. And, of course, I'm close friends with Joey and Serenity, if that answers your question."

Ryou nodded in understanding while Malik flicked his eyes back and forth between the two. Malik finally turned to Ryou, hoping for an answer. The detective leaned in, speaking quietly; "They found Serenity in the Whitechapel district about three months back, having been attacked by her kidnapper. Though we're not certain, we suspect that she might have been an intended target for Jack the Ripper."

Malik inhaled sharply, stunned by this revelation. As far as the public knew, Jack the Ripper left no survivors. This revelation was… startling and filled with Malik with sudden hope. "Did she see who assaulted her?"

Ryou glanced away, uncurling the piece of hair around his finger. He didn't speak for a long second, debating how to proceed. "… The whole incident was rather traumatizing for her and we haven't been able to get a full report on the incident. Her attacker blinded her and she hasn't regained her sight. From what we gathered, she doesn't remember his face."

Malik deflated, disappointed by another dead end. Such a crucial witness that lead to nothing was nothing short of painful in his mind. He rested his chin on his folded hands, ignoring the regret that lingered. "Why wasn't this reported to the public?"

Ryou leaned back, eyes closing. "To put it shortly, we're afraid that if Jack the Ripper learned she survived, he might try to finish the job. For her own protection, all information regarding the attack was kept to a minimum."

Malik nodded slightly, understanding the trail of thought. Even if Serenity couldn't remember her attacker, maybe she could remember another detail? He didn't want to give up on this lead quiet yet – perhaps he could talk to Ryou about this later if he hadn't already considered it.

"Serenity's a sweet girl. She and her brother always made a point to come by and invite me out. It's nice to think of that bastard hurting her. “ Mai cut herself off, a harsh glint shining in her violet eyes. She let both of her hands fall to the table, briefly picking at a stain on the wooden table before caging her fingers together. "How can I help?"

Ryou nodded, pulling out his notebook from his coat pocket. He flipped through the pages, reading through indecipherable scribblings. "A little over a week ago, a young woman was attacked in an alley just around the corner from here. Did you notice anything unusual that night?"

Mai pursed her lips, tilting her head. She shook her head slowly. "Nothing jumps out at me. Usually on business nights, I'm working the front desk with our clients. I keep tabs on who goes out that night and who is working in-house, so to speak, so I didn't notice anything out of the blue."

"Not even a man forcibly dragging a woman down a back alley?" Ryou asked, a sharper tone to his voice.

Mai's eyes flicked open and she watched the detective out of the corner of her eyes. Several long seconds passed, Malik watching with astute fascination. The whistling of the kettle eventually forced Mai to stand up, walking over to get their cups of tea. She took her time, adding tea leaves and letting the drinks cool for a moment before serving.

"… How much attention do you pay to recent politics, Detective Ryou?" Mai asked lightly, a soft edge in her voice.

Ryou took the cup, bringing it close to his lips as he inhaled deeply. "Not much. Only if it affects myself personally or my work."

Mai nodded. "That's fair. I guess I could say the same applies to me. There was a recent piece of legislature that came into effect, oh, about three years ago. It's a law claiming to protect women and girls and all sorts of other things. Does this jog your memory at all?"

Malik narrowed his eyes at the smirk on Mai's face, as if she had a secret that she was begging to share. Ryou slowly nodded his head, a light scowl on his face. "I do recall that, yes. Some sort of criminal law, correct?"

Mai took a sip of her tea, her eyes flicking over to Malik. She chuckled, shaking her head physically while also enjoying Malik's confusion. She turned her focus onto Malik, speaking more for his benefit than for the detective's. "That's the one. Essentially, it raised the age of consent to stop men from exploiting such young girls. You have to be at least eighteen to be a sex worker and it's supposed to help protect younger girls from becoming prostitutes."

Malik narrowed his eyes, not quite seeing what the problem is. "Do you have an issue with this law?"

Mai chuckled softly, shaking her head. "On the contrary. I think this was one of the smarter things they have passed in years. But there were some unexpected side effects. There's been a bit of a crackdown at brothels, preventing some women from working as they were under-aged. Which is problematic when they're poor, homeless and trying to escape an abusive situation."

Mai sighed, leaning back into her chair. "There's a lot of exceptions and oddballs cases like that that certainly don't speak for the majority. But there are situations with this law that people are ignoring. It's punishing women trying to provide for themselves. Prostitutes aren't exactly seen in a positive light. Also, this law extends buggery laws, further criminalizing the sex industry."

Mai turned her gaze back to Malik, the wheels starting to turn. "It's a double-edged sword. It's helped many girls and women, but it's placed the blame on others at the same time."
Mai nodded, cupping her hands around her mug. "While I think it's been overall helpful, the public perspective has been warped. People claim that prostitutes are luring girls out to sell their bodies. Even though it's really a demand we're meeting for the public. While I would say the public is finally reconsidering how they treat women and children, progress is not always linear. There's such a focus on protecting the young that older sex workers like myself are seen as the root of the issue."

Mai flicked her eyes back to Malik. "To put it simply, they want to help some people, but the rest of us can go to hell. Sex workers, homosexuals, procurers — we're all the enemy. End of story."

Mai took a deep breath, setting her cup down with a harsh clatter. "If I were to die tomorrow, no one in this city would care. I'm not dying for sympathy — that's simply a fact. People are interested in the Jack the Ripper case not because they feel pity and compassion for us, but because the scandal is far more intriguing than the people he has killed. That's why people care more about the killer himself instead of his victims."

Malik sat still, considering Mai's dark words. Mai struck him as a woman who was frank and straightforward. She didn't kid herself or cling to naïve optimism. She ran a tight ship and her outlook was shaped by the reality of the world they lived in. She saw the world as cut and dry, pragmatic for someone in her position with responsibility over a house of sex workers. The very same women who may be targeted by a serial killer.

Mai rested her hand against the tea cup, letting the hot drink warm her hand. "So, Detective Ryou, you'll have to forgive me if I don't notice every unfair act towards women around me. Sad to say, but you sort of have to be desensitized to these things at this time. I'm used to my girls coming back after being beaten by a lover. It's a tough world out there — you know that too, don't you?"

To Malik's surprise, Ryou let out a bitter laugh, a mocking smile on his face. "All too well, unfortunately. All too well."

Malik watched Ryou, raising an eyebrow. Would it be rude to ask about this later? Probably... But he was still going to ask.

Ryou turned back to his notebook, pulling out the Ishtar family picture. He held it out for Mai to take a look. "Do you recognize this woman?"

Malik sighed, already sensing the answer. If Mai didn't notice the scuffle a few nights before, then there's no way she would know of his sister. They traversed different walks of life, so to speak.

Malik's expression torn between anger and shock at his own reaction. Malik didn't have a chance to curb his reaction. Before he could even process that he was reacting, his hand acted on its own accord. He couldn't see Ryous' expression, his white hair curtaining his face as he remained frozen in his spot. Only Mai seemed unperturbed by the events unfolding in front of her.

"That's evidence. How else do you explain why your sister is there at that time of night? Now consider the Ripper noticed this pattern and chose to target her knowing she was meeting to sleep with someone. Or rather, what if he was the lover?" Mai smirked, Malik frowning on the gesture. He had a bad feeling based on the hungry look on the detective's face. Ryous' expression was very cold. "You might not be entirely off."

Malik narrowed his eyes. "What the hell are you saying, Ryous? This is my sister we're talking about."

"I'm not saying anything. The evidence is before us and I'm putting the pieces together. That's my job." Ryous' expression grew darker, focused more on writing than addressing Malik's concerns. "That's every two weeks. Did you ever see her with somebody?"

Mai spoke; "Yeah, I've seen her around here a few times."

Ryou looked up, a small smile on his face. "How often would you say you've seen her around?"

Mai thought, leaning back in her chair. "Let's see... I suppose I would see her every other week pass by. I just assumed she worked at another brothel, truth be told."

"Then she was meeting someone there. So she's meeting a man in the middle of the night in the Whitechapel district by herself, her family completely unaware. It looks like a lover or potential client, depending on the circumstances."

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Mai shook her head, toying with her braid before tossing it back over her shoulder. "No. I did notice her making her way down towards the rentals, closer to the river, but I never ventured after her."

Malik frowned. The rentals didn't make sense. That wasn't the way home. Why would Isis go down there? Did she have her own business that she didn't tell her family about?

Before Malik could process this, Ryous started speaking out loud, quickly, to himself. "Then she was meeting someone there. So she's meeting a man in the middle of the night in the Whitechapel district by herself, her family completely unaware. It looks like a lover or potential client, depending on the circumstances."

Malik snapped his head back around to glare at Ryous. "That's bullshit!"

"That's evidence. How else do you explain why your sister is there at that time of night? Now consider the Ripper noticed this pattern and chose to target her knowing she was meeting to sleep with someone. Or rather, what if he was the lover? Ryous shook his head, still ignoring the fuming Egyptian as he continued to mutter to himself. "No, that wouldn't make sense. We found other patons as he continued to walk blindly forward, trying to clear his mind.
How dare he.

How dare Ryuu even suggest that his sister would sell her body to the night.

Malik stepped in front of the window, ignoring the swarm of immigrants who spoke something resembling Italian while drinking out front. He leaned back into the stones, raising his hands no rub at his temples. The drunken mob (in the middle of the day no less) eyed him, muttering softly as they slowly wandered down the street, a sea of sin and destitution.

His sister would not consort with these sorts of people. Isis was better than this. Even if she had a secret lover, she would not think to meet him in private in such a place. Ryuu may be a detective, but his was his sister. He knew his sister better than the detective did. And despite what the evidence may suggest, he knew Isis wouldn't go behind their family's back.

His eyes flattered open and he took a deep breath. This whole case was stressing him out more than he thought. He knew Ryuu wasn't trying to intentionally upset him. He felt as if time was being wasted accusing Isis of falsehoods when his sister's life hung in the balance. And all he could do was sit and wait and watch. He hadn't contributed to the case. He felt like he wasn't doing anything at all, let alone enough.

Malik let his hands drop to his side, spotting someone standing in his periphery. He didn't need to look to know it was the detective. Malik sighed, staring straight ahead, not yet ready to talk. Ryuu stood quietly nearby, hands raised in front of him as he fiddled with his sleeve.

The nervous tic eventually grated on Malik's already frayed nerves. He rolled his eyes. "Do you always have to pick at something?"

Ryuu blinked, realizing what he was doing as he pulled his hands apart. A light blush growing on his face. "… Sorry. Childhood habit."

Malik flicked his eyes over at Ryuu, who seemed more flustered and embarrassed than he had ever seen him before. For someone with a dry sense of humor and an excellent poker face, this was a new side of him that Malik hadn't seen before.

Ryuu cut himself off, raising a hand to fiddle with his hair again before catching himself, snapping his wrist down. "I'm rambling, aren't I? Look – when I'm on the job, I focus so much on the few facts that I have that I forget the larger picture and don't consider other people's feelings… And I'm sorry for that. I shouldn't be making such lewd accusations of your sister."

Malik watched Ryuu, the detective's hands twitching before he finally clasped them together to fight the urge to fidget. Malik released the breath he had been holding, trembling slightly at the weight. He glanced away, his own frustration still lingering. "You were doing your job. I know you weren't trying to piss me off."

Ryuu took a step forward, slow and hesitant. "That still doesn't mean I should be making those sorts of assumptions about Isis."

"Hazard of the job. It's like you mentioned before."

Ryuu shook his head, lowering his face to hide beneath his bangs. "That's how I approach the job, but that doesn't mean everything I do is right. I'm so used to postulating off of so little evidence because I usually have nothing to work with. I have to theorize and research off that until I can a better sense of the picture. I'm always willing to accept new theories and dismiss them when the narrative no longer fits."

Ryuu finally caved, raising a hand to twist at the loose strand hanging by his cheek. "But I didn't consider the narrative you have of your sister. Your perspective on your sister's character is far more important anyone else's. I'm sorry. If you're certain that she would not act in that manner, then that's good enough for me."

Malik blinked, surprised by the apology. He had expected Ryuu to excuse his language and behavior from before, but… this was more than he bargained for. What he said was rational, but his words felt anything but. From his body language to the odd tremor that entered his voice, Ryuu seemed genuinely upset about hurting Malik's feelings.

Malik relaxed, surprised by the sincerity. Ryuu had a rather sharp wit when it came to investigation, but his social skills with people could use some work. All interactions with other people seemed to indicate that Ryuu was difficult to work with or just plain weird. And while that was certainly true, Malik sensed that Ryuu was reaching to meet Malik in the middle. That he was trying.

Besides, it wasn't like Malik was completely innocent in their fight.

"It's okay. I appreciate you coming out to say sorry. And I'm also sorry about slapping you."

Ryuu glanced away, his hand to feel the light burn on his cheeks. "No matter how upset I was, that's no excuse to hit you."

Ryuu turned his head up, chuckling lightly as a small smile grew on his face, relief seeping through. He raised his hand to the cheek that Malik had struck. "It's fine. I was being a dick and upset you. Shit happens."

Malik sighed, raising his hand to trace along Ryou's cheek. The light pink had already faded away, indicating that it wouldn't even leave a bruise. "Still shouldn't have done it."

Ryuu shrugged. "We both did stuff we shouldn't have today. We're both idiots."

"Idiots chasing after a crazy serial killer."

"That's life in a nutshell, really."

Malik laughed at that, a grin popping onto his face. His hand wandered to twirl around the piece of hair that Ryuu had been fidgeting with. He supposed the nap helped, but the sunlight really accentuated the pure-white tones to the detective's hair. The cloudy city didn't really do justice to his beautiful, snow-like hair, which felt like silk threads between Malik's fingers.

Ryuu's eyes flickered rapidly between Malik's hand and face, suddenly breaking the spell. Malik stepped back, his face burning with heat. He could only pray that his tanner visage would hide the blush on his face. He had no idea what came over him, but he didn't want to try explaining it to the detective.
"Did you have any other questions for Mai?" Malik forced out the question, in a desperate change of topic.

Ryou raised an eyebrow, his lips twitching as if he was debating frowning or smirking (probably smirking). He instead settled for glancing back towards the brothel. "I got what I needed for now. I was going to check to see if Namu had finished those reports for me."

Malik nodded, pushing off with his core muscles to step away from the building. "We'll probably want to try and grab a cab. Or else it'll be very late by the time we get back."

Ryou nodded, his eyes narrowing for a moment. Malik waited for Ryou's question that inevitably followed. "Are you blushing?"

Malik hailed a cab, rolling his eyes to distract the detective. "Hardly. Nothing flusters me."

"Our first encounter has me suspecting otherwise."

"Your feminine features threw me off the first time we spoke," Malik explained, already anticipating the backlash.

As if on cue, Ryou's head snapped around, scowling at Malik as a cab pulled in front of them. "Fuck you. I don't look like a girl."

Malik smirked, winking at the detective. "I think most people will side with me, based on how angry those comments make you. Perhaps a haircut will help clear up any confusion."

Ryou rolled his eyes, fuming to himself as he stepped into the buggy. "You're a real git. Malik Ishtar."

"Always a pleasure to keep you company."

Malik bit back a chuckle, deciding he needed to stop teasing Ryou before he started to implement the lessons he had learned from past murderers. Lord forbid he become the reason the good detective was driven mad. He still needed Ryou's help to find his sister, after all. So Malik made himself content as he listened to Ryou explain more details on the case, trying not to fall asleep in the late afternoon sun.
Ryou was an idiot.

Well, he was deeply intelligent in a way. He had a natural intuition that allowed him to connect the dots from seemingly disconnected facts. He understood how the human mind worked and how people would react under different circumstances. He often used this knowledge to deduce how a killer or a thief would act to find his culprit.

Despite knowing so much about how people worked, Ryou didn't know how to apply it in his own life.

Figuring out people from afar was so easy to do on paper and in his head. But even when Ryou was aware of how his words and actions could affect the people around him, he was never good at doing what was right. He tried to make up for it by being polite and charming when called for, but he always got in his own head. He always managed to get in his own way and do something stupid.

Ryou sighed, pressing his forehead against the glass pane of the carriage. The horse-drawn cab jolted along the cobblestone path, Ryou feeling each and every bump. Malik sat across from him, eyes studying the crowded streets of shoppers and storeowners alike. Though Malik didn't seem angry at the moment, Ryou felt his cheeks burn from his earlier accusation.

It didn't matter if his was seeing someone or not, in the grand scheme of the case. He knew that small detail in his supposed narrative was minute and only served to figure out how she may have met Jack the Ripper. Perhaps she did, perhaps she didn't. Still, Ryou didn't have any right to make such outlandish claims.

He knew he had been in Malik's position and heard someone suggesting such awful things about his own little sister, Ryou would have lost his temper as well. He probably wouldn't have slapped him, but that option wasn't off the table either.

Ryou felt these thoughts pulling at the back of his head, trying to ignore them as he hopped out of the stopped carriage. Malik quickly followed after him, Ryou holding the door open for him to the precinct. Malik didn't seem angry at him anymore, but it didn't put Ryou's mind at ease. He still felt like a prat over what he said.

A quick conversation with an officer near the front informed the two that Kaiba was in his office in a meeting with Yugi. Perfect – Ryou needed to talk to Yugi. Irritating his irate boss was another plus to the whole situation.

Ryou wandered up to the familiar set of doors, knocking politely. "Commissioner Kaiba, it's me, Detective Ryou. Might I have a word with Yugi?"

As if proving how much Kaiba didn't want to acknowledge his new guests outside, no one answered. Before Ryou could knock again, Malik grinned, a devious look on his face. "I love it when he gives me an opportunity to piss him off."

Ryou frowned, curious as to what his companion was doing. He bit back a laugh when Malik started to fiddle with the lock, a small smirk on his face as he methodically went to work. "I wasn't aware of your criminal background, Mr. Ishtar."

"It's not criminal if you don't get caught."

Ryou covered his mouth, unable to keep from laughing. Malik smirked, the lock unhitching. He flung the door open, an arrogant look on his face.

Kaiba looked like he was about to have an aneurysm. "Ishtar! I swear to-"

"Oh, hi, Ryou. It's been awhile!" Yugi exclaimed, standing next to Kaiba by his desk. He had a map laid out, detailing some specific region for city planning. Ryou remembered that Yugi had his work cut out trying to repair and rebuild some "structurally unsound" buildings after a recent fire last year.

"Good to see you, Yugi. Are those the plans for the reconstruction?" Ryou asked, knowing that if he wanted information about the expansion of the police department, it would be easier to get answers out of Yugi versus Kaiba.

Yugi sighed. "Sort of. I lost my original blueprints the last time I was here. I have no idea where I left them, but I have to make do with my memory for now."

"That's rough. Are you working on the station house at the moment?"

Yugi shook his head. "No, the hospital. The state medical center was deemed structurally unsound a few months back and it's been hell trying to address medical emergencies. And since that specific hospital was the primary location for all police emergencies in this district, we've had to consolidate the medical team from the hospital over here."

Yugi cut himself off, glancing up at Kaiba with a tired look. "It's frustrating. The sooner this can get approved, the sooner I can get all these extra workers out of here."

Ryou pressed his lips together, noticing how the commissioner and city planner glared at each other. Apparently, there was a difference of opinions on how things were being done.

Ryou stepped forward, reaching into his pocket. "Well, while I'm here, mind if I ask a favor of you?"

Kaiba looked up, stepping out from behind his desk. It was clear that if he stayed in that room any longer, he would have snapped at being thoroughly ignored by the detective and didn't want to deal with his antics. He needed Ryou on the job, so the detective was safe (for now).

Yugi barely paid any note to Kaiba's frustration, leaning back against the window. "Sure. Is this for the Ripper case?"

Ryou nodded, pulling out a folded sheet of paper. He held up the small list. "Would you be able to tell me the proprietors of these flats?"

Yugi blinked, his eyes furrowing. "… I'm not sure how legal that is."

Ryou shrugged, ducking his head away. "Probably not very. Thing is… I have reason to suspect that Jack the Ripper may have bought one of these properties and is using it as a sort of base."

Yugi's eyes widened, head snapping up away from the list. Ryou kept his gaze steady, sensing the other man's shock. He knew the killer expected him to play by the rules. But that didn't mean...
Ryou couldn't bend the rules if it got him a name.

Yugi considered Ryou's request a moment longer, the reluctance still etched into his face. A few long seconds passed before Yugi finally sighed, folding the paper and slipping it into his own pocket. "I'll have this to you in two days at the latest. It shouldn't be hard for me to locate this information."

Ryou smiled, a sense of relief crossing over him. "Thank you for doing this, Yugi. This is a great help."

Yugi shrugged, a light blush on his face. "Just doing my job in helping to catch crazy serial killers in this city. That's why I wanted to be a city planner, after all."

Ryou chuckled, stepping backwards. "Of course. Those criminals need to look out."

Ryou turned back to Malik, who had started to pull books off of Kaiba's bookshelf. Malik didn't even bother putting them back into place, stacking them on top of the neatly organized books. Malik noticed Ryou's stare, giving a quick nod to Yugi, a sheepish grin on his face. "Sorry about constantly interrupting your meetings with the commissioner. Still appreciate the help."

Ryou raised an eyebrow, unaware of their past interaction. Yugi just shrugged, propping himself up to sit on Kaiba's desk to examine some of the commissioner's notes. "I don't mind, though I imagine Seto does. Speaking of which, can you invite him back into his office? We still need to finish up business and I can't delay this meeting any more than I already have."

Ryou grinned, assuring Yugi would do just that. Fortunately for him, Kaiba hadn't travelled far at all. He stood outside of his office, leaning against the wall, eyes closed. They flicked open when Ryou and Malik exited. Ryou gave him a mocking smile, gesturing for Kaiba that he was allowed back in.

Kaiba stepped in front of Ryou, his expression stern. Ryou met the icy, blue eyes, tempered with something deeper than anger. "Watch your conduct, detective. Do not forget who your employer is and what debt you owe him."

Ryou said nothing, well aware of the respect due to his boss. Despite Kaiba's off putting attitude, Ryou was not going to let the commissioner's demands prevent him from doing his job. Even if it meant stepping on his toes at times, the detective always provided results.

Perhaps it was that shared knowledge allowing Ryou to be let off the hook once again for his presumptuous behavior. He watched Kaiba close the door, sighing as the events of the day started to catch up with him. Ryou felt like he had so much information before him, but he wasn't sure how all of it tied together yet. He had pieces and snippets, but the whole picture remained elusive still.

A quick trip down to the basement informed them that Namu had already left for the evening. Ryou knew that if he actually looked up his schedule beforehand, he could have avoided this issue. Then again, he always had too many thoughts going on in his head to remember details like a normal schedule. Ryou shook his head, wryly smiling as he pressed his forehead against the fogged glass. He supposed he would have to try again tomorrow.

A cough caught Ryou's ear and he turned to his remaining companion. The small smirk on Malik's face told him that he had been lost in thoughts again. Ryou flicked his eyes away, the urge to fidget with his hair returning. He really needed to do a better job of paying attention to his surroundings.

"So, any other plans for the evening?" Malik asked, taking a moment to fix his hair.

Ryou frowned, thinking. What was their next step? "I don't have anything else for you to translate. And Namu isn't here to give me that list of missing organs from the other victims."

Malik gave him a long stare before finally breaking eye contact. "Yeah, still not used to dealing with a murder case."

Ryou bit his lip to keep from smiling as he led them up the stairs to the atrium. He kept forgetting that Malik was still a bit squeamish about it all. "I was thinking of checking out Whitechapel. And that would be?"

"And that would be?"

Malik sighed, leaning in to poke at the shadows under Ryou's eyes. "You need to get more sleep. Last night wasn't enough to fuel you through the rest of the investigation."

Ryou jerked his head back, flustered at the soft, warm touch above his cheekbones. "Since when did you become such a mother hen?"

"Since a certain detective stopped taking care of himself in lieu of his case. Seriously, you're going to pass out if you keep going at this rate. Malik frowned, a hint of concern leaking into his voice.

Ryou brushed his hair out of his face, his gaze returning to Malik. This was... not exactly what he expected. He had figured Malik would want him to solve the case as quickly as possible. And Ryou would certainly throw himself into the case without rest. In a strange twist of role reversal, Malik was the one reminding him to get rest and take care of himself.

Though instinct urged Ryou to research and investigate without rest until he found the killer, logic dictated that this was a foolish plan. Ryou couldn't keep working tirelessly and expect to produce results. Even detectives needed to eat and rest, despite the danger that threatened the city. Yet it was Malik who was reminding him of this, and it was Malik who was making sure he took care of himself.

Ryou hadn't had someone in his life care about him in that way in many years.

So despite the desire to keep working, Ryou felt himself relaxing. He caved in to Malik's request, seeing the wisdom behind it. "Fair enough. I suppose I haven't been getting much sleep as of late. Shall we meet tomorrow?"
Malik let out a breath, his shoulders slumping with released tension. He thought for a moment before speaking. "Yeah. If you want, you can meet me by the university. I should be able to pull up more books and documents about ancient Egyptian religion. Maybe we'll find some clue in that."

Ryou perks up, smiling at the idea. Not only was the university the research center for Egyptology, but other dead cultures and languages. Maybe he would be able to pull some files regarding the other messages left by Jack the Ripper.

"That's an excellent idea. Let's meet, say, eight in the morning?"

Malik laughed, shaking his head in amusement. "Okay. You might be able to get up at that time, but I'm going to need a bit more sleep. Meet me after lunch, okay? That'll give me time to wake up and find those documents."

Ryou blushed, a small smile growing on his face. "Sorry – Not use to a 'normal' schedule. After lunch then."

Malik nodded, an odd look crossing his face. Ryou furrowed his brow, a question lingering in his mind. Before he could ask, Malik turned to leave, giving him a short wave goodbye. Ryou watched his odd companion leave, the sunset making his blonde hair glow like fire. He thought about earlier that morning when they stood by the river, the sunlight sparking and giving him a radiant glow.

Malik was made to be in the sun.

Ryou shook his head, turning to head back to his flat. This last week working with Malik had been exhausting but productive. Strange to think in the short time he had spent with Malik, the young researcher had quickly integrated himself into the case. His work, insight, and quick wit had let him rest for very long, but he did catch a few breaks where he thought of nothing. Though long stretches of uninterrupted sleep were true bliss.

Ryou couldn't dwell on his lovely evening of sleep as he stepped onto the campus the following day. It was just after noon, and Ryou couldn't help but feel a little curious. He had never been at King's College before, and he was curious about what sort of place Malik usually worked at.

As Ryou wandered the halls of the History department, he felt his body stopping to examine and study each trinket and token along the way. Though most items on display in the department were of English and European history, he did see a few samplings of artifacts of cultures vastly different than his own, including that of Egypt.

Ryou studied the golden pendant that hung by two other golden items. The pendant and the ring next to it were like a bloody history with them."

"Fascinating, aren't they?" Ryou jumped at the voice, turning around to see a well-dressed man. He had long silver hair, though it appeared to be natural instead of greying. He wore a red dress coat with a black vest underneath, the jewelry on his fingers indicating his wealth and stature.

Ryou nodded politely, returning his gaze to the items encased in glass. "They are rather beautiful. Though such trinkets often carry a bloody history with them."

"The gentleman laughed, shaking his head. "Well, you're one for wives' tales it seems. These are considered some of Egypt's greatest treasures. I should know – I am the Head of Antiquities in England."

Ryou blinked, turning around to study the man. Based on that title, this meant he was talking to Malik's boss, and by extension, Isis's. Naturally, his first thought on the matter didn't deal with a matter of respect, but of what this could mean for the case. Still, Ryou knew how to play his part. "I see. It's an honor to meet you. I'm Detective Ryou of the London Police Department."

Pegasus chuckled, offering his hand. "Maximillion Pegasus. A pleasure to meet you. Do you normally come here to check out the Egypt exhibit here at the university in your free time, my good detective?"

"Not usually. It's more like my work has lead me here. I'm working with Malik regarding the disappearance of Ms. Isis Ishtar."

Ryou studied Pegasus, gauging the archaeologist's reaction. If he did know something, he didn't reveal it. He sighed, a look of weariness crossing his usually collected face. "I see. Well, I'm glad to hear someone's working on the case. Isis is an incredible archaeologist. She's as sharp as they come. I actually was finishing up some business with her a few nights prior."

Ryou held his breath, keeping his expression neutral. "When was that?"

Pegasus frowned, raising a hand to rub at his chin. "I want to say the 22nd of this month? I can't really remember. My schedule's so busy as of recently."

Ryou nodded, his mind racing. That date was when Isis went missing. He recalled when Malik first spoke to him over a week ago, mentioning how his sister left their boss's estate coming home. Ryou never drew the connection, but the lines started to form. This meant the last known person to have seen Isis was Pegasus.

"Needless to say, Pegasus suddenly became a person of interest."

Before Ryou could even begin to ask questions, a voice caught the pair's attention. An elderly gentleman followed by a bald man with startling blue eyes came running down the hallway. Pegasus sighed, crossing his arms. "It appears work demands my attention again. It was good to
"Likewise. If it's not too much, would I be able to speak to you regarding Ms. Ishtar in the near future?"

Pegasus chuckled, waving his hand. Whether to say farewell, dismiss the suggestion or express that it wasn’t an issue, Ryou had absolutely no clue. He didn’t have time to inquire further as the two gentlemen caught Pegasus up in a conversation, leaving Ryou alone with his thoughts and questions.

Ryou couldn’t shake the feeling that he probably shouldn’t have let a witness go so quickly, but Pegasus excused himself before Ryou could strategize. It was a strange predicament to fall into. He would have to outsource to Malik and get his help trying to catch his boss at a time when he wasn’t busy.

The sound of footsteps in the other direction caused Ryou to turn his head. He smiled when he saw Malik making his way down the hallway. He had lost the dress coat and wore a white button-down with a tan vest. His sleeves partially rolled up, Malik apparently hard at work this morning. It showed a different side to him, a bit more relaxed than the carefully preened appearance he normally maintained.

"Did you get any sleep?" Malik asked, a smirk on his face.

Ryou chuckled, walking over to meet him halfway. "A little. More than I usually do."

Malik snorted, deciding to let that slide. Ryou suspected Malik was not happy with that answer, but Ryou noticed a similar gray shadow under his companion’s eyes. Perhaps he wasn’t the only one losing sleep at night. It was certainly ironic for Malik to lecture Ryou on not getting sleep only to then deprive himself of some rest.

Of course, this was an argument for another time. Malik inclined his head towards the hallway he just came from. "I spoke to Rishid and he helped me locate some files that could help us."

Ryou nodded, thankful for the two brothers’ work ahead of time. "Excellent. So we should be able to finish the translation?"

Malik’s smile widened, a gleam in his eye. "Not only that, but we were able to outsource to some of the other historians. I mentioned how the killer left messages in Latin, Cuneiform and Biblical Hebrew, and we were able to gather some resources that might help us translate those texts. It’ll be much more difficult, but Rishid is pretty good at deciphering grammatical structures of dead languages. Between him and me, we can probably figure something out."

Ryou sighed, walking for a moment, a stunned look on his face. While he never considered Malik to be a liability, Ryou was constantly amazed by his resourcefulness and cleverness. He felt a smile playing across his face, but quickly masked it into a cool smirk before Malik could realize what he was thinking. He ignored the curious stare Malik gave him, a small chuckle on his lips.

"Not bad Malik. You surprise me still."

"Well, I can’t let you be the one constantly baffling me every day," Malik jabbed back without pause.

"You know, you would make a pretty good detective," Ryou suggested, watching Malik’s face to see what his reaction would be.

Malik furrowed his brow, his own face crinkling in consideration. "Really? I feel like I would get frustrated with dead ends."

"Maybe, but you’re stubborn and hate losing. Those are the qualities of a good detective right there."

"Speaking from experience, are we?" Malik smirked, raising an eyebrow.

Ryou laughed, unable to deny the claim. Once again, Malik’s power of observation was coming in handy. He reflected on his previous night’s thoughts, hoping that they may at least connect the dots to see the truth.
Chapter 9

Translating dead languages written by someone uneducated on the matter proved to be much more difficult than Malik had first thought.

While Latin was relatively straightforward, the other two languages were much trickier to translate. Malik nearly lost it when he realized that their serial killer had written his message in Cuneiform backwards, not realizing the different flow of text. Malik had to walk out and take a break after that. He thanked his elder brother for his patience on the matter where Malik lacked any. If this madman wanted to parade about as an intellectual snob, then he should have the decency to do his damn research first.

Ryou did what he could to help, mostly reading up on the history of their cultures to see if there were any parallels between the Anubis comparison to draw from. It fascinated Malik how even when the detective was out of his element, he did not waste a moment and instead threw himself into the investigation. Even with such foreign subject matter, that didn't deter Ryou from learning all he could to continue his work. The three worked continuously through the afternoon until the sun cast long, red shadows into the office. It was only when Ryou reminded Malik of their investigation tonight that he remembered their plan. He felt both anxious and excited at the prospect. He wasn't sure what Ryou was looking for, but if it drew them closer to finding the killer, than Malik considered it well spent.

"Leaving then?" Rishid asked, his voice a gentle murmur breaking the silence.

Malik nodded, grabbing his coat that he left hanging by the door. "We're going to investigate the crime scene and see what we can find… I'm not sure when we'll get back."

Rishid chuckled, a small smile on his face. "Stay out as late as you need. I'll do my part here to help out."

Ryou bowed slightly, a grateful smile on his face. "Thank you for all the help, Rishid. If there's a single clue hidden in these message, then we'll be one step closer to finding his."

Rishid nodded, his expression stern as always. "We appreciate the help… Please find her, detective."

Ryou gave a nod, a sharp glint in his eyes. Malik raised an eyebrow. He hadn't seen Ryou like this before, but it almost seemed as if the detective saw this case as a challenge not to his ego but to his character. That he wouldn't let the serial killer have the last laugh and Ryou would triumph.

As Malik turned to leave, he heard his brother calling his name. He turned back, Rishid glancing away before steely eyes locked on his lavender ones. The setting sun caught the scar on his face, casting a dark shadow that seemed more threatening than his kind-hearted brother truly was. "He careful."

Malik swallowed, his stomach coiling. He knew Rishid had his reservations about Malik getting involved in the case, but he hadn't objected. Rishid knew that his little brother was stubborn and would do what he want. Rishid held down the fort, covering for his family and making sure Pegasus didn't give them any reason to reprimand their lack of work.

Still, Rishid would still worry for him, aware of the potential danger. And Malik knew how much Rishid feared losing another sibling to the night.

"I will. I'll see you later," Malik said, keeping his voice steady. This outing felt different from the other ones. Malik aware that they were going out in the dark. They were entering the killer's territory in the hopes of catching him. All it would take was one mistake, one slip-up between victory or death.

Malik shook those thoughts, following the white ponytail out of the building as they left for the Whitechapel district.

Even though the news of the Whitechapel murders spread like wildfire across the city, Malik had no idea what the district was actually like. He had simply written off the area as a slum to avoid at all costs. His first trip down with Ryou a few days back was his first time in the poverty-stricken slum, and his other trips during the day convinced him that the corpses weren't the only thing dead about this area.

So Malik was confused by how… loud Whitechapel was.

He stuck close to Ryou, unable to keep from staring at the groups of poor immigrants wandering about, singing songs. The bars and pubs stayed open, music and smoke pouring out as liquor drenched the streets. Women stood on every street corner, winking and flirting at potential customers as they went out to work.

When he imagined a murder scene, he had thought it to be much quieter. Malik hadn't anticipated such a lively, raucous scene. Despite the depravity all around him, there was not a cop to be scene, though Malik suspected there were a few hiding about, with their eyes on the true prize.

Malik guessed that Ryou was accustomed to this scene as he showed no sign of surprise or novelty to the sights before him. Malik skipped a few steps, moving to walk alongside the detective. "Is Whitechapel always this… boisterous?"

Ryou smirked, his teeth catching his lip to shutter a laugh. "This is where everyone comes to escape from their problems. So yeah, Whitechapel can become a real riot some days. And I mean that literally. The drunks often have a bit too much and start looking for trouble."

Malik wrinkled his nose, not eager to get into a fight at night. Ryou seemed to notice his discomfort, slowing down to a stop at a corner. "Things will quiet down as the night goes on. That's when we'll want to take particular interest."

Malik nodded, tearing his gaze away from the happenings around him. "So that's the game plan then? Hang around here and circle around?"

Ryou shrugged, leaning back against the stone wall. "Pretty much. Get a sense of where, when and how the killer picks his victims and try to figure out a way to anticipate his actions. Do what it takes so we don't find another corpse."

Ryou reached into his pocket, pulling out a thin, metal whistle, handing it over to Malik. "In case something goes wrong tonight."
Malik rolled his eyes but said nothing as he pocketed the whistle. He eyed a group of Iranians crossing the street, the men leering at the two quietly observing. “Well, let’s hope nothing bad happens.”

Ryou gave a short laugh, a smirk on his face. “Where’s your sense of adventure? Everybody loves a good murder mystery.”

“That itch for adventure disappeared when a serial killer took my sister hostage,” Malik snapped back, temper flaring at Ryou’s almost blase attitude towards their whole stake out. The detective took too much joy and pleasure in such an outing.

Ryou shrugged, a bored look on his face. “Fair enough. I guess I can’t argue with that logic.”

Malik let out a loud sigh, the unpleasant crowds around them grating on his nerves. Even though Ryou let him win that argument, Ryou’s entire outlook on this case continued to chip away at Malik’s composure. “Sometimes you worry me, detective.”

He could tell by the way that Ryou frowned and gave him a puzzled look that he had no clue what Malik was referring to. Malik didn’t really want to explain, but the words came flowing off his lips before he could think of censoring himself. “Your keen interest in death and murders is a little unsettling and you seem to admire the serial killer for his… artistic approach if I dare call it that.”

Ryou furrowed his brows, glancing away. He raised a hand to twist around a lock of hair, his expression contemplative. “You know, I never thought of it that way. I suppose I do come off as a fan of this sort of thing…”

Based on the odd expression on Ryou’s face, Malik suspected there was something else. Curiosity got the better of him. “What are you thinking?”

Ryou chuckled, shaking his head. A weak smile crept on to his face. “Nothing. It’s just… Commissioner Kaiba says the same things about me. He’s fairly certain I’m going to snap one day and when that happens, he’s ready to throw me in the nut house.”

The matter of fact tone in Ryou’s voice told Malik that his observation was nothing new to the detective. In fact, Malik realized that Ryou was used to hearing these sorts of rumors about himself. Ryou wasn’t sure whether to regret making such a statement or defend his position.

Ryou turned back to Malik, a curious look on his face. “Tell me, Malik – Do you think I could kill someone?”

Malik froze at the question, but kept his eyes locked on Ryou’s. He felt like a rodent cornered by a hungry, feral cat. After a few long seconds, Malik swallowed. “I honestly don’t know. You seem nice enough, but just because you’re nice to me in person doesn’t indicate what sort of monstrosity you’re capable of.”

Ryou nodded slowly, his expression revealing nothing. He turned back to stare out into the streets. “That’s a fair assumption. These are dangerous times and working with a morbid detective with an interest in gruesome cases like myself may not be in your best interests.”

Malik let out an annoyed sigh. What Ryou was saying was true, but damnit, logic didn’t seem to apply. He felt his whole position to be jumbled as it was, and Ryou’s agreement with his initial accusation made him more confused. “It’s more complicated than that. I want to trust you. You’re my best bet to find my sister. But…”

Ryou didn’t respond, letting Malik fume over his response. Malik wasn’t entirely sure. Even though Ryou had a few screws lose, he felt that the detective was on his side still. He wasn’t sure, but if push came to shove, he believed that Ryou would do the right thing. But he couldn’t be certain. So he supposed that he had brought him back around to square one.

Ryou pushed off the wall, walking slowly. “Let’s walk for a bit. Keep your eyes peeled for anything out of the ordinary.”

Malik watched Ryou walk away for a moment, sighing before he followed along. He was the last person to know what constituted as strange in this place, but he was here for the rest of the night and they would have to keep patrolling to find what they were looking for.

The two fell into an awkward silence, looting casually around Whitechapel. Malik unsure of how to continue conversation as they continued to pace around in circles. He suspected he had offended Ryou somehow, but didn’t know what to do about it. He knew any attempts to cover his detections would have to keep patrolling to find what they were looking for.

Malik froze in his tracks, blinking as two women passed him. Anyone who stared longer than a second could easily tell that these were not two female prostitutes, but rather men in drag. The blonde wigs did little to deter viewing eyes from the stubble on their chin. Their height, broad chests and terrible make-up job did little hide the fact that these were men and not women.

Malik stopped gaping long enough, finally asking the question that echoed in his mind. “What the hell?”

Ryou passed, glancing back at Malik gaping at the two men in drag. It only took a moment before Ryou started laugh, a large grin growing on his face. His laughter grew as the detective struggled to catch his breath. Malik let out an indignant huff, embarrassed to be the source of so much amusement for his companion.

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After a moment, Ryou finally caught his breath, grin still on his face. “I’m sorry. I forgot you didn’t know about the covert operation we have going on around here.”

“I’m sorry – the what?”

Ryou smirked, walking over towards Malik. The amusement gleamed in his eyes. “The police are getting desperate. Jack the Ripper is targeting prostitutes. What better way to catch a killer than to dress as one of his targets?”

Malik blinked, realizing that Ryou was being serious and not fucking with him. “Wait, that’s their genius plan to catch a serial killer?”

Ryou nodded, looking like he wanted to laugh again. “Afraid so.”

“They don’t even look convincing!”

“I know. Everybody around here knows. Still doesn’t mean they won’t try.” Ryou shrugged, tilting his head. “If anything, they have arrested some folks already on different charges.”
"What do you mean?"

"Buggery."

"Oh." Malik blushed, glancing away. He supposed if a man was looking for particular company, they might see the officers in drag as an invitation rather than a poor attempt at catching a murderer.

Ryou chuckled at Malik's reaction, walking up to be closer to Malik. "It's not exactly a perfect case, but still, a lot of poor blokes have mistaken these particular prostitutes for exactly what you think it is."

"I don't even know what to say," Malik muttered, glancing away. "Seems like an odd way to catch criminals."

Ryou glanced around, his eyes narrowing in the dark light as he continued to scan their surroundings. "The police will do what they have to. Of course, if you don't have enough evidence, it doesn't mean anything in court. Though I wouldn't recommend spending any more time in a detention center than need be. Ba-"

Ryou stopped talking, his voice trailing off as his gaze sharpened. Malik was about to ask him what he meant when he noticed the shift in Ryou's posture. He stood up straight, glancing in the direction Ryou was staring in. Down one of the narrower side streets. He noticed someone walking away, but a door had been left ajar.

Malik felt his pace quicken, eyes darting around as Ryou quickly crossed the road. They left the well-lit road behind for the dimmer path. Malik had a terrible suspicion what they might encounter, his suspicions making his blood run cold. Why would someone leave a door open in the middle of the night?

Ryou crossed into the narrow street, Malik right on his heels as he flung the door wide open. The scent of fresh blood instantly assaulted his nostrils, Malik taking a step back. His stomach wrenched as he saw organs lined up neatly on the table next to a dissected corpse. His heart sank, his heartbeat in his ears as he froze at the horrific sight.

Malik staggered back, leaning against the wall across from the door. He tried to rip his gaze away, but he stared at the kidney next to the woman's arm, the blood dripping down the white sheets, the vacant, glassy look in her eyes. Malik flung a hand over his mouth, bile stinging his throat. His stomach wretched, Malik fighting the urge to puke in the streets, eyes and throat burning at the reflexes.

Ryou broke through the spell first. He swore, turning on his heels. "Shit! He's getting away!"

Malik snapped his head around, watching as Ryou plunged into the dark alleyway after the escaping man. He forced himself to swallow, pushing himself off the wall. Malik started to run after him only to stop a few steps away from the pitch black. He glanced behind him, where the street lights stopped as the darkness started to take over. His mind screamed to follow Ryou, follow the killer, follow the man who held his sister captive.

And yet all the all-consuming black before him crippled him. He needed to run, but his legs wouldn't move.

Malik desperately tried to think of something, anything that could break him out of his stupor and run to help Ryou. This could be their chance to finally catch him. He couldn't fail now. A thought crossed his mind, a desperate hope to force him to move. He grabbed the tin whistle Ryou gave him, blowing as a shrill noise pierced the night.

As if on cue, the two officers disguised in women's clothes came rushing towards him. One carried a lantern while the other had his baton already drawn. The two gazed around, curious to see the young man before him. Malik was lucky that his guess about the police whistle would work.

The officer stared as Malik, a confused look on his face. "Is something wrong?"

"Yes. I'm going to need to borrow this."

Before the officer could react, Malik snatched the lantern from his hands. With a light to guide his way, he couldn't stop. He pelted in the direction Ryou had run, ignoring the indignant cries behind him. Malik was furious at his own weakness and fear of the dark; he would have to deal with it later. Right now, Jack the Ripper was near and Malik had to catch him before it was too late.

Malik sprinted down alleyways, blindly searching for any sign of motion. With only a lantern to guide him, he allowed his body to move, searching desperately. The killer was here. Malik was alone, trying to find a serial killer that Ryou had chased after without a moment's hesitation. Malik ignored how the cold air made it hard to breathe, focusing on covering more ground and finding his companion.

A sharp cry caught Malik's ear and he sped up to reach the end of the alley. He looked both left and right until he saw Ryou. The detective leaned against the wall clenching at his bicep. As Malik drew close, he could see the blood spilling forth.

"You're hurt!"

Ryou shook his head, pushing off the wall. "It doesn't matter! We can't let him escape!"

Perhaps Malik would have argued at another time and place, but with the killer so close, he found himself racing alongside Ryou. He squinted his eyes, noticing the flutter of a coat eaten by the darkness not yet revealed to them. They were still hot on his trail, and he couldn't run forever.

As they turned the last corner, both men blinked in confusion when their target vanished. Malik started forward, eyes darting around. A sudden motion caught his eye. He lifted the lantern higher, noticing the man now climbing a thin, metal ladder to ascend the building.

"Stop!" Malik screamed, realizing the stupidity of trying to command their suspect. What Ryou did was even more stupid as the detective sprinted forward, leaping forward to catch the man by the waist. Malik didn't have time to recover, swearing under his breath at his companion's recklessness. He ran to catch up to the two men, standing underneath the ladder, searching for some way he could help. Ryou and the escaping man grappled at each other, the killer struggling to hold on with the additional weight.

Before either could loosen their grip, a sharp metal twang rang through the air. Malik jumped back as the ladder fell loose, dropping the rest of the way to the ground. Ryou and the escaping murderer tumbled to the ground in a hard crash. Malik didn't waste a second, racing forward to pin the killer down. His heart raced as the man struggled against him, but it was too late. Malik had
the advantage over him, a knee to the back of his neck and his arms pinned behind him.

Ryou rolled over on his side, weakly sitting up. He struggled to catch his breath, a hand returning to cover the bloody wound that still bled freely. Malik panted, keeping a tight grip as he returned his focus to Ryou. “You okay?”

Ryou nodded, his hair a tangled mess, his hair tie long lost in the earlier struggle. “I’ll live. This son of a bitch stabbed me.”

“The fuck I did! Let me go!” the man underneath Malik snarled, twisting violently to try an escape. Malik placed more pressure with his knee, hearing the man gasp slightly in a struggle for breath. He struggled to remain calm, but the fact that this man held his sister captive and brutalized women remained fresh in his mind.

“Like hell we will. You’re under arrest for the recent homicide of a young woman off Forester Lane and as the prime suspect for Jack the Ripper,” Ryou grumbled out, a harsh glint in his eyes. He struggled to stand up, glancing around as more people seemed to have noticed their struggle. Malik could hear police sirens approaching.

“And I’m telling you, you have the wrong guy!” their captive snapped, a desperate note in his voice.

“You fucking stabbed me and ran. We saw you leave her flat right after the murder—”

“That wasn’t me! I don’t even have a knife on me! Ryou—”

Malik felt the man twist sharply, attempting to catch him off guard. Malik tightened his grip, not letting go. He noticed Ryou’s eyes widening slightly, his expression growing confused. Malik could see the buggy from the street, as several officers ran to join them.

“Wait, no… but you can’t be—” Ryou cut himself off, taking the lantern that Malik had dropped to bring it closer. Malik frowned, unsure what was going on. It was only after Ryou tore the hood away from the man and Malik saw the white hair cascade onto the dirt beneath him that the pieces fell into place.

“Bakura?”
Ryou sat in a small room, a table between him and Bakura.

The night had worn on, Kaiba roused from his sleep to place Bakura under arrest. Ryou had argued that since this was still related to the Ripper case, he should be the one to interrogate Bakura. Kaiba, begrudgingly, agreed to this, allowing Ryou the first shot at the parolee criminal. Ryou didn't have a lot of time, but he had to make the most of it.

Something wasn't right.

Bakura glared at Ryou, a sharp glint to his crimson eyes. Gone was the usual confident smirk and instead he faced a rather grave looking man. The bags under his eyes was evidence of how long the night had gone on, the night sky growing lighter, dawn soon approaching.

Ryou looked down at his notes before glancing back. "Bakura-"

"Fuck you."

"Bakura, please. I'm trying to help."

"I somehow doubt that. You nearly got us both killed," Bakura snapped.

Ryou shrugged, feeling too tired to try bantering or putting up with Bakura's usual shenanigans, especially if Bakura was in a bad mood. "You were running away. I needed answers."

"I turn you back to my original response of 'fuck you.'"

Ryou sighed, leaning back in his chair. His eyes studied the conman, who had his arms crossed and glared decisively at the wall. Ryou tossed his notes on the table in front of him, deciding to take a gamble. "I don't think you did it."

Bakura's body didn't move, but his eyes shifted, catching the detective's gaze. "What makes you say that?"

"Multiple reasons. The most evidence-based one is that the knife used in the murder hasn't been found. The alleyways, the home and yourself have all been searched and no knife matching the murder weapon has been found."

Bakura shrugged, an angry snarl in his voice; "Just because it hasn't shown up doesn't mean it won't. And when it does, I'll take a guess who's the first guy they'll blame."

Ryou leaned forward, resting his folded hands on the table. "That's the other reason. Despite how much of an asshole you are, I know you well enough to know that you would never murder someone. You're a thief and crook, but you're not a killer. You don't match the profile."

Bakura didn't say anything, his eyes narrowed as he returned his gaze to the wall. Ryou leaned forward, an earnest edge to his voice. "Bakura, please. I want to help you. You taking the fall for this criminal will only close the Ripper case and that real culprit walks away free. I need your word."

Silence.

Ryou felt frustrated at the thief before him, remembering how he barked his innocence in the alleyway and yet remained stone cold now in the interrogation room. The levity of the situation wasn't lost on either man, but Bakura still wouldn't cooperate. Just his word, his oath of his innocence and Ryou would stake his case on it.

Ryou sighed, standing up. He ignored how his head spun, exhaustion and lack of sleep catching up with him. As he pushed in his chair, he caught the soft murmur; "What does it matter? I'm guilty until proven innocent. I've fallen through the cracks enough that if they can pin this on me, they will. You know that's how it works."

Ryou turned back, noticing how Bakura's harsh, impenetrable defenses seemed to lessen slightly. His face was still hard, but his eyes were soft, vulnerable even. Ryou swallowed, leaning over to take Bakura's hand in his own. The thief looked up, their eyes a mirror of each other.

"I won't let that happen. I'll talk to Kaiba and convince him otherwise. I know he wants to catch the killer as much as I do -- I won't let an innocent man fall through. Well, mostly innocent." Ryou corrected himself, fighting the grin that wanted to grow on his face.

Bakura let out a dry chuckle, pulling his hand away. Ryou blinked as Bakura leaned back, his arms crossed. "It won't work. He may want the killer away, but it's also a gamble to let me take the fall. If I'm hanged and the killings stop, then he's right. If the killings continue after my death, that's one less criminal off the street. Kaiba has nothing to lose with me taking the fall."

Ryou swallowed, trying to ignore the fact that Bakura was probably right. Kaiba was ruthless and vigilant, but not always for the sake of justice. The commissioner didn't mind taking a gamble if it posed no great risks to himself or the general populace. He would see it as doing the public a favor.

Worse than that, if Bakura was executed for being Jack the Ripper, then the real killer could get away. The real Jack the Ripper could stop his killing spree and slip away, never to be caught and live as a free man. There would be no risks on his end either.

In the end, the only person who would suffer would be Bakura.

Ryou couldn't let Bakura hang on a falsehood.

"I won't let that happen. Trust me, I reassured him, a firm edge to his voice. Bakura flicked his eyes up, his face a careful mask. Ryou held his gaze, unblinking and unrelenting. After a long moment, Bakura flicked his eyes away, his expression too relaxed and bored given the situation.

"I appreciate the gesture. Just focus on your case and I'll take care of myself," Bakura murmured softly. As if he had resigned himself to his fate and knew that Ryou couldn't change his stubborn nature on the matter. Ryou knew arguing any further would accomplish nothing. He grabbed his file, snatching it as he left the room.

Ryou sighed as he exited, noticing Malik standing in the room across from him. A smile grew on his face, Ryou stepping forward to talk to him, but not making it far. A sharp voice caught his ear, Ryou resisting the urge to roll his eyes. Malik smirked at the gesture, watching the detective bite his lip as he tried to gather himself to deal with his boss.

Ryou paused briefly, turning to face his commissioner who stood next to the door waiting for
Ryou's return. Kaiba stepped forward, his arms crossed, eyes cold and brittle.

"Did you get a confession?" Kaiba asked, direct and to the point.

The fact that his commissioner had already decided Bakura's guilt only confirmed their detainee's suspicions. Still, Ryou would try. "The opposite actually. Looking at the case, I believe he's not the real culprit. Jack the Ripper is still out there. If we mark a perimeter-"

"You caught him yourself after fleeing the scene of the crime, did you not?" Kaiba snapped.

Ryou paused, contemplating his answer. "I did give chase, but he slipped out of my vision after giving me this." He gestured to the throbbing, dull wound on his arm. "I got a little distracted. There's a window of time when I didn't have my eyes on him and he might have given me the slip then."

"He might have? You're speculating now of all times? Why was he even near the scene of the crime otherwise?" Kaiba snorted back, his decision already made.

"I'll admit it does look suspicious, but I don't believe Bakura is a killer. We have the wrong man-"

"Are you sure your feelings aren't clouding your judgment on the case?" Kaiba growled, each word carefully weighted. He took a single step towards Ryou, a scowl on his face as he studied the detective.

Ryou frowned, his eye twitching. If Kaiba was going to bring this up every goddamn time Ryou shared his thoughts on the case, then he would never accomplish anything. "My feelings are clear on the matter. I have enough sense to recognize when a man is truly guilty. I'm not willing to risk a man's life to prove myself."

Kaiba narrowed his eyes, the two glaring at each other. Ryou refused to budge on the matter. Kaiba may have public pressure to show results, but they needed to catch the killer and not a wrongful conviction. Just because it might show results doesn't mean those results were worth the cost.

Before Ryou could argue his case further, he felt fingers brush against his shoulder. Ryou jerked his head back, jolted by the gesture. He relaxed when he saw Malik watching the two men, a reserved expression on his face.

"I imagine you two still have business, but you really need to get your arm looked at."

Ryou blinked, glancing down at the wound on his arm, blood staining his coat. Though he certainly hadn't forgotten about his injury, it had grown numb after a few hours. An infection was the last thing he needed. Ryou sighed, his eyes flicking up to Kaiba one last time, but his commissioner ignored him, brusquely sweeping past to return to his office. The commissioner's eyes were focused ahead, unflinchingly looking forward, refusing to acknowledge the other two in the room.

When the commissioner slammed the door behind him, Ryou let out a heavy breath. Ryou knew they would have this argument again later.

He felt Malik take his hand, his fingers warm against his icy fingers. He suspected the blood loss drained all warmth from him. Ryou let himself be lead by Malik, his head snapping up when he heard Malik chuckle.

"I swear you're trying to get fired from your job some days."

Ryou shrugged, a bitter smile on his face. "He can be difficult to work with. And I guess I'm more stubborn than I realized."

"Don't I know it. Malik huffed, blowing his bangs out of his face. Ryou noticed the bags under his eyes, realizing that Malik was probably just as tired as himself. He suspected the doctor would prescribe them a night of full rest because lord knew they needed it.

It wasn't until a minute later Ryou realized that Malik led them further into the building and not outside to a hospital. "Malik, where-"

"You forget there's a doctor currently here. Thanks to our little discovery." Malik smirked, turning the corner. Ryou blinked when he saw Namu's office, a smile growing on his face. Of course the coroner would be here. There was a murder last night and Ryou was always impatient to get the autopsy report.

They could kill two birds with one stone.

Malik knocked on the door, a grumbling noise indicated that the coroner was inside. They let themselves in. Namu hunched at a small desk as he jotted down some notes. He didn't look up, though his scowl revealed that he knew who was here.

"Damn it, Ryou, I'm working on it. Give me a half hour to finish this."

Ryou chuckled, a wave of exhaustion hitting. "I'm actually here on a different request."

Namu rolled his eyes, lifting his head to glare at the two men. His eyes widened slightly as he noticed the dark red stain on the arm of the detective's coat. He stood up, swearing under his breath. "Shit, Ryou. I swear he's going to kill you one of these days. What is this, a knife wound?"

"No shit. You've probably lost too much blood. How the fuck did you manage that?" Namu snorted back, his decision already made.

"Yeah. It doesn't hurt too much now, but I feel like that's not a good sign either."

"Of course you did. I swear you have a death wish." Namu muttered, annoyance tinging his voice. Ryou didn't take it too personally, knowing that the doctor was more concerned about his well-being than actually irritated by his recklessness. Or at least, that was what Ryou told himself.

Malik's voice interrupted the haze that settled in Ryou's mind. "Where did you get this book?"

Ryou turned with Namu, noticing that Malik was studying what looked like an old tome resting atop a small bookshelf. Malik turned back to his needle. "Family heirloom. I don't have much from where my parents died, but what I keep is all here in this office. I imagine you might recognize those armlets."
Malik chuckled, a hand tracing the gold. "I'm surprised you don't wear them."

"They get in the way while working."

"As would the headband." Malik snorted, picking up the golden crown with an odd eye centered on it.

Namu rolled his eyes. "Don't ask me why my parents had that. Tomb keeping meant we had some weird shit in our place."

"Tomb keeping?" Ryou asked, watching the two bond over nostalgic artifacts.

Malik nodded. "Namu's family was one of several who were charged with protecting the king's graves, including my own. Though at the risk of being disrespectful, they didn't take their duties all too seriously."

Namu shrugged. "They never wanted the job. I'm glad I got to skip out on that shit. Just leave me to my dungeon of corpses." He winced at the remark. "That was somewhat tasteless."

Malik scrunched up his nose, giving Namu a sidelong look that only Ryou caught. "Yes, it was."

Ryou turned to the doctor, sensing the conversation was close to derailing and wanting to divert the impending crash. "Hey Namu, while I have you here -"

"Do you ever stop working, Ryou?" Namu smirked. Ryou flinched as the needle pierced his skin, but he kept his eyes trained on the doctor. He was no stranger to pain or blood.

"Were you able to check in on the missing organs of our victims?"

Namu sighed, his eyes not leaving the careful stitches he made. "I was, but I haven't found the time to write down an official report. The long and the short of it, all the victims were missing the same three organs – their heart, left kidney, and spleen."

Ryou frowned, reflecting on this information. He flicked his eyes over to Malik. "Well, the missing hearts fit our theory, but what does the missing kidney and spleen mean?"

Malik gave him a blank look that told him that he didn't have a clue either. Namu chuckled, a dry note in his voice.

"You're dealing with a mad serial killer. Does everything have to have a reason?"

"It does with him. Jack the Ripper has been very meticulous and careful. He doesn't leave anything to a whim," Ryou gave a short response back. His mind was racing to put these clues together, but nothing seemed to fall into place. In fact, with Bakura's sudden appearance disrupting the case, everything grew even more disjointed and confusing.

He noticed Namu rolling his eyes, not believing Ryou's assertion. "I think you give this jackass too much credit, but you're the detective. I trust you'll figure it out."

Ryou leaned his head back against the wall, closing his eyes. "I hope so too." This case drained him. The good night's rest from the previous evening felt so long ago.

He heard a chair scrape as Namu stood up, walking back to his desk. "There. You'll live. Remember to change your gauze. I got a report to file and I think you have a city planner to go harass."

Ryou blinked, looking over to a clock. It was already seven in the morning. He felt completely exhausted and tired and just wanted some sleep, but he couldn't rest. He needed to get the report from Yugi regarding those proprietors. The sooner he got answers, the sooner he could convince Kaiba of a different suspect.

"For once, I'm thankful Yugi is a morning bird. Thank you so much, Namu." Ryou stood up, moving slowly as he adjusted the sleeve to cover the bandages. There wasn't much left to adjust since Namu had done a hack job on his shirt.

The doctor just ignored him, turning back to filling in details. "Yeah, sure, get the hell out of my office."

Ryou chuckled, glancing at Malik for a moment before filing out. He was surprised by how quiet Malik had been, but he suspected that his companion was also feeling exhausted and tired. They both needed to rest after the night they had.

The two made the slow trek back towards Kaiba's office, knowing that's where Yugi would be waiting. If they were lucky, Kaiba would still be caught up on some details from last night's escapade so they could have a moment alone with Yugi. That would make things much easier.

Ryou glanced over to Malik, noticing his downcast eyes. Ryou frowned. "Are you okay?"

Malik glanced over at Ryou before returning his gaze to the ground. "Yeah, Tired, I suppose. I don't know. This case... it's taking a lot out of me."

Ryou turned to the doctor, sensing the conversation was close to derailing and wanting to divert the impending crash. "Hey Namu, while I have you here -"

"Tomb keeping?" Malik asked, startled at having been caught. Ryou knew that the night that Malik ordered him to get rest that Malik had not done so himself. He had been running the last two days on only one night's worth of sleep. Ryou knew from personal experience that one couldn't keep up with that.
Malik chuckled, lowering his hand as he shook his head. "Can't get anything past you, can I?"

"Well, I am a detective. It's sort of my job."

Malik laughed out loud at that, a grin on his face. Whether because he was genuinely amused or just deliriously tired, Ryou didn't know, but the sound was delightful nonetheless. The two continued down the hallway, their conversation light. Ryou saw Yugi standing by Kaiba's office, a bored look on his face. It looked like that had beaten the commissioner back.

Before Ryou could even greet Yugi, three officers burst into the hallway, running past all three men. Ryou blinked, noticing how they raced towards the set of interrogation rooms near the end of the wall. His heart seized in his chest, his eyes meeting Malik's momentarily before he jogged down to the end of the hallway. Before he could enter, an officer blocked his way.

Ryou was ready to snap at the officer when he recognized him. Familiar green eyes darted around, alarm evident across his face. "Officer Devlin, what the hell's going on?"

Duke recognized Ryou, glancing around as if unsure if he was allowed to speak. He glanced behind him into the hallway, officers scrambling about as more burst past him, now armed. "I'm not sure, I was told to secure the entry way."

Ryou frowned, stepping back at this. What the hell was Kaiba thinking? What dumb as hell thing did Bakura say? What the fuck was going on? Duke leaned back, his eyes flashing as he tried to get more instructions. That's when Ryou spotted the broken lock. The door to the interrogation room where Bakura resided hung ajar.

"Shit..."

Before Ryou could even prepare himself, an all too familiar voice clashed against his ear.

'Detective Ryou! My office! Now!'

Ryou didn't need to look to see how pissed off his boss was.
Malik stood quietly by the door, eyes flicking between Ryou and Kaiba.

It didn't take long for Malik to piece together what this was all about. Bakura, who knew that staying under police custody would ensure a trial not in his favor, decided to take matters into his own hands. And while Malik didn't believe Bakura was guilty, he was far from innocent on many other matters.

The fact that Ryou defended the con man to his boss did him no favors. And now that Bakura had escaped, the police had a prime suspect for the killing. Bakura had really fucked them over.

Ryou stood in front of Kaiba's desk, not breaking eye contact. Malik had to give Ryou credit where credit was due – the detective had a spine and was not a coward. He threw himself into danger without a second thought to himself and he refused to cower under the reprimanding gaze of his livid boss.

He suspected courage wasn't going to help him in this situation.

"Detective." Kaiba snapped, temper barely kept in check.

"I know what you're thinking, commissioner. And I didn't do it. I'm not a moron," Ryou replied before the accusation could leave his lips.

"Really? You insist on his innocence and when I left the interrogation room for a few minutes only to come back to the lock having been broken, what would you have me believe?"

"Bakura isn't a murderer, but he's from less savory places. He had to have broken himself out," Ryou retorted.

"And I would agree, but the lock was broken from the outside!" Kaiba couldn't keep his voice calm, slamming his fist on the desk. Ryou stepped back, a bewildered look on his face. Malik felt equally confused. How the hell did Bakura escape if he was inside the room?

Ryou narrowed his eyes, clenching his fists as he took a step forward. "We're talking about a professional con man. He's served time for theft and we know that he has broken into facilities with tighter security than our precinct. He might know how to disable a lock and then break it from the outside so as to appear as if he had an accomplice – that would absolve him of the guilt."

"You're just postulating! That doesn't make sense!" Kaiba snapped.

"But it's the truth! Just because you don't believe it doesn't change facts!" Ryou placed a hand on the desk, leaning closer to Kaiba. "What would I have to gain by helping him? I don't benefit from helping a criminal escape! I want to catch Jack the Ripper!"

Kaiba snorted, a suspicious look in his eyes. "What would you have to gain? Do I really need to remind you of the debacle two years ago? When I found out that not only is one of my officers a homosexual, but one of the suspects was keeping your bed warm at night?"

Malik froze, his eyes wide as he stared at the two. Kaiba's expression was like ice, cold in his anger and rage. Ryou's face revealed his own devastation. He had always been good at masking his disappointment, the shame of it all.

"I didn't know him well then. Had I been aware of his crimes and actions, I would have distanced myself from him. And I have – what I'm doing now is defending a man from a crime he didn't commit. Nothing more." Ryou took a breath, his eyes focused on the desk before.

Kaiba shook his head, his eyes alight. "Oh really? Then why break out a suspect? Why allow a potential witness to escape before we got his testimony? Why do you not follow any of the goddamn protocols and constantly interrupt my other officers on your wild goose chases?"

Kaiba stepped around the desk, approaching the detective. Ryou snapped his head up, taking a step back. Malik winced, his heart racing. The first sign of weakness.

"It's been five months since I've put you on the case and you have nothing to show for it. The first inkling we have had that we might have found the criminal behind all these murders and you instantly reject the possibility and ruin any chance of progress. Your constant disregard for procedures and professionalism is out of line and I've had it!"

Kaiba held out his palm, glaring down at the detective. Ryou snapped his head up, taking a step back. Malik winced, his heart racing. The first sign of weakness.

"Hand it over now! Any further insubordination and I'll have you detained for your behavior!"

Ryou froze, his eyes widened. "What?"

"You heard me! I'm taking you off the case. I'm done with your disobedience and disrespect!"

Ryou shook his head, a desperate note leaking into his voice; "Sir, please reconsider."

"Hand it over now! Any further insubordination and I'll have you detained for your behavior!"

Malik froze, his eyes wide as he stared at the two. Kaiba's expression was like ice, cold in his anger and rage. Ryou's face revealed his own devastation. He had always been good at masking his thoughts when he analyzed the evidence. Take that all away, and Malik could see the hurt, the disappointment, the shame of it all.

Malik felt like he was turned into stone in that moment, a statue observing all but unable to interact. It wasn't happening to him, but it was still affecting him by sheer proximity. Malik couldn't breathe, eyes wide as he watched the white-haired detective, who let his head drop down. It wasn't until his pale hand slipped into his coat pocket that Malik finally was moved to action.

"Fuck no." Malik shook his head slowly, his voice a low murmur. He stormed forward, body reacting faster than his mind. He snapped his hand around Ryou's wrist, holding it in place. Malik ignored Ryou's wide-eyed stare, placing himself in front of the detective to face off against Kaiba.

"Fuck that. You'll do no such thing!"

Kaiba blinked, surprised at being spoken to that way. The momentary shock didn't last, his expression darkening as he considered the young man before him. "What?"

"You're not firing Ryou. You have nobody else willing to work the case. How the hell was he supposed to solve the case when he's had no help or assistance from anybody?" Malik growled, his lavender eyes aflame. He felt like he had nothing to lose. He didn't work for Kaiba and Ryou's job was already on the line. Worst case scenario, Ryou still didn't have his job.

But Malik was a stubborn jackass – he would make sure he got his way.
Before Kaiba could make any sort of response, Malik kept speaking, adrenaline making him reckless; "There's no way Ryou could have helped Bakura escape because I was with him the entire time. He was getting his arm treated by Namu – which you can go ask about right now if you spent more than thirty seconds trying to figure out how Bakura got away."

Kaiba narrowed his eyes but didn't speak. Perhaps it was because he was reluctant to admit that because Ryosuke had an alibi, he had no reason to suspect the detective. Perhaps it was because Kaiba was still pissed as hell and needed to take it out on Ryosuke. Malik didn't know, but the fact that Kaiba hadn't ordered for him to be detained seemed like a good sign. It wasn't like Kaiba would ever admit to being wrong.

Malik straightened himself up, forcing himself to take a slow breath. "My sister's life is at risk. Eight women are dead. People are going to keep dying unless you let Ryosuke do his job and find the killer. Unless you plan on hunting down Jack the Ripper yourself, let Ryosuke do what he does best and find you your killer. He's never let you down before and he won't now."

Kaiba blinked, considering Malik's words. He still seemed angry, but it seemed more resigned. Malik didn't know what else to say or do, but since the commissioner wasn't making any moves or orders, Malik decided to take the initiative. Still holding on to Ryosuke's wrist, he pulled the detective closer as he made towards the door.

"If you need us, we'll be in his office," Malik dismissed them both, starting to hate the awkward silence. He felt the cold, blue eyes watching him leave but didn't focus on that. His attention remained on the cold hand in his, Ryosuke following him in mute, stunned silence.

In all fairness, Malik hadn't done anything so reckless in front of Ryosuke thus far, so he couldn't blame him for his shock. Well, aside from slapping him for his rude remarks the other day. But that was a different matter altogether.

After they left the office, Malik noticed Yugi walking down the hallway towards Kaiba's office. Yugi raised his brows in concern, flicking back and forth between the two men. "… Is it safe to go in?"

Malik shrugged, speaking for both of them while Ryosuke tried to gather himself. "You can take your chances. It's not you he's angry at."

Yugi snorted, glancing away. "That hasn't stopped him before. I left the list in your office, Ryosuke. All the owners and proprietors of those addresses you needed. Just… don't tell anyone I gave those to you."

Malik glanced back, noticing Ryosuke blink as he turned his attention to the shorter man. He shook his head briefly, his expression clearing as he spoke; "I appreciate it. I'll go take a look at it now."

Yugi nodded as he returned his gaze to the closed door ahead of him. "I suppose asking Seto for a favor is out of the question?"

Malik snorted. "I wouldn't risk it. What did you need?"

Yugi sighed. "My original blueprints. They're still missing. I could have sworn I left them here at Kaiba's office the first time, but I don't remember. I suppose it doesn't matter. Surviving this meeting with him will be a bigger challenge."

"That it will. Fare thee well," Malik offered dryly, glancing at the door behind them.

Yugi inhaled deeply, signing the cross in front of him before tentatively walking forward. Malik chuckled, knowing that Yugi would need all the luck he could get trying to deal with the anal commissioner.

Malik noticed Ryosuke staring at him, his lavender eyes briefly meeting dark, cocoa eyes before flitting away. He pulled at Ryosuke's hand, dragging him through the precinct until they ended up at Ryosuke's office. Malik had never been inside, but he suspected that the detective's flat gave him an inkling of what to expect for his work space.

Ryosuke snagged the file sitting in his box outside the door, unlocking the door to lead Malik into a room that somehow managed to be even more cluttered and messy than his home. He knew that Ryosuke probably had some organizational method that Malik didn't know about, but the lack of tidiness was unfathomable. Maybe because he grew up with Isis and Rishid, who were very meticulous about labeling and organization, such unruly living space shocked him.

Malik sighed, wandering over to a chair that looked relatively empty compared to the other furniture. Ryosuke quietly walked around the room, moving files and folders to stack at one corner of his desk. The room was relatively small, only a third the size of Kaiba's office. The desk comprised most of the room, Malik's knees knocking into it when he sat down. He rubbed at his neck, trying to ignore the ache down his spine. It had been a long night.

"… Thank you."

Malik blinked, unsure if he had heard the soft words initially. He glanced up, Ryosuke still cleaning up so that he at least had somewhere he could write and make notes. Malik figured he imagined the words until he noticed Ryosuke's lips moving, the quietest and most reserved he had ever seen him.

"Back in Kaiba's office. Thank you… for standing up for me. I didn't think… He's rather stubborn and when he asked me for my badge… I didn't know what to do or how to fight for my job back. You didn't have to."

Malik sighed, standing as he stretched. He walked around so he could lean against the desk. Ryosuke didn't say anything, eyes flicking over to Malik's direction as he continued to clean. Malik chuckled, looking up to stare out the window. "You're helping me find my sister. You literally chased after a murderer blindly with no thought of self-preservation. You're an idiot and the most selfless person I've ever met."

Malik snorted, a small smirk growing on his face. "Though some people would say those two are the same thing."

Ryosuke chuckled softly at that, a dry smile on his face. Seeing Ryosuke relax a bit made Malik feel better, happy to see the detective a little more cheerful. "I suppose it's a bit of a character flaw. I just sort of act before I think. There was no question about what I needed to do, I just had to- I couldn't let down a friend…"

Malik blinked, head snapping around to look at Ryosuke. He noticed the stare as he lifted his head, his brown eyes curiously watching his companion. Malik realized that he was merely watching him, shaking his head as he snapped his head away. "Sorry, I just… I'm glad you think of me as a friend. It took me off guard."
Ryou's face flooded, a light pink dusting across his cheeks as he realized what he said. "Oh shit, sorry! I didn't mean to imply – we've been spending so much time together and I just thought-"

Malik shook his head, a grin growing wide on his face. He started laughing, a sense of relief and lightness hitting him after such a long night. He got the feeling that Ryou was feeling on edge after all they had been through. They were both exhausted and more emotional right now. Still, it was nice to hear that… "It's alright! I consider you a friend as well. I just never said it before."

Ryou chuckled nervously, the rose color never quite leaving his face. "I'm happy to hear that. I mean, I know… well, back in the office, when Kaiba said… It doesn't change who I am, you know. But if you're not okay with that, I'm not surprised, I just figured…"

Malik stared blankly, not really following what Ryou implied. Ryou fiddled with his hair nervously, waiting for Malik to make some sort of remark before realizing that he was going to have to be more specific. He glanced away, the blush darkening to the color of apples. "Well, I mean the whole thing about me being gay…"

The light finally went off, Malik snorting as he shrugged. "I don't care. I think there are worse crimes out in the world."

Ryou didn't respond immediately, watching with a curious gaze. "That's… very forward thinking of you. I wasn't expecting that."

"Well, I got to keep surprising you somehow."

"Apparently." Ryou laughed, looking more relaxed. He stared down at the empty space on his desk, as if debating whether to actually work. He set down the file, but he kept talking to Malik; "Kaiba has always kept a watchful eye on me."

"Because of the buggery conviction?" Malik asked, unsure of how open Ryou was about discussing these things.

Ryou snorted, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. "No… well, yeah, that wasn't a scandal he wanted to grace the police department… I… Well, he suspects that I'll go crazy and commit a crime some day."

Malik frowned, looking forward. "You mentioned that last night."

Ryou nodded, raising a hand to brush away his hair. He managed to resist the urge to fiddle with the loose strands that had fallen apart. "Yeah. I didn't tell you this sooner, but… I was not always well. When I was a child, my parents and younger sister all died very suddenly."

Malik raised his head, startled by this information. "Oh god, I'm so sorry-"

Ryou shook his head, a reflective smile on his face. "I was a bright kid, too smart for my own good. But my odd behaviors unnerved the other kids and the nuns at the orphanage. I collected animal bones and shared them with everybody I had. It wasn't a surprise that I wasn't a popular kid. Still, being teased for my feminine appearance has been a staple since childhood. That one I claim no responsibility for."

Ryou sighed, finally raising his eyes to meet Malik. "But… things changed drastically when I was fourteen. I was woken up abruptly one night to find out one of the other boys had died in his sleep. One of my roommates who I shared a bunk with. No one knew how or why, but everybody suspected who."

Malik frowned, eyes locked with Ryou's. "… You didn't do it, though."

Ryou's expression didn't change for a moment. He broke eye contact, glancing away to hide his face. After a moment, Malik caught the subtle shift. The tremble in Ryou's fingers. The stiffening of his shoulders as he fought against the physiological response but to no avail. Ryou turned back, tears in his eyes but a smile on his face.

"You're the first person to ever believe me."

Malik's heart clenched at those words. He acted more on instinct than anything else. He knew perhaps he should be suspicious and guarded, but he knew without a doubt that Ryou was good and kind and wouldn't hurt anybody. He couldn't imagine everyone treating him with suspicion and wariness, as if he were a bad omen.

Malik pulled Ryou into a hug, arms tight around the thin, pale man. He could tell that Ryou had not anticipated this, freezing up in his arms. It only took a moment before he felt Ryou wrap his arms around him. Malik didn't hug people often. He glanced away, the blush darkening to the color of apples. "Well, he suspects that I'll go crazy and commit a crime some day."

Despite Malik's own hesitation about putting pressure on his back, the arms surrounding him felt warm and that warmth seeped into his tense muscles. Ryou always seemed a bit cold-blooded, his hands and fingers were always like ice when Malik went to touch. Yet he found his core to be warm, the shared body heat deliriously wonderful.

Ryou snatched, leaning back away from the hug. He raised his palm to rub against the trails of salt tears in his eyes but a smile on his face. "It wasn't for another three years that I got out of the asylum. A later autopsy showed that he had a heart condition that hadn't been detected. People still thought I did it and all I could do was just hold my head up and keep at it."

Malik resisted the urge to pull Ryou closer, surprised at himself for desiring that previous warmth and closeness he had felt. He settled for staying near Ryou, feeling himself drawn to the detective though not entirely sure why. "How did you become a cop?"

Ryou chuckled, a smirk growing on his face. "I worked as a cemetery caretaker after I got. A weird case of someone robbing graves got Kaiba in my direction. Initially I was a suspect, but I picked up the specific patterns and details that the other officers never noticed. I ended up catching the culprit and providing the evidence to convict."

"I'm good at what I do. Kaiba may not always trust me, but he knows I'm good at my job."

"That you are. Sometimes, your boss needs to be reminded though."
"That's why I have you around," Ryou teased, nudging him lightly. Malik smiled, staring down at the desk before him. He wasn't blushing, but he felt like his face was warm nonetheless.

"I do what I can. I'm not sure how much help I am in the field, but I know how to deal with Kaiba." Malik raised his hand, brushing his bangs back. He remembered how he struggled to follow Ryou last night when everything counted on it. He hadn't been ready. Yet for some reason, when Kaiba was ready to fire Ryou, Malik could act. He wasn't sure how or why those differed, but perhaps it was best that each of them handled different pressures better than the other.

"For what it's worth, you've helped me figure out more in the past few days than the last several weeks of research have come up with," Ryou reassured him, grabbing his file off the desk. It looked as if he had given up on researching for the moment.

Malik sighed, glancing away. "Perhaps. Still would have been nice to catch him."

Ryou's expression sank for a moment, disappointment slipping through. "Yeah… It's like you said -- we just have to do better next time. And I'll make sure to bring a lantern."

Malik blushed, not sure if he heard right. He glanced over at Ryou, finished gathering the last few files to take home. Malik continued to watch Ryou, slowly following him to the door. "I'm sorry?"

Ryou glanced back, hand resting on the door handle. "Yeah. You don't like the dark much, do you?"

Malik felt his breath catch, a rush of embarrassment hitting him. He hadn't told Ryou and he hadn't meant to let him know. If Ryou had picked up on him pulling an all-nighter the night before, he should have figured Ryou would piece the other mystery together rather quickly. "I… I'm not fond of it, no. I can deal with it though. I don't want you to worry about it-"

Ryou shook his head. "Nonsense. It's not a problem at all. I didn't think that we would pursue the killer last night so the thought that we would need to bring our own light source didn't really cross my mind. It only makes practical sense that we should have one next time though."

Though Malik still felt slightly awkward over such a stupid fear, he felt less uncomfortable than before. Leave it to Ryou to adjust their proceedings to be considerate of Malik's fear in the name of their case. Even though Malik suspected Ryou did it more as a favor to his friend, the fact that he had a logical reasoning behind bringing a light next time made Malik feel less guilty somehow. As if bringing a light would somehow aid their case and not just be a hassle to their work.

"Well, I'm glad that my phobia has made us reevaluate our equipment for our next stakeout. Heading back now?" Malik asked, eyes slipping down to the file in Ryou's hands.

"Well, I want to read over Yugi's report and look into the individuals listed. Perhaps there's a pattern or correlation we're missing-"

Malik chuckled, snatching the file from Ryou's hands. The detective snapped his head up, startled by the theft. He frowned, reaching to grab the file back, but Malik held it just out of reach. "You need to get some sleep. You've had a long night, you lost a lot of blood, and you won't get any work of value done with you this tired."

Ryou gave a dry laugh, a smirk on his face. "You clearly haven't seen me investigate before. I do my best work when I'm sleep deprived. And you need to get more sleep than I do -- you stayed up the last two nights and you're more tired than I am!"

Malik grimaced, knowing that what Ryou said was true. But Malik usually got more sleep than Ryou probably did on a daily basis. A few nights weren't going to hurt him. He lowered his hand slightly, allowing Ryou to grab the file, but still gripping it so Ryou couldn't snatch it away.

"How about a compromise? I'm coming over with you. You get one hour of research before we have to take a nap -- deal?"

Ryou tugged at the file, but Malik had a vice grip on it. He let out an exasperated sigh. "You're not giving me an option, are you?"

"You did mention that my stubbornness was one of my best redeeming qualities."

"You said that, not me. I'm always amazed by your obstinance over every petty thing you can think of." Ryou rolled his eyes, but was already conceding to Malik's demands.

Malik grinned, letting go of the file as he waived down a cab. "You flatter me."

Ryou stared at Malik, his face slipping back into the careful mask. Malik continued to smile, wanting to see if he could keep goading Ryou on. Ryou inhaled slowly, raising an eyebrow. "You do like to be praised to the point of ridicule."

"Well, there is so much to compliment about me." Malik mockingly gestured, a flair of confidence.

Ryou smiled, leaning in close for a moment. Malik blinked, suddenly taken back by the invasion of personal space. Ryou's face was only inches from his own, still pleasant and calm as always. "I wonder how you would handle sincerity."

Malik blinked, not sure what Ryou meant by that. He found it hard to think with Ryou so close and his sleep deprivation probably not helping. Before Malik could think of a response, Ryou turned, climbing into the cab. Malik shook his head, annoyed at himself for letting Ryou get the last word but not feeling any grudge. Ryou was hard to read at times.

Malik laughed to himself, climbing into the cab to head back to the flat.
Chapter 12

Light crept into the bedroom. Ryou scrunched up his face, hating the setting sun. Even in his sleep stupor, he was aware that the window to his bedroom faced westward. And the fact that it was waking him up now gave him a sense of how much time had passed. This case was throwing his biorhythm off and turning him nocturnal.

He could hear someone shift next to him, probably also irritated at the sun that had slipped through the curtains. The thought had Ryou's eyes fluttering open. When he had gotten home earlier that morning, he had changed into a clean shirt, only for it to be wrinkled with his daylong nap. That didn't seem like a concern as he looked over at the body next to him.

That was the other thing on Ryou's mind.

Malik had followed him home, making sure he made good on his promise. Ryou obliged, even though it was clear that Malik was just as tired, if not more so than Ryou was. So when Malik took away his research to make sure he went to his bedroom, he ended up trailing him. He had fallen next to Ryou, promising it would only be for a few moments before he got up a left.

Ryou rolled over onto his side, watching Malik. He didn't really know what to make of this. Ryou was aware that he found Malik attractive, no doubt, but that hardly meant he would act on it. He had grown used to the law where (in the most mortifying way) and it nearly cost him his job as well as his life. Ryou was reluctant to open himself to anybody.

Ryou hadn't meant for Malik to learn about his attraction to men. After Kaiba blurted out that information, the damage was already done. Yet the fact that Malik didn't seem disgusted or angry at his behavior was a relatively good sign. The fact that he was so laissez-faire about the whole thing was not only astonishing, but also unnerving.

Could it be that this revelation didn't horrify Malik because he wasn't bothered by that sort of attraction? Or even that Malik shared the same sort of feelings?

Ryou shook his head, his face burning at the thought. He was projecting his own feelings onto Malik, hoping that they would be reciprocated. That was wrong for him to do, as that would place unfair expectations on his friend. Just because Malik treated him kindly and considered him a friend did not mean his affections ran any deeper than that.

And in all fairness, he doubted Malik was interested in men. If he were, he had not expressed that in any manner or form. Though Ryou did have to wonder by the way he treated him and guarded himself…

Ryou snorted, a smile playing across his face. Malik was a good friend and he wouldn't dare betray that trust. He had his duty to find his sister and Ryou intended to make good on his word. He didn't want to think about the case, the warmth and comfort of his bed too alluring and the sight before him too lovely to ignore.

With a begrudging sigh, Ryou sat up, running his fingers through his hair. A quick glance into the mirror sitting on his bureau was enough to tempt Ryou to run and grab his brush. His hair stuck out in a crazed mess and it would be a nightmare getting it into a ponytail later. Still, sleep clung to him, Ryou gazing down as Malik slowly started to wake. His lavender eyes fluttered open.

"… I feel like shit," the soft words came tumbling from Malik's lips.

Ryou chuckled, admiring how the sunlight shimmered and brought out the different hues of gold in his hair. It made the jewelry he wore on his wrists seem dull in comparison. "Yeah. We slept all day, but I don't feel like I got any rest. I could sleep the night away."

"Can we?" Malik asked, shoving his face back into the blanket.

Ryou only hoped that he was imagining his face growing warm. He hated being so pale and his embarrassment always being made public to the world. He didn't want his mind going down the trail of having Malik over in his bed all night. "We really should do some work at least. I would hate to waste the whole day."

Malik let out a frustrated moan, still not moving from his spot. Ryou felt the smile widen on his face, amused that Malik was reluctant to get up. Ryou's hand twitched, eventually caving into the desire to pat Malik's shoulder. Surely that wouldn't be too familiar? It wasn't any more unusual than their contact earlier today.

Ryou hated that he was starting to overanalyze their friendship. He decided to not let his overanxious tendencies towards people he was close to get in the way. He rubbed Malik's shoulder, his heart skipping a beat when Malik sighed and relaxed into his touch.

Ryou felt a knot in Malik's shoulder blade, applying only light pressure as he tried to massage it out. It only took a few moments for Ryou to realize that it wasn't a knot he felt. He frowned, turning his head slightly. Malik was still wearing his button-down shirt, his vest thrown aside when he laid down to rest earlier. Though it covered his back, the collar had fallen low, revealing the nape of his neck.

Ryou returned his gaze towards Malik's face, his profile relaxed and his eyes closed. Daring to get a closer look, Ryou continued to get rub Malik's shoulder. He tilted his head to the side, catching a glimpse of the skin hiding beneath his shirt. He froze as he saw the varied texture carving ravines in what should have been a smooth expanse of copper skin.

Ryou licked his lips, his question hesitant on his lips. "Malik…"

"My father."

Ryou flicked his eyes down, noticing that Malik still hadn't moved. His eyes remained closed under Ryou's touch. "I'm sorry?"

"It was my father. He was often angry and short-tempered. I did what I could to stay out of his way, but…" Ryou felt the shoulder under his hand shift, a small attempt at a shrug. "I was a kid. I wasn't always good at doing that."

"Oh…" Ryou felt stupid for not having any more to say. He couldn't detach himself like he often did on the case or while investigating. There was no distance between him and Malik, nothing grand separating them. Only the thin layer of cotton separated the two physically and the expanse of silence weighed on them.

"… You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to," Ryou offered, already feeling bad for having brought it up.
He felt Malik shift, slowly sitting up. Ryou's hand fell away, falling into his lap as he watched Malik brush the hair out away from his face.

"It's alright. I don't mind talking to you about it."

Ryou felt something clog in his throat but he didn't speak, unable to tear away from the soft, lilac eyes. Malik didn't seem bitter or tragic or mourning – a detached air hung about him, separating him from his pain. Perhaps that was the only way to deal with such trauma.

That was how Ryou had dealt with his own pain for years. Suffering couldn't touch him if his defenses were strong enough. Only after speaking to Malik had the cracks in those walls finally appeared.

Malik stretched, his bones cracking as he sat up. He looked over at Ryou. "Remember my elder brother? How he had odd birthmark on his cheek?"

Ryou nodded, thinking back on their meeting the other day. He had noticed an odd, gaping trail from his cheekbone down to his chin, but decided not to remark on it out of respect. He had a sense that what he had thought was a birthmark was not so.

Malik raised a hand to his cheek, as if tracing the mark on his brother's face. "That was from my dad. After Rishid tried to step in and protect me from... well, you felt my back."

"I'm sorry," Ryou whispered, words rushing into his mind before he could properly filter them. "I should have asked to touch your back before doing so – I had no right to–"

Malik took Ryou's hand, effectively cutting off his rant. Malik held his hand in both of his, Ryou's hands ice-cold compared to the warm palm that encased them. A small smile played across his face.

"It's okay. I don't mind."

Ryou raised an eyebrow, suspicious still. He wouldn't put it past Malik to be hiding his feelings to spare Ryou's. "If you're not okay with it, just say so–"

Malik shook his head. "But I am. It's strange. I usually don't like people touching my back, but I'm fine when I know it's you... I don't know. Your touch is warm."

Ryou snorted, thinking about how his hand seemed to drink in the heat from Malik's hands.

"Hardly. My hands are always freezing."

Malik chuckled. "Perhaps. But you're always warm." He raised the pale hand up to his cheek.

Ryou's breath froze in his chest, his fingertips resting on the soft skin. The air caught in his throat, his eyes flaring at the sudden intimate touch. He wanted to drink in the moment, terrified that he would linger too long. He wanted so much more and all he could think was how he could be struck dead right now and Ryou would have already discovered true bliss.

Malik pulled back, realizing what he did, and let go of Ryou's hand. Despite every instinct telling Ryou to brush his fingers along Malik's cheekbone to see if he could get a blush to stain past his caramel-colored skin, Ryou let his hand drop into his lap. If he had been braver and more daring, perhaps Ryou would have pushed his luck, but he couldn't do that. He was too reserved and careful to dream of such behavior.

Malik coughed, glancing around the room. "So... Yugi's report? Do you want to get back to it?"

It was Ryou's turn to flop back on the bed, his amorous affections thoroughly dashed by the recollection of his work. He groaned as he stared at the ceiling. "Not particularly. It's turning into another dead end."

"No named suspects turning up again?"

"Worse." Ryou raised a hand to brush back his bangs. "All of the homes connected to Jack the Ripper were rented out a week prior to the killing. And each property was taken out in the name of someone recently deceased and with two months' rent already paid."

He heard Malik swear under his breath, realizing the issue. "So we still have nothing. We can't even interview the owners of the property."

Ryou nodded, closing his eyes as he sighed. "All business transactions were done through the mail. They never even saw who was renting out these flats because they were so desperate to get money off their property. And the names of all the dead individuals are names that could be found in a local obituary."

"... He really thought all of this through."

"Yeah." Ryou felt less enthralled by the killer and more fed up by this new revelation. He suspected his lack of sleep took away any sense of admiration he normally held. "It's really pissing me off."

Malik leaned back until his back pressed against the wall. The two fell into silence as Ryou contemplated what to do now. Nothing seemed to fall into place. What he had hoped would give them a clue in the right direction was still a dead end. And although Namu had confirmed the hearts of all the victims were missing, it did little to actually incriminate any potential suspects. For that matter, Ryou didn't have any suspects outside of Bakura.

But he knew Bakura didn't do it. So he was back to square one, with all the information and no answers.

He didn't know how to fix everything and he didn't know what to do. Everything had flown by so fast that Ryou was so sure that they were making progress, but it felt like nothing of real value was accomplished. At the end of the day, he had nothing to indicate progress on the case, nothing that would help them catch a killer.

Malik sighed, pulling Ryou away from his spiraling thoughts. "So we have nobody to interview at all? No one who might have seen something, anything relating to the case?"

Ryou was about to scoff and dismiss the question when his answer got caught on his tongue. He paused for a moment, his eyes fluttering at the sudden intimate touch. He turned his head towards Malik, hope not yet lost as an idea cross his mind. "I know one person who we haven't interviewed..."
Malik ended up going home for the night. Even though Ryou had anticipated this, it made sleep
difficult despite how exhausted he still felt. He had grown so accustomed to Malik's presence in
his life that his absence made him feel hollow.

The next morning, Ryou found Malik sitting in his living room, shadows under his eyes gone and
a small smirk gracing his face. Ryou blinked, glancing over at his door. "I thought I locked it last
night."

"You did. I let myself in."

"I should be annoyed but honestly, I'm more interested in knowing how you learned to pick
locks."

Malik glanced away, a slight tinge of pink slipping through his dark complexion. "... When my
dad got angry, he'd lock me in the closet. It was always so dark in there and I hated it..."

Ryou felt stupid for asking again. He seemed to hit every land mine in their conversation recently.
"Shit, sorry."

Malik shrugged, standing up to stretch. "Stop apologizing. I'm fine now. It took me quite a few
years to get to where am I now... I eventually realized if I broke the lock, I could escape the dark.
So I taught myself."

Ryou nodded. "Makes sense. Bakura learned in a similar way to escape his fear."

"He's afraid of the dark?"

Ryou bit his lip, reluctant to reveal past secrets. "No... fire." His mind flitted to the image of
Bakura as a child, desperate to escape the fire that took his family and countless others living in
the neighborhood.

Malik frowned, his gaze meeting Ryou's for a moment before glancing away. Ryou shook his
head, not wanting to linger on such sad thoughts so early. "We should get going - you can teach
me the art of lockpicking in exchange for breakfast."

Malik laughed at that, his usual smile slipping back onto his face. "Deal."

After Ryou picked up a mug of coffee for each of them and some biscuits to share, they were on
their way. Malik informed Ryou of the mechanisms of breaking open a lock as they walked
briskly in the cold, misty air dusting the London streets. It seemed the sun would not be able to
break through today despite its best efforts. That's what they got for living in this cloudy, damp
city.

It didn't take them long to find the residence in question. A couple of larks hung close to the
windowwall, where a few seeds remained scattered. Ryou eyed them for a moment before stepping
up to the black door framed by white stones. He waited after a few knocks, the door cracking
open to reveal a young man with blond hair and hazel eyes.

"Ryou?"

The detective offered a polite smile. "Hello Joey. I hope this isn't a bad time."

Joey shook his head, his eyes flicking over to Malik curiously. He stared blankly at him before
finally catching himself. He shook his head, blond hair scattering across his eyes before stepping
back. "No, not at all. I just wasn't expecting visitors this early. Come in?"

Ryou slipped into the dimly lit home, lamps far and few down the hallway. He flicked his eyes
towards the man who met his gaze but said nothing as he focused towards the light coming from the
kitchen. Joey rushed down the hallway, seemingly flustered by his sudden company.

"You'll have to forgive me. I'm not much of a homemaker." Joey laughed nervously as he cleared
off two chairs for his guests. He slid the toolboxes onto the desk, papers bunching up as he tried to
clear a space. "I don't believe I got a name?"

Malik spoke before Ryou could even think of making introductions. "I'm Malik Ishtar. I'm
working on the Jack the Ripper case with Detective Ryou. A pleasure to meet you."

Joey paused long enough to shake Malik's hand, a relaxed smile on his face. "Likewise. Can I get
you anything to drink?"

Ryou shook his head. "We just had some coffee before getting here. Thank you though."

An awkward silence fell between the three men, Joey sitting down as he looked back and forth
between his two guests. He fiddled with a broken pocket watch that sat on the table, removing
some of the gears as he continued to gut the instrument. Ryou vaguely remembered that Joey
worked for a watchmaker – he suspected that recent events had made it difficult for him to leave
home and so he opted to repair clocks from his residence.

The occasional ticks of pieces falling out kept like a steady timer, Joey reluctant to address why
they were here. He shook his head, blond hair scattering across his eyes before stepping
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Ryou didn't say anything, glancing down at the table. He knew that Joey was against the idea –
the last time he tried to speak to her about the case, she fell apart into tears. It had been too soon
after the attack to try talking about the trauma she experienced. But although Ryou didn't wish to
upset her, he also needed information.

Joey set the clock down, a frown on his face. "Does it have to be now?"

Ryou swallowed, keeping a straight face. "I wouldn't have come if it weren't necessary. If she has
a moment now, I have a few questions."

Joey considered his words, a mixed sense of frustration evident on his face. He finally caved,
standing up as he left the pocket watch on the table. Ryou and Malik stood up as well, exchanging
a quick glance. Joey led them around towards the living room. Ryou blinked, remembering that
Serenity's bedroom was upstairs. "Is she already awake?"

"She's afraid of the dark."

Ryou nodded. "Makes sense. Bakura learned in a similar way to escape his fear."

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"She's afraid of the dark."

Ryou nodded as he considered this, standing back as Joey knocked on the door. A soft voice
heralded them in as the three men entered. He could see Serenity from a profile, sitting next to the
open window with seeds in her hands. She hummed to herself as the birds chirped and hopped
nearby, trying to snatch some feed.

It wasn't until she turned to face towards the door that her scars became evident. Everything about
her was soft and elegant, except for the jagged lines decorating her eyes. Her lids remained shut, but the swollen lines remained, leaving her unable to open her eyes. Although Ryou had known this was her likely fate when he had first met her at the hospital, it still shocked him to see her with the bandages gone.

Serenity leaned back in her chair, her head tilted. “Joey, is that you?”

Joey walked over, kneeling down next to his sister. “Yeah, how are you today?”

Serenity smiled, reaching a hand forward. Joey took it without saying a word. “I’m doing alright. Did someone drop by this morning? I heard a knock at the front door.”

Joey grunted, his eyes flicking over to Ryou. He took this as his cue to approach slowly. Joey spoke for him; “Yes. You have a visitor today. It’s Detective Ryou and another gentleman helping him on the case – you remember Ryou, right?”

Serenity lifted her head in recognition, a thoughtful look on her face. “I do. Detective, you’re working on my attacker’s criminal case, right?”

Ryou nodded, realizing afterwards that he would need to verbalize all of his responses for her benefit. “Yes. I’m happy to see you Serenity – it’s been awhile.”

“A couple months now. How are things at the police station?”

Ryou huffed, blowing a tuft of hair out of his face. “Hectic at times.” Technically not a lie.

“I see. How… how is Commissioner Kaiba?” Serenity’s voice trailed off, her words hesitant, ears burning.

Ryou raised an eyebrow, but withheld his own thoughts, trying to be as truthful as possible. “He’s well. The case has consumed his life as of recently so I’ve been seeing a lot of him.” Ryou didn’t mention how Kaiba nearly fired him in his rage, grimacing at the memory.

Serenity nodded, her cheeks rosy. “Good… good.” Her voice trailed off, head turned away from the detective. The pieces started to click in Ryou’s mind, but he didn’t voice these thoughts, letting the young woman keep her secrets.

A heavy pause hung over them before Serenity finally asked her next question, trepidation in her voice. “Is the case going well?”

Ryou knew that giving her a run-down of the case would only serve to stress her. Encouragement was enough indication to let them know how reluctant she was to speak. Joey spoke up, a thumb rubbing her knuckles. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

Serenity shook her head, her brows furrowing in a silent frown. “No. It’s okay. I want to help… or at least try to.”

Ryou took a deep breath, pulling a chair forward. He felt Joey’s gaze on him, stern and guarded. Ryou had thought about this carefully. He wasn’t going to try agitating her. He had specific details he needed and he planned on avoiding any triggers.

“Do you remember which street you were on when it… happened?”

Serenity didn’t respond immediately, her hand shifting in Joey’s. “… I was walking down Cable Street. I had gone to visit Mai for the day and got lost on the way home.”

“Do you remember seeing any other people walking around at that time of night?”

Serenity shook her head. “Only a few women pacing around. You know… um, sex workers.”

“Were you wearing a shawl or any sort of head covering?”

He heard Joey let out an annoyed sigh. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Before Ryou could try to explain his logic, Malik finally snapped from his spot against the wall; “Just let him do his job.”

Serenity’s head jerked up at the new voice, her hand tightening for a moment before remembering that she had two guests. She bit her lip, brows furrowed. “I… think I was. It was pretty cold out, so I wrapped up in a red scarf Mai had given me to keep warm.”

Ryou raised an eyebrow at this. Though perhaps a fleeting detail, it raised a question of why the killer had picked Serenity out. He would have to fully flesh this idea out with Malik, but a narrative was starting to form.

Still, Ryou had one last question that was at least worth a try.

“One more question – do you remember anything about your attacker?”

Ryou could feel Joey glaring at him but kept his eyes on Serenity. She didn’t move at the question, her face a mask free from emotion. He knew what he asked was cruel, but if he could capture the man who blinded her, it would be worth it. She pulled her hand away from Joey, surprising all in the room. She held her hand out, tentatively searching.

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Ryou realized what she asked for, reaching out his own hand. Her hand was smaller, softer than his own, though much warmer. She must have had the same thought when she giggled. “Your hands were freezing the last time I saw you too.”

“Your’re not the first to remark on that,” Ryou offered wryly, his eyes flicking back to Malik, who gave him a cheeky grin.

Serenity nodded, focusing on the hands before her. “I don’t remember his face. I don’t think I will. I remember how his voice terrified me to my core though. I can’t ever forget the fear his words instilled in me… though I imagine that doesn’t help you on your case.”

She leaned forward, a small pout on her face. “I… I think I remember a crest. It was a pin on his jacket. It was a circular golden pin with an eye at the center. It looked old, so maybe it was a relic or something? I’m not really sure.” Serenity let out a sigh, a bitter smile on her face. “I doubt that’s helpful.”

Ryou shook his head before again realizing his mistake. “No, no, that’s all good. It’s something I
can work with.

"Definitely."

Ryou jerked his head back when he heard Malik confirm this, a sharp glint to his lavender eyes. This caused Ryou's heart to race, hope rising in him. He hadn't held his breath on Serenity's description, knowing that a golden pin was a stretch. But perhaps it wasn't such a useless clue after all.

Ryou clasped Serenity’s hands in his own. "Thank you so much for your help. I know how hard this is for you."

Serenity nodded, a small smile growing on her face. "If it catches him, then it will be worth it... Please, Detective... I don't want his voice to haunt me forever..."

He could hear the earnest plea in her voice, a cry to make her unending nightmare go away. To stop his reign of terror over London and let her find peace. And although everything seemed to swirl around him in confusion, clarity cut through like a piercing, golden eye.

"I promise."

Ryou and Malik said their quick goodbyes, thanking both Joey and Serenity for their time. They were barely a few steps away from the house when Ryou turned to Malik. "You know something, don’t you?"

Malik frowned, nodding. That sharp, intelligent look had returned to his eyes, a look that Ryou could get used to. "It might be a long shot, but given the killer's past affinity for Egyptology, I don't think this is a coincidence. There's an ancient Egyptian symbol known as the Eye of Wdjat – it's the originator of the other symbols that represents ancient gods, including the Eye of Horus and the Eye of Ra."

He turned to face Ryou, his thumb trailing along his lip as he thought. "The Eye of Wdjat is just that – a golden eye."

Ryou raised an eyebrow, his mind racing. "Would this be a common symbol to have a pin of?"

"I wouldn't say a pin, but perhaps a crest. Or at least, an adapted crest to include said curator's interest in Egyptology. And he would have access to all the information needed for Egyptology."

Ryou stopped walking, his mind going a mile a minute. He felt the Eye start to fit into the puzzle laid before him. The Egyptologist gone missing. The Egyptian symbol that Serenity saw before losing her eyesight. The hieratics left behind as a clue. Possession of an ancient Egyptian artifact. The last person who saw Isis before she disappeared."

Ryou looked back up at Malik, no question in his mind. "Maximillion Pegasus."
Malik had been in Pegasus's residence once years prior. It was just after they had moved to London. He remembered feeling irritated at the time, frustrated by all the events leading up to this moment in his life. While his siblings had discussed the opportunities before them, Malik had no desire to become a spectacle to be paraded around by these damn Brits.

No man better encapsulated this belief than Maximillion Pegasus.

Pegasus was the lead archaeologist on the project and their boss. He was considered something of an oddity to the public, with his peculiar antics and sense of humor bewildering most. Though native to London, most described him as a foreigner in his own land, obsessed with everything Egyptian and marveling at all of its history and relics.

This had initially given Malik hope upon meeting him. But it became clear to him very quickly that he was nothing more than another greedy investor. Over the years, Malik learned to detach his feelings from the matter, aware that there was little he could do about the situation. Better to make the most of their situation, like his siblings pointed out.

Still, Pegasus had always rubbed him the wrong way. He was decent enough to work for so long as he never got too deep into the matter. Pegasus could be unbearably nosey and loved to pry his way into research projects that he really had no business in. He made for a better patron and sponsor than researcher.

Perhaps that was why Malik was eager to let Isis deal with him whenever possible. Whenever Pegasus demanded an update or wished to discuss something in their field with the three siblings, his always agreed to take the bullet for them, so to speak. She always kept a level head about her (unlike Malik who too quickly let his irritation show), but she didn't let herself be pushed around (unlike Rishid, who was too polite for his own good sometimes).

Malik had been willing to accept this arrangement. He never considered that this had placed his sister in terrible danger.

So Malik led Ryou up the stairs to Pegasus's mansion. They had tried the university, searching the entire department and making multiple trips to his office. After several (expensive) calls to his estate, they got a curt message letting them know that Pegasus was away on a business trip and wouldn't be back for another three days. Those three days ate away at Malik, both men wondering if they had caught on too late.

Malik couldn't sleep. He felt guilty that he scolded Ryos for not getting any sleep when his own anxiety overwhelmed him. He insisted on staying over to help with the case, even though there wasn't much he could do. Ryos seemed to know this, but still allowed him to come over. Malik needed to get near Ryos -- the detective's presence comforted him. There was something about Ryos that drew him closer.

Malik was taking a nap when they had gotten word from Rishid that Pegasus had just returned from his trip. The two men wasted no time, Malik practically storming his way across London to confront his boss. He had to remain calm and keep a level head. The evidence seemed to point in one direction, but if they were going to fill in the gaps, they would need to approach with care.

The last thing they needed was Pegasus attempting to escape the country. Any chance of finding his sister would then be lost.

Malik rang the doorbell, his lavender eyes glaring at the door. He felt Ryos's shoulder brush his as the two men stood facing forward. He could feel Ryos's gaze on him.

"So... shall I lead the questioning or...?"

Malik narrowed his eyes, clearing his mind. "I'll do it. I have a rapport with him so it should be easier for me to get some of our answers."

Ryos gave a brief nod, their conversation cut short as the door swung open. A quick word with the maid and the two men were led into the salon. It was a stark contrast to Ryos's small flat. Lavish in silk and beautiful decorations gleamed and sparkled, even in the dim light; Pegasus lived in a luxury only earned through riches not belonging to him.

Malik sat on the couch, his legs crossed as he calmly waited for Pegasus. Ryos did no such thing, taking his time to walk around and study each item in the room. It was as if they were both working in tandem -- Ryos would gather information from their surroundings while Malik would keep his eye on the prize.

As if on cue, Pegasus came waltzing in, his silver hair hanging loose. He wore his favorite burgundy suit, a large smile on his face. "Malik! I wasn't expecting to see you drop by! How have you been?"

Malik offered a polite smile. He knew he would get further by thinking like Isis -- polite, yet candid. Charming yet immovable. "I'm well. How was your trip?"

"Simply marvelous -- if you haven't been to Crawley, then you absolutely must! Get that older brother of yours to take you!" Pegasus smiled, no hint of hesitate in his voice. The fact that he glossed over his missing sister so easily did not sit well with Malik.

Pegasus didn't waste a moment, turning towards Ryos who waited patiently to the side. "And you! We've met before. You're that detective lady I ran into at the university. Ryos, was it?"

Malik was so disappointed that he couldn't see Ryos from his periphery. He could only imagine the rage the detective felt. Sure, Malik had made the same mistake upon meeting Ryos (as many others probably had), but that didn't mean he didn't want to see Ryos's reaction.

The curtness in his voice was all the indication he needed to know that misgendering the detective did not go unnoticed. "Detective Ryos, yes. Thank you for having us over. Do you have a wash room I may use?"

Pegasus nodded, indicating where to find the room. Malik flicked his eyes over to Ryos, whose expression was stern, but his eyes remained focused as ever. As much as Malik suspected the restroom visit was more for Ryos to compose himself, he suspected the detective would take advantage of being out of Pegasus's eyesight to snoop for information.

That meant it was up to Malik to gather what information he could. A sudden sense of pressure and weight hung on him as he found himself carrying the investigation on.

Malik watched Pegasus walk over to a small cage in the corner of the room. He took what looked like a small bunny into his arms before moving to seat himself in an armchair. Malik had no idea
what to make of this, but then again, this was Pegasus - his odd behaviors were well-known among the upper echelons of this city.

"You said you had some questions for me regarding the disappearance of Isis?"

Malik nodded, raising a hand to examine the bed of his nails. He didn't bother to bring over pen and paper. Ryou was one for scribbling down notes and drawing the pictures - Malik knew such ramblings would only confuse him. It would be easier for him to chase tangents if he let his mind explore.

"You met with Isis right before she was kidnapped, yes? The night of the 22nd?"

Pegasus pouted, as if trying to recall. "I think so. That's so long ago, it's hard for me to remember all that's happened."

Malik resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He wanted to tell Pegasus that this a week and a half ago, but it was difficult enough to reason with his boss. "You requested her presence to evaluate a rare artifact you had just imported. A vase, I believe."

Pegasus's face lit up at that, a boyish grin on his face. "Oh yes! It was such a peculiar vase - it was green and blue with a face drawn onto it. Apparently keeping such a jar would bring good fortune and prosperity onto one's household."

Malik nodded, less interested in some old pot and more interested in what happened that night. "Right - well, that night, Isis was over late working with you. Can you tell me what happened?"

Pegasus cooed at the rabbit in his lap, who seemed content to sleep while the two men talked. "Well... we were up late discussing the vase and about other work projects she was in charge. I didn't want her to overextend if I could step in and take the lead. We lost track of time and she ended up leaving a little after midnight."

Malik raised an eyebrow, knowing there was more. "Did you call a cab for her?"

"But it was midnight and she would have had to walk all the way across town."

"I was tired. I probably wasn't being my most considerate self."

"Then why invite her to your estate so late in the night? Your meeting was scheduled at 7 in the evening and would have taken hours. If you knew that, why did you not make arrangements for transportation?" Malik stopped pacing, studying a German clock that sat atop the bureau. He could see Pegasus's reflection in the glass, Malik's eyes narrowing. Pegasus paused, a frown on his face. "You make it sound as if it's my fault that your sister disappeared."

"I'm no archaeologist, but doesn't this medallion have the Eye of Wdjat on it."

"I would say so. It's pretty rare. Why?"

"It's not a common symbol to find, correct?"

"I told you that she left just before midnight. Why do you keep asking these questions?"

"That's not what I asked! I asked if you tried to keep her from leaving!"

"It's not a common symbol to find, correct?"

"I would say so. It's pretty rare. Why?"

"I'm no archaeologist, but doesn't this medallion have the Eye of Wdjat on it."

Malik blinked, watching as Ryou pulled a golden token from his pocket, a familiar symbol emblazoned at the center. He flicked back in forth, the Eye identical on both the necklace and medallion. There was no doubt what that symbol was. It matched the description Serenity provided.

Pegasus put his rabbit down, a dangerous look in his eyes. "You were rummaging through my stuff!"

Ryou's expression didn't change, his eyes shifting over towards the silver-haired man. "I got lost on the way to the wash room. My mistake."
Ryou sounded completely unapologetic for his behavior, goading Pegasus into making a mistake. Pegasus inhaled a shaky breath, his temper barely in check. He snatched the medallion out of Ryou's hand, daring the detective to try and take it back. Malik felt as if his chest were heavy and made of stone, unable to feel his heartbeat or anything around him. Everything hung like death around them, Pegasus ignoring their penetrating gaze.

Malik took a step forward, licking his lips. Before he could ask the dreaded question, Pegasus's voice came out like a hiss, venom dripping in his words; "Get out of my mansion. Another word and I'll make sure you and Rishid sleep on the streets for the rest of your lives."

Anger flared up in Malik at the threat. He gritted his teeth, a retort ready when he felt a hand fall on his shoulder. He snapped his head back, Ryou gazing calmly at their suspect. Ryou nodded, a soft yet determined gleam in his eyes.

"Thank you for your time, Mr. Pegasus. By your leave."

Malik sat in a leather chair next to Ryou. His eyes kept flicking back and forth between him and the commissioner who sat at his desk. Kaiba didn't say anything, his hands folded together and lips pressed into a thin line. Malik knew that Kaiba hadn't been eager to rush back to his boss after their last confrontation, but it was necessary given recent events.

There was no question in either of their minds of Pegasus's guilt, but matters were more complicated. They lacked any concrete evidence to convict him and unless they had enough to build a case, arresting him would only result in him being detained for a period of time. This led Ryou to come up with an idea, but he needed the police cooperation on the matter.

So Malik and Ryou had walked their way back, tails between their legs, waiting patiently outside of Kaiba's door. Despite Malik urging Ryou to try picking this lock, Ryou insisted that it would only be to their benefit to not piss off his boss. And while Malik knew this was wise—old habits died hard, he supposed.

Ryou relayed all they had gathered on the case, whether to reassure Kaiba that progress was being made or to eventually convince him of their plan, Malik wasn't sure. Kaiba sat silently, soaking in all the information as Ryou discussed their confrontation with Pegasus. The heavy silence afterwards that followed was more uncomfortable than anything Kaiba could have screamed at them in anger.

"... You realize that your stunt will put him on guard?" Kaiba asked, his face astonishingly neutral.

Ryou nodded. "It was needed. By Pegasus's admission, he had attempted to bed Isis the night that she was kidnapped. Multiple relics showing the Eye of Wdjat were found, just as Serenity described. And since he attempted to blackmail her as he did Malik..."

Kaiba narrowed his eyes. "He would have had a motive for silencing her."

Ryou stood up, his hand twitching nervously. "May I?"

Kaiba just watched Ryou, not saying anything. Ryou took this as a notion that he may as well continue with his proposition. He pulled out a map, detailing several specific streets and locations in Whitechapel. "Yugi's research allowed us to pinpoint something useful."

Malik stood up, drawing closer to study the map alongside Ryou. He noticed how Kaiba, though his face was a perfect mask, sat closer, intrigued as well. "Of the eight murder locations, three were committed in the homes of the victims. The other five were done in flats rented out from recently deceased folks."

"Were all of these names made public?" Kaiba asked, without missing a beat.

Ryou nodded. "Every single one. It wouldn't have been hard for the killer to keep an eye out. Pegasus could then rent a vacant property in White Chapel using these pseudonyms. That's not all though."

Ryou took a pen, dabbing it in ink briefly as he drew a careful circle that included all of the apartments. Malik raised an eyebrow, a smile growing on his face. "I didn't even notice that."

Ryou gave him a small grin, his excitement leaking through. "Neither did I until we spoke to Serenity."

"You spoke to Serenity?" The question came quick, eager and curious from Kaiba's lips. A lightness to his voice stood in jarring contrast to his usual grave and dour tone.

"You spoke to Serenity?" The question came quick, eager and curious from Kaiba's lips. A lightness to his voice stood in jarring contrast to his usual grave and dour tone.

Ryou cocked his head, confused by this reaction. "Yes? We asked her some questions for the case."

Kaiba seemed to realize his uncharacteristic remark, pressing his lips into a thin line. Malik didn't understand what was going on, but he caught the smile teasing the corners of Ryou's lips. Perhaps the detective had already solved this mystery and would enlighten Malik later on the matter.

"What am I looking at?" Kaiba asked brusquely, trying to save face.

Malik resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He suspected that Kaiba wasn't really angry but just using his authority to make Ryou move on with his case. Ryou drew the pen on six different streets, using the ink to blacken them thoroughly. "It just so happens that seven of our victims were last seen within this seven-block circumference."

"And that idea would be?"

"I want to set up a trap for the killer."

Kaiba lifted his head, tilting as he considered the possibility. This was the most lenient and relaxed that Malik had seen him. In fact, Kaiba looked almost gleeful at the opportunity to put the killer
that Malik had seen him. In fact, Kaiba looked almost gleeful at the opportunity to put the killer behind bars. "I'm listening."

Ryou licked his lips, his nervousness causing him to speak faster; "We'll use his own knowledge of his behavior to our advantage. His murders occur within the first week of the month, shortly after he's rented the flat. That means he'll be setting up his next murder site soon."

Malik frowned at this. "But Ryou, Yugi mentioned that the killer never meets the proprietors in person – he pays via mail order."

Ryou shook his head. "That's not what we're looking for. We just need to look for a flat rented out to an individual who has already died."

Kaiba nodded. "Because even if he's not there now, he will try to bring back a victim there."

"Precisely. We can set up bait. We'll decide his next target by placing one of our own agents masquerading as a prostitute roaming this specific area. But we can't just let anyone get taken by him. We need someone trained by the police and is aware of the plot to cooperate with us."

Kaiba lips turned into a frown, a suspicious note in his voice. "If you intend to hire a prostitute to work for us–"

Ryou chuckled at that, shaking his head. "No, I don't want to involve any innocents in our trap. I was thinking of those officers you have working undercover down in Whitechapel."

Kaiba snorted, rolling his eyes. He crossed his arms as he stood back. "Detective, even you must be aware that that was a last-ditch effort to ease the public's mind. Those men haven't been able to trick anyone into thinking they are female sex workers – they've only increased my paperwork regarding buggery cases."

Ryou took a deep breath, a sense of bashfulness flooded him. "I know all too well about that. That's because they don't look feminine in the slightest. You need someone who does."

The silence that followed froze in Malik's chest. He thought about how Pegasus mistook Ryou for female earlier. How Malik had done the same before and how many others had done the same time and time again in Ryou's life. Kaiba seemed to realize this, his lips twitching as if he wanted to smile.

"You're volunteering yourself?"

Ryou let out an exasperated sigh, rolling his eyes. "Don't make me say it." He grumbled, a rose color flushing his face.

Kaiba just smirked, leaning over the desk. "But that's what you're implying. You basically admitted that you look like a woman."

Ryou finally broke his peace, scowling past his burning features. "I'm admitting that other people think that about me, damnit! Stop making thing difficult for me!"

Kaiba just chuckled, an amused smirk on his face. Malik's heart raced at the confrontation, only to realize that that was what Kaiba had wanted. He had just been trying to get a rise out of Ryou and he succeeded. Ryou seemed to realize this, backing down and rubbing at his arm.

"You're volunteering yourself?"

Ryou sighed, the blush starting to fade from his face. "Like I said – we need a perimeter. Not just in Whitechapel around these few blocks, but around Pegasus's estate. The idea is that I'll act as bait. This will be a last stand. If something goes wrong, Pegasus will likely try escaping back to his estate to create some sort of alibi for the time of the kidnapping."

Kaiba nodded briefly, pulling the map closer as he studied some of the buildings. "So we'll cut him off here. No mistakes. No hesitation."

Ryou nodded, though Malik had his own reservations. Teasing aside, he was aware of the ridiculously dangerous risk they were taking. If things fell through, Ryou would likely end up dead. Ryou had mentioned that he would risk life and limb to catch this killer, but he was also shrewd and careful. Malik had faith that their plan would work.

But the thought of it failing made it hard to breathe. The thought of Ryou getting hurt physically hurt Malik. This was their best shot at catching the killer, but it wasn't worth losing Ryou over. This sudden wash of fear and anxiety overwhelmed Malik, now taken back by the strength of his own feelings and not understanding why these emotions afflicted him so.

Kaiba seemed to at least realize that this was a risky maneuver they were trying to pull off. He stood up straight, fixing his coat as he studied the detective. Ryou kept his eyes averted, hand twirling at the loose strand of hair. Malik felt the stupid urge to touch his hair himself, but refrained from doing so.

Kaiba covered his mouth as he finished laughing, his expression falling as he considered what Ryou offered. He narrowed his eyes. "What's the catch?"

Ryou sighed, the blush starting to fade from his face. "Like I said – we need a perimeter. Not just in Whitechapel around these few blocks, but around Pegasus's estate. The idea is that I'll act as bait. This will be a last stand. If something goes wrong, Pegasus will likely try escaping back to his estate to create some sort of alibi for the time of the kidnapping."

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Kaiba sighed, his voice softer than usual; "You're certain about this?"

Ryou flicked his eyes over. The silence was long, but there was no question in his voice. "Without a doubt."

Kaiba gave a slow nod, a smile creeping onto his face. Malik felt his heart race at it all came crashing down on him. This was it. He smiled, resting a hand on Ryou's arm. The white-haired man turned to face him, a grin growing on his face.

"Let's go catch us a killer."
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

AN: Explicit material ahead

"Trouble certainly has a way of finding you, doesn't it love?" Mai teased, seeing Ryou to the door.

Ryou smiled, unable to deny the accusation. "I will admit this case has certainly been more than I had bargained for."

Mai chuckled. "I don't doubt it. Though I never would have guessed you'd end up a brunette by the end."

Ryou raised an eyebrow, glancing down at the wig he now held. While he could attempt drag in his natural hair color, that wouldn't be wise. Pegasus would certainly recognize his white hair in a moment and Ryou didn't want to dye his hair some terrible shade of dirt brown.

Mai didn't seem to have an issue finding him the wig, though he didn't want the story as to why the poor woman shaved her head. So long as it didn't involve lice, he could live with it.

"You'll let me know when it's all said and done, right? I can't keep my girls from their work you know," Mai remarked, a note of irritation slipping through.

Ryou nodded. "It's only for a few weeks. I know that's problematic, but the fewer people wandering that area at night, the less likely we'll see a corpse the next day. As soon as we catch him, you can go back to business as usual."

"How gracious of you. Well, if it means no more headlines glamorizing the deaths of my fellow co-workers, I suppose it'll be time well spent." Mai pulled her hair loose of her ponytail, giving it a shake. Blonde curls fell past her shoulders.

"You don't know how much I appreciate this, Mai." Ryou stopped and turned, facing her as she relaxed against the door frame.

She just snorted, pulling out a cigar to light. "You can thank me by catching this son of a bitch, got it?"

Ryou chuckled. "Of course. On my to do list."

Mai sighed, taking a few long drags. Her violet eyes fluttered open, a small smile on her face. "Well, I'm going to relax until tonight. Stay safe, Ryou."

"You as well, Mai. I'll see you around."

Ryou left the brothel, his mind aflutter with all that needed to be done. Kaiba had done good on his part and had a constant police watch near Pegasus's manor. They had done a careful job spreading the word to other sex workers in the area to avoid the perimeter laid out. Though they couldn't prevent people from travelling through, the fewer people there at night, the easier their work would be.

Now it was up to Ryou to play his part. The idea that he had to dress in drag was rather unappealing, but even he would concede. Perhaps everybody hadn't been off for mistaking him as female all these years. As much as he loathed the description, if it caught him London's most infamous killer, it would be worth it.

Still, that didn't mean Ryou had to be happy about the whole scenario.

In the suitcase, Ryou stored the dress, petticoats and wig. Mai had gotten him the attire needed to convince any onlooker that he was a lady of the night at first glance. While grateful for the aid, Ryou doubted whether he would even use the make-up and jewelry provided. He would have to decide on that once he was fully dressed.

Ryou felt someone grab his shoulder, slamming him into the brick wall. He dropped his suitcase in shock, stunned only for a moment before shoving the hand off of him. "Piss off!"

"What the fuck do you want, Ryou?"

Ryou sighed, crossing his arms as he glared at his doppelganger. "I should be asking you that question. Why the fuck did you break out of detention? You nearly got me fired!"

Bakura snorted, his hand resting at his hip. "Why? I'm the one who broke out, not you."

"Kaiba thought I helped you."

"Then Kaiba's a fucking moron."

"Yeah, well, he's my boss, so thanks for that." Ryou rolled his eyes. Bakura had a habit of always causing more trouble for him than it was worth.

"If I stayed there, I'd be hanging from a noose by now. And you still have your job, so all's well that ends well." Bakura shrugged, a smirk growing onto his face. Ryou wanted to slap the look off, Bakura pissed him off so much.

"What are you even doing around Whitechapel so early?" Ryou asked, unsure why he chased down the conman in shock, stunned only for a moment before shoving the hand off of him. "Piss off!"

"What the fuck do you want, Ryou?"

"You never got into a life of crime before, macushla." Bakura grinned, chuckling to himself. "The only criminal thing you did was fall for a stud like me."

"Yes and I learned my lesson." Ryou refused to stroke Bakura's ego. How he had been drawn to
this problematic, arrogant bastard in the first place was a mystery to him still. One he might never solve.

"So I noticed. You seemed to have moved on to beautiful, foreign blonds." Bakura raised an eyebrow, watching Ryous with astute interest.

Ryous passed, the words clogging in his throat. He knew what Bakura implied, but any attempt to deny such affections seemed to catch, unable to pass through his lips. Maybe because he knew it would be a poor lie at best. And it seemed he had waited too long, because Bakura's smile only widened in his silence.

Still, Ryous didn't want to stand there like some side show for Bakura's amusement. He tore his gaze away, his voice bitter. "It doesn't matter. It's strictly business between us."

"But you want it to be more?"

Ryous sighed, a wistful look on his face. "Of course I do. But I'm not selfish enough to take advantage of him or risk his job. I'm not a thief like you - I don't just take what I want."

Bakura nodded, not denying the accusation. "The smile dropped from his face as he glanced away. "You should try it sometime. You might be happier if you did.""

Ryous sniffed, reaching down to pick up his suitcase. "I'm happy enough for now. That's good enough for me. Anyway, I've wasted too much time talking to you. I need to get back to work."

"Hey, you're the one who chased me down," Bakura snapped back, refusing to be blamed for Ryous's impulsive decisions.

Ryous just smiled, walking away before he remembered something. "Avoid Osborn Street all the way out to Dorset Street for the next few weeks. We're trying to catch a killer and I don't need you mucking up my investigation."

"God, you're so demanding. Have fun piss ing off a serial killer then. I have better things to do." Bakura complained to the sky, even as he walked away from Ryous. This made the detective grin. Perhaps he shouldn't have given that information to a potential suspect in the case, but Ryous was certain of Bakura's innocence and Pegasus's guilt. This was a trap designed around the killer's behavior and knowledge.

Ryous shook his head, not wanting to think too deeply on their conversation. He had done his good deed and warned Bakura off. If he got himself in trouble after this, it would be on him and not Ryous. And what Bakura said about Malik... Ryous closed his eyes. This was work. He wouldn't let his thoughts stray from his job. Kaiba already suspected that he was distracted and Ryous refused to confirm those suspicions.

He stepped away from the darkness, letting the morning sun greet him. He had a lot of work to get ready for tonight.

Ryous frowned at the collection sitting atop his bureau. He had done some reading and eaten lunch before finally heading back to his bedroom. He knew the dress would fit for tonight but he faced a new issue altogether as he stared at the mess of brown hair in front of him.

The wig didn't fit over his hair.

Ryous hadn't even thought of this being a problem. He had been confused when Mai asked if she wanted her to help him dye his hair. She had given him a strange look at his refusal but accepted it nonetheless. Now he understood where she had been coming from, anticipating that his long hair would be problematic in trying to fit a wig over it.

Ryous stared into the mirror in front of him, pulling and twisting his hair up in every which way imaginable. He attempted to braid it and pinned it at tightly to his scalp as possible, but the wig still looked lumpy and uneven. It was quite clear that it wasn't his hair he was wearing.

So Ryous scowled, frustrated at his options. There was no point in doing this unless it was convincing. He wasn't going to act like those officers who didn't bother shaving out on their nightly mission. Ryous intended to capture the serial killer, with no room for error. The wig didn't fit and he sure as hell wasn't going to dye his hair. Hair dye would make his hair look horrendous. He would rather cut it short than stain his beautiful hair.

Ryous sighed, a bitter note in his voice as he walked to his bathroom, grabbing a pair of scissors.

It was only as he had the metal shears in his hands that Ryous realized how much he liked his hair. Sure, people mistook his long locks and soft features as female, but he never felt that way. He always felt like himself in how he presented himself. It may only be hair, but his hand still trembled as he pulled his hair back into a ponytail. He raised the scissors up, his eyes locked with the reflection cast from the mirror atop his bureau.

He felt his hair pull free, the deed happening much quicker than he registered it. He pulled the thickest of hair in front of him, staring down at the ponytail now freed from the rest of his hairs. It was much easier to look at his hair than to look up the stranger in the mirror.

His eyes fluttered up, a strange sensation hitting him in his chest. His face looked so familiar and alien at the moment. He looked like himself, but he saw both his parents in his features. His father's nose. His mother's cheekbones. His father's eyes. His mother's lips.

Ryous didn't like to think about his past. He looked back down, his hair brushing his jawline. A smile grew on his face. He avoided being nostalgic whenever possible. It was easy to look back at his past fondly or bitterly. He had to remind himself that it was neither of those things - it just was.

Ryous was so lost in his own thoughts, he didn't hear Malik come in to his flat until he heard a knock. He snapped his head up, Malik standing in the doorframe. He had an odd look on his face.

"Your hair..."

Ryous glanced down at the bound ponytail in his hand. He shrugged, not wanting to let on how insecure he felt about cutting his hair. He felt pathetic for being this sentimental. "It wouldn't fit under my wig. I'll grow back."

Malik nodded, walking over to stand by him. Ryous placed the ponytail on the bureau, not looking up. His breath caught when he felt Malik's fingers run through his short hair.

"Hand me the scissors. I'll help even it all out." Malik ordered, his eyes flicking up to catch Ryous's in the mirror before glancing away.

Ryous barely registered the words, distracted by the gentle fingers in his hair. It took him a moment before he grabbed by the scissors, offering them to Malik. He kept his face down, knowing that if
he made eye contact with Malik right now, he would not be able to control the blush that threatened to burn across his cheeks.

The two stood there silently, small locks and chunks of white hair falling to the ground. Ryou struggled to keep his breathing normal, trying to relax under Malik's care. His earlier conversation with Bakura rang in his head and he refused to act rashly. As far as he knew, Malik didn't even see him that way.

"This is going to take some getting use to." Ryou blinked when he heard Malik speak, his words seemingly loud following the deafening silence. He blinked, watching as Malik turned him so that he could fix his sides. "The thought of you with short hair is so bizarre to me."

Ryou chuckled, trying to focus on the conversation and not how close Malik's fingers came to brushing at his jaw. "Well on the bright side, I likely won't be mistaken for a woman anymore. Not by my long hair at least."

"Don't worry. You were plenty masculine before." Malik winked, pulling the lengths of hair straight to make sure they were even.

Ryou licked his lips, Malik far too close for this to be safe. "I'm glad to hear that. I was wondering why you mistook me for a woman the first time we met."

Malik snorted, though Ryou could tell that he was blushing. Malik put the scissors down on the bureau behind Ryou, his hand still brushing through his white hair. "If it makes you feel better, I like you much better as a man than I would as a woman."

Ryou was about to make some remark, something flirty that likely would have gone over Malik's head. Everything was too warm, too close for the moment. He could feel Malik's eyes on him, the gap between them closing. Ryou's heart leapt in his throat, those beautiful, lilac eyes swimming before him. They were hypnotic and Ryou was under his spell.

"I like you as well." Ryou murmured, unable to tear his eyes away. They were only inches apart, Malik seemingly under the same spell as Ryou. Before he could register what he was doing, Ryou leaned forward, lips grazing against Malik's. It was only a second, but the moment they pulled away, Ryou's eyes snapped open. The dreamy sensation lost, alarm evident in Malik's eyes.

Malik's stomach twisted.

He jerked back, away from Malik. He shouldn't have done that. He had crossed a line. He was... That was... stupid! "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't- I didn't mean-" Ryou felt his eyes burn, a sudden desire to cry welling up in him. What the hell had he been thinking? Ryou stepped back, closer to the dresser.

Before he could finish his apology, Malik rushed him. Ryou's yelp of surprise was lost as he was pushed against the dresser. Malik's lips smashed against his, desperate and needy. His hands twisted into Ryou's short hair, his kisses forceful. Ryou melted into the touch, his hand winding up to trace along Malik's jawline while the other rose up his chest.

Their lips burned and meshed together, their kisses sloppy. Ryou only pulled back long enough to breathe before lunging again, desperate to taste Malik. His hand slipped around to the back of Malik's neck. Ryou's eyes fluttering shut while his lips fought against Malik's.

They had been kissing for a few minutes before Ryou finally pulled back, his face burning. His eyes were locked with Malik's, hazy and lost. He could tell Malik felt just as flustered and overwhelmed as he did. "Uh..." Ryou whispered, feeling stupid for attempting some semblance of conversation.

Malik let out a breathy laugh, an almost giggly sound. Ryou raised an eyebrow, smiling when he
pre-cum as he teased him further. Malik, enjoying the strangled delighted cry that escaped. He could tell Malik was close, the sight back as Ryou continued to kiss along his jawline. Ryou leaned into him, sucking and nibbling

"Fuck- Ryou…" Malik finally sputtered out in English, his name a low moan. He leaned his head his hand to let go.

Ryou didn't have any form of lubrication on hand at the moment and Malik's cock felt too good in held back, enjoying the effect he could have on his partner by mere touch. He knew that this was something in a language that Ryou didn't know, probably Arabic. Ryou leaned in, placing wet kisses along his jawline as he steadily picked up the pace. One hand continued to tease Malik's nipples while he pumped him with the other.

"Do you want me?" he whispered softly, his lips brushing against Malik's.

Malik's eyes shifted from Ryou's eyes to his lips, breathing heavily. He raised a hand, gently brushing through his short white hair. Ryou leaned into the warm touch, a smile growing on his face. Perhaps he was being pushy, yes. He had pushed it the moment he accidentally leaned in for a kiss. It should have ended there.

But Malik had kept going.

Malik leaned up, his lips brushing against his jawbone. "I do."

The words were whispered right into Ryou's ear, forcing him to bite back a grin. Ryou's free hand worked its way to Malik's shirt, undoing each button slowly, trailing downward to where Malik wanted him. Malik leaned in to kiss him again, his breath hitching. "I want you."

Ryou's eyes fluttered shut, the words sending a pleasant shiver down his spine. He smiled, sitting up and straddling Malik's waist. "Good. Because that first kiss, while not planned, is the best thing I've ever done."

He finished the last button, pulling Malik's shirt open to graze his fingers up Malik's torso and admired his bronze-sculpted body. Artists couldn't even imagine something as beautiful was Malik.

Malik sat up, looking less uncertain and more eager as he started to help Ryou out of his clothes. Ryou chuckled, running his hands through his golden hair. Malik's hands felt warm against his chest, the sensation tingling through his body. Ryou couldn't get enough – it had been far too long since he had been intimate, and his body seemed to suddenly remember the pleasure of physical connection, suddenly ravenous for Malik.

Ryou didn't think through his actions, impulse dictating his every action. He dragged the shirt away from Malik's torso, wanting to drag his fingers over every inch of his body. His hand only wandered down his golden hair to the base of his neck when he felt the edge of the scars. He pulled away from the kisses, his breathing ragged. He managed to rein himself in, suddenly nervous.

"…Is it alright if I- if you don't want me to-" Ryou asked in a rush, fumbling over his words. This was the problem with being aroused – it made cognition impossibly difficult.

Malik pressed his forehead against Ryou's, his eyes squeezed shut. He didn't speak, instead grabbing Ryou's hand to bring it towards his back. Ryou paused, his fingers resting against ragged skin. After a moment, he let his hand wander, exploring the new terrain with the same loving attention he had the chest before him.

Malik's reaction fascinated him. Ryou leaned back, watching Malik moan and squirm against the delicate touch. He noticed how he seemed to react more where undamaged skin would be found, Ryou lingering there as he traced along where the nerve endings would pick up his touch.

After a moment, Malik reached up, finally tearing off Ryou's shirt so that they both sat shirtless on the bed. Ryou straddled Malik's lap, their chests pressing against each other, both enjoying the shared warmth. Their lips were only a breath apart, occasionally plucking at each other in soft, slow brushes. Their eyes grew lost and hazy in each other's gaze. Despite their pent-up sexual frustration, Ryou was amazed how even now, they seemed to hesitate, drawing out the moment.

Malik whined softly, his tongue diving into Ryou's mouth. He pulled away, a desperate note slipped into his voice; "Ryou, touch me."

The command sent his stomach fluffing with excitement. Ryou slipping his hands down Malik's chest. He could see his partner's erection pressed against his trousers, desperate for attention. Ryou didn't want to rush it though, taking his time tease at Malik's nipples, rubbing just below and circling them before finally pinching. He chuckled at the way they perked up, Malik arching into the touch. Little whines and gasps escaped, the red deepening in Malik's cheeks.

Ryou followed the golden happy trail down to the hem of his pants, eyes glancing up for permission. Malik seemed frustrated, reaching down to free himself of his pants. Ryou bit back a grin, amused how Malik seemed less aroused and more fed up at the gentle teasing. Despite any annoyance, he gasped when Ryou took hold of his throbbing cock.

Ryou began to slowly pump him, kneading the warm flesh. Malik leaned against him, whispering something in a language that Ryou didn't know, probably Arabic. Ryou leaned in, placing wet kisses along his jawline as he steadily picked up the pace. One hand continued to tease at his nipples while he pumped him with the other.

Ryou wanted to do so much more, his own erection straining as he touched Malik. Still, Ryou held back, enjoying the effect he could have on his partner by mere touch. He knew that this was likely Malik's first time with a male partner and figured he would take him in slowly. Besides, Ryou didn't have any form of lubrication on hand at the moment and Malik's cock felt too good in his hand to let go.

"Fuck- Ryou…" Malik finally sputtered out in English, his name a low moan. He leaned his head back as Ryou continued to kiss along his jawline. Ryou leaned into him, sucking and nibbling where his jaw met his neck.

"Shit!" Malik swore, his breathing becoming erratic. Ryou twisted his hand slightly as he pumped Malik, enjoying the strangled delighted cry that escaped. He could tell Malik was close, the sight of him unraveling causing Ryou to grow harder. He swirled his thumb along the head, smearing pre-cum as he teased him further.
Ryuu let his other hand dip down, cupping Malik's balls. This became his undoing. Malik grew louder, unrestained, until he arched under Ryuu. He glanced down, watching as Malik's cock twitched and spurted semen splattered on his stomach. Malik fell back down on the bed, Ryuu straddling his partner as he admired his handiwork. He lifted his hand, licking off dollops of cum that remained.

He felt Malik's lavender eyes burning on him as he struggled to catch his breath. Ryuu smiled, thinking how he could get used to this sight. Malik smiled, still a little breathless. "Fucking hell, Ryuu. I didn't expect to be seduced today."

Ryuu chuckled. He tried to ignore his erection in his pants, which throbbed from Malik's orgasmic moans a few moments earlier. "All in a day's work for a detective."

Malik snorted, a smirk growing on his face. Ryuu didn't have time to think as Malik rolled them over so that he hovered over him. Ryuu knew that his cheeks burned with lust, but there was something about Malik smiling down at him, a wicked gleam in his eyes, that made him feel rather cory. He whimpered, arching into Malik's warm hands as they wandered slowly around his pale chest.

"I believe I should return the favor. That seems the polite thing to do." Malik remarked calmly, as if commenting on the weather. Ryuu tried to think of some witty or snarky retort, but choked on his words when fingers pinched at his nipples. Ryuu swallowed, turning his face away to press against the sheets, his face burning. "How thoughtful of you. I never knew you were so generous and well-mannered."

"There's a lot you don't know about me," Malik murmured. Ryuu glanced down to watch Malik kiss his chest. His expression was so soft and affectionate that Ryuu tore away, unable to bear the look in those lavender eyes. Before he could linger on those thoughts, he felt Malik tug his pants away, a hiss escaping his lips when his erection hit the cold air.

Despite his own bashfulness, Ryuu looked up, craning his head to watch Malik. The one nice thing about being attracted to guys was that they knew what guys liked. So Ryuu expected Malik to return the hand job, eager to feel his warm hands on his throbbing need. He didn't expect the warm, wet tongue swirling against the head of his cock.

Malik tilted his head back, a scream slipping through. He slapped a hand over his mouth, a rush of embarrassment flooding him. Before he could apologize, Malik lowered his mouth over the head of Ryuu's erections, slowly bobbing down as he got used to the gesture. The warm, soft suction around his member was exquisite, Ryuu struggling to keep his voice down and failing miserably.

"Aahh! Ahh, fuck! Mali- ahh!" Ryuu moaned, voice trembling before his volume grew again. Malik hummed lightly, almost thoughtfully. The vibrations down his erection left Ryuu struggling to remember how to speak. Over time, Malik continued to bob a little faster and a little lower, taking a bit more of his length into his mouth. Ryuu could feel him brush against the back of his throat, his heart racing at the glorious heat and suction that blinded him otherwise.

Malik twisted his fingers into the blonde, gossamer locks between his legs, his hips having a mind of their own. Malik sped up, his golden hair flashing in the sunlight while his hand pumped wherever his mouth couldn't reach. His hips jerked, fast and shallow, Ryuu's eyes squeezed shut. He knew he wouldn't last longer and yet he didn't want it to end.

He looked back down, noticing Malik's eyes gazing on him as he took his cock. The stare hypnotized him, drawing him in. Ryuu couldn't think of anyone or anything more beautiful than the sight of Malik between his legs.

He felt his breath catch in his throat, everything coiling down to his core. "Malik? Ah-ahh. I'm going to- ahh!" Ryuu waited wordlessly, his orgasm approaching too quickly. Ryuu tried to warn him before he came, some part of him still remembering that he probably shouldn't choke his partner, but his mind too far gone to think of the details on how to relay that.

Malik seemed to have sensed Ryuu reaching his peak, pulling back enough as Ryuu poured into his mouth. Ryuu blinked, constellations dancing across his sight as he came back down, his body relaxing and sinks into the bed. He felt boneless, breathless, and elated, watching Malik silently sit up, wiping his chin. Seeing Malik swallow sent another shiver down his spine.

Ryuu, in his post-orgasmic bliss, sat up, pulling Malik in for a close hug. He wasn't sure how Malik would respond, but Malik submitted himself to the embrace, the two falling down onto the bed. Ryuu pulled him to his chest, both of them laying on their side facing each other. His eyes flitted down, one arm wrapped around Malik's waist while the other drew mindlessly across the bronze chest before him.

Malik started to shift away, as if to make to leave. Ryuu suddenly pulled him in tighter, scowling. "Stay."

Malik paused, giving Ryuu an odd look. "But... don't you have to get ready for tonight?"

"We've got a few more hours. Let's take a nap."

Strange how Ryuu felt more bashful about asking Malik to stay and cuddle with him than he was about engaging with him sexually. Perhaps because intimacy was deeper, more connective, than fucking. And he didn't know how Malik saw all of this. But Ryuu knew what he wanted and he just hoped that Malik was on the same page.

A smile grew on his face when Malik tightened his grip, pulling Ryuu to his chest. Ryuu nuzzled into him, enjoying the scent of his skin and sweat. At the last minute, Ryuu snagged a blanket to throw over them to ward off the chilly air. He didn't know if this would last—these sort of things rarely did. But Ryuu didn't have time to worry about it, sinking into a comfortable sleep in Malik's arms.

Chapter End Notes

Link to artwork here
Catching a killer proved to be elusive in the following days. Malik worked with several officers, keeping an eye on the district while Ryou paced around Jack the Ripper's 'fishing pool,' as the detective like to put it. Nine days had passed and nothing had bitten thus far.

Ryou, admittedly, had been approached by several men seeking service. Only one threatened to turn violent when he refused, which forced an officer nearby to act. It was a good thing that he stepped in instead of Malik, otherwise Malik couldn't promise that his face would have remained intact.

Malik's exhaustion didn't help. On top of going to the stake out every night, Malik had gotten word from his older brother that Pegasus was tired of him not showing up to work. While Rishid had done his best to cover for him, even he couldn't hide the fact that he was trying to do the work of three Ishtar siblings.

That's when it hit him. Malik snapped his eyes open, shifting so that he could face Ryou. "No! Sorry, I just got use to you being around and all that, I didn't think-"

"But it wasn't until Ryou kissed him that those pieces all fell into place.

"He fell back, head landing heavily on the pillow. Ryous stirred, his head popping up and he smiled at Malik. He found himself returning the smile, an almost reflexive action. It was weird how heart seemed to skip a beat whenever he saw that rare smile. Ryous moved a bit closer, a hand coming up to undo a few buttons on Malik's white shirt. "How was work?"

"Terrible. I'm fairly certain Pegasus is still pised at me for our little stunt at his estate a few weeks back."

Ryou moved up a bit, resting his cheek against Malik's shoulder. "Do you think he knows that we know?"

Malik considered the question, moving his arm to wrap around Ryou's shoulder as he ran his fingers through his white hair. The fact that Ryou had cut it still disappointed him. He wished he knew?

"If he does, he hasn't shown any indication towards me. He's still his usual boisterous self at work -- which is unbearable." Malik frowned. He had been certain that Pegasus would have tried something by now.

"I'm guessing it's because you have dirt on each other," Ryous murmured, still sounding a bit sleepy. A hand wandered around his exposed chest, his pale fingers gently teasing the warm muscle underneath. "If you go the police with your evidence, you'll lose your job. But if he fires you, there's nothing stopping you from pushing your case against him. A stalemate."

Malik nodded – what Ryous suggested made sense. "So we can do nothing to each other right now. We just have to catch him in the act."
Ryou paused, his face deepening to a darker red as he nodded. Malik licked his lips, drawing his hand away to rest on Ryou's wrist; "Want me to?"

"I think I'll be good? Maybe if I sit up?"

"Uh huh," Ryou murmured between kisses, not particularly caring.

"I'm not tired though," Ryou remarked, whispering into his ear before traveling down his jawline.

Malik, despite his growing arousal, giggled at this. "But I am!"

Ryou chuckled, sitting up as he looked down at Malik. He could only stare up, wondering what the abino was planning with that devilish grin on his face. "Tell you what – you help tire me out and I'll let you sleep. Sound fair?"

"Hardly. Why do I have to help you so I can get some rest?"

"I promise you'll like it." Ryou winked, an amorous look on his face.

"It's quite insulting how you forget that so quickly."

"I don't care. I want you. You can't change my mind," Malik promised him, a smirk growing on his face.

Ryou chuckled, the corners of his mouth twitching up into a smile. "Of course. How could I forget that you're the most stubborn man alive?"

Ryou laughed, leaning forward. Their lips brushed each other, slow and languid. There was no rush, their tongues passing against each other as they tasted and explored each other's mouth through taste and feel. Malik wanted to forget everything else in his life and just kiss Ryou all day. He seemed to forget how tired he felt, too caught up with tasting Ryou and how his body curved into his own.

Ryou rolled them, pushing Malik back into the bed while Ryou hovered over him. Their kisses intensified, picking up in speed. Malik snorted, trying to pull away. "Ryou, I need to get some rest."

"You can do me… I think it'll be easier for our first time. Will you be okay on your back or do you want to switch to a different position?"

Malik swallowed, forcing himself to nod. "Uh, yeah. So are you going to… or do you want me to?" He snapped his head away, feeling embarrassed. He hated how he acted like some blushing maiden, struggling to speak when the obvious before him.

"I'm not tired though," Ryou remarked, whispering into his ear before traveling back down his jawline.

Malik felt his ears burn at the touch, but he still lazed. "Oh yeah? What did you have in mind?"

Ryou leaned back, rummaging around his bedside table. Malik raised an eyebrow, confused for a moment before Ryou pulled out a small, clear jar filled with oil. It only took a second for it to set in. Malik's heart starting to race from both excitement and nervousness. They had been pleasuring each other with their hands and mouths, so it made sense that this was the next step.

Still, there was something nerve-wracking about Ryou grabbing the oil. As if to say he's ready and wanted to move forward. Not that Malik didn't feel the same way - He wanted to, like really wanted to, but he was also rather… new to all of this, simply put.

"Is that alright with you?" Ryou asked, a cautious look on his face as watched Malik's changing expression.

Malik swallowed, forcing himself to nod. "Uh, yeah. So are you going to… or do you want me to?" He snapped his head back, feeling embarrassed. He hated how he acted like some blushing maiden, struggling to speak about the obvious before him.

Ryou smiled, his hand brushing against his cheek. Malik felt his ears burn at the touch, but he still relished the caress. "You can do me… I think it'll be easier for our first time. Will you be okay on your back or do you want to switch to a different position?"

Malik blinked, considering what Ryou suggested. He hadn't even thought about how his scars might become irritated in the act. It hadn't been an issue over the last few days. Often times, he was too lost in physical pleasure to notice the constant irritation of his tortured skin. He shifted slightly, seeing how his back felt. "I think I'll be good? Maybe if I sit up?"

Ryou nodded, shifting back slightly. As Malik pushed himself up, Ryou fiddled with his belt, struggling to remove it. Despite their best efforts, they both ended having to stand up to remove the rest of their clothes. Once freed, Ryou sat in Malik's lap, his pale legs straddling his hips. The feel of his body pressed against his was enough to send Malik's cock twitching in pleasure.

Before they could get carried away kissing, Ryou broke away, opening the jar. He coated two fingers in the oil. Malik watched as Ryou lifted himself up slightly, prepping himself with one finger. The sight of Ryou spread like that made Malik feel dizzy, his breath hitching. He wrapped a copper arm around his waist to help hold Ryou up, slowly kneading his cock.

Ryou groaned at his touch, swaying slightly as he tried to pump himself into Malik's fist as well as grind down against his finger. His eyes fluttered, remaining half open as he rocked, trying to make the most of both sensations. Malik parted, peppering the pale chest before him with sporadic kisses.

There was something undeniably arousing about watching Ryou lose himself in pleasure. Malik watched the coral staining Ryou's cheeks spread across his face as he gasped for air. His white hair laid wild around his face, an almost desperate, hungry look in his eyes. It made Malik hunger for Ryou as well.

After a while, Malik watched as Ryou switched to two fingers, stretching himself in preparation for what would come. As Ryou reached back to coat his fingers again and add another finger, Malik spoke, pulling his hand away to rest on Ryou's wrist. "Want me to?"

Ryou paused, his face deepening to a darker red as he nodded. Malik licked his lips, drawing his
hand away. He made sure all three fingers were saturated before moving back, ignoring how the oil dripped onto the blanket. For a moment, he searched, tentative as he tried to find Ryou's entrance, heartbeat in his ears. He experimented with one finger, jerky and nervous, though Ryou didn't comment, eyes squinted in shit what Malik (hoping) was pleasure.

Intuitively, Malik knew the general idea of sex, but he felt clumsy and anxious when confronted with the tasks. After seeing Ryou's earlier strained expression, Malik tried slipping two fingers in slowly, wanting to get a feel first before plunging in with three fingers. This time, Malik kept the motion smooth and languid, a breathy moan low on Ryou's lips. Malik swallowed, heart thudding in his chest. The unexpected tightness and heat around his fingers made his throat go dry. It made him look forward to what was to come. He pumped in, trying different angles to see how Ryou would react.

Ryou panted, little moans slipping past his lips. He wrapped his arms loosely around Malik's neck, focusing on riding Malik's fingers as if it were his cock. Malik moved to three fingers, trying to stretch him. He heard Ryou grit his teeth for a moment, the discomfort fading quickly as he groaned, tossing his head back.

"Malik, please- I'm ready," Ryou mumbled, leaning down to whisper into Malik's ear. He swallowed, forcing himself to nod. Arousal replaced his earlier sense of embarrassment, but he still felt a little bashful moving forward. As he pulled away, Ryou grabbed the oil again, using it to coat Malik's cock.

As Ryou wrapped his fist around Malik, he panted, groaning loudly. He was amazed he didn't cum then and there, but Ryou kept the movement slow, making sure that he was greased up and ready. Malik leaned against Ryou's shoulder, mumuring profanities in his native tongue. English was difficult to think of when this close to rapture.

Once satisfied, Ryou let go, lifting up his hips. Malik helped guide him, holding Ryou by his hip as he pressed the head of his erection against his entrance. After a few tentative pushes, Ryou slowly sank down, their foreheads pressed together as he sank down to his base. Malik smoldered, unable to breathe; Ryou felt glorious around him. They both sat there, panting, struggling to catch their breath.

"Christ, Ryou," Malik whispered out, unable to find his voice, hoarse and raspy. "You're so f-fucking tight."

Ryou shook his head, a breathless chuckle. "Am I? I couldn't tell." Ryou lifted up a few inches before plunging back down. Malik groaned, suddenly needing more. It was too slow, the pace so agonizingly slow that Malik was stuck between pleasure and torture. He knew that Ryou was still adjusting, but goddam, was self-control difficult.

Malik's patience was rewarded as Ryou started to pick up the pace, plunging up and down on his cock. Malik couldn't mute himself, groaning and crying out in pleasure. He reached up, trying to kiss Ryou, but their pace was too sloppy, too difficult to kiss properly. Malik decided to set his attention along Ryou's collarbone, kissing, sucking and biting wherever he could reach.

Ryou tipped his head back, his short hair only brushing his shoulder. Malik felt Ryou's hands touch his face, thumbs smoothing eyes mesmerizing Malik. He snapped his hips forward, deep as he could.

Not long after, Malik found release, his forehead pressing against the sweat-dappled chest before him. He purred into Ryou, a few last jerks before leaning over, close to his partner. He couldn't breathe, his head buzzing and his body tingling. Fingers tagging at his hair and the erection pressed between their stomachs reminded Malik that Ryou hadn't finished yet.

Malik lowered one hand, kneading at Ryou's ass as he urged him to move faster. Ryou jerked at that, his flesh squeezing around Malik. He found his hips jerking up, trying to move faster, move deeper. He needed more contact, more pleasure. It consumed Malik as he tried to relish every sensation.

Ryou got close, his voice growing louder. The sound drove Malik forward, suddenly lifting Ryou up. The detective yelped slightly, taken back by the gesture before relaxing on the bed when Malik laid him down, legs spread to welcome Malik back in. Malik plunged back finding better purchase against the bed. He lifted Ryou up by his hips, his hips quickening and rushing towards that invisible horizon. Ryou cooed and moaned under him, scarlet burning across his face, smoldering eyes mesmerizing Malik. He snapped his hips forward, deep as he could.

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Malik pushed himself up on his forearm, looking down at pale features turned rose. His right hand came forward, still slippery with oil as he pumped Ryou in earnest. Malik could tell by the way his cockhead swelled that Ryou was close. His partner squeezed his eyes shut, arms tightening around Malik's neck. Ryou trembled, crying out, "Fuck! Malik- I'm- ahh!"

Malik watched Ryou arch, his hips giving a last few jerks as semen splattered onto his pale skin. The white seed nearly translucent on his skin. Ryou sank into the bed, struggling to catch his breath, white thighs quivering around bronze hips. Malik's heart hitched, the sensation lodging in his throat. He didn't know exactly what it was, but decided to let the question in his mind go, rolling over to lay next to Ryou.

Ryou had other plans, pulling Malik back to his chest, a smile on his face. "No. I want to cuddle."

Malik snorted. "We can. I just wanted to give you some air to breathe."

"That's not how you cuddle, idiot." Ryou teased, his arms wrapping around Malik's shoulders. He felt his fingers brush against his back and Malik found he didn't mind. If he were to entrust his body to anyone, scars and all, it would be Ryou. He couldn't think of anyone else he was comfortable sharing this with, nor anyone he would desire for this moment.

No, Ryou burned in his thoughts, like a white star guiding him through the night.

Malik chuckled, starting to understand the sensation that clogged in his throat yet he couldn't give voice. Instead, he rolled over, pulling Ryou with him. He could hear him start to protest until he realized that Malik only wanted to switch positions. Ryou settled into his chest, his white hair scattering and mixing in with his golden hair. Malik held onto Ryou, the two of them falling into a hard sleep in seconds.

Malik was fairly certain it was his mind playing tricks on him but he believed that sex before sleeping made him sleep that much better.

Even though they'd only gotten a few hours rest, Malik felt more invigorated after their quick romp and nap. He helped Ryou get ready, teasings his short hair for as long as he could before
Malik had to throw on a wig. It was astounding how such a disgusting color muddied his beautiful dark eyes. Only Ryuu could do his white hair justice, making every one of his features meld perfectly and just dazzle the beholder.

Strange how a dress and wig could do so much to change one’s appearance. With the wig, Ryuu became unrecognizable, blending with the crowd. Mais had really outdone herself on this costume. Ryuu's disguise was convincing and it certainly got the job done.

Though Malik felt uncomfortable about the fake breasts…

The moment they stepped out the door, their guises returned. Ryuu the odd yet sharp detective on the job, Malik his assistant working with the police force. Their relationship appeared amicable yet professional, a careful line not to be crossed lest they wished to face trial or imprisonment.

Yet as Malik sat near the window, watching the dark streets, his mind lingered on their time together. He brushed his fingers against his lips, the feel of Ryuu's lips against his still fresh. Even when they were apart, Malik found his thoughts drifting back to Ryuu. His beautiful hair, his unblemished skin, his rosy cheeks when he was aroused, the soft squeeze as their bodies wrapped together...

Malik shut his eyes, trying to clear his thoughts. He shifted in his seat, fighting the erection that was starting to form. He needed to keep his mind on the job. He couldn't be fantasizing right now. Despite how alluring the image of Ryuu riding him...

Malik wondered how good Ryuu's cock would feel inside him.

Malik tapped his forehead against the cold glass. He needed to stop. He was more tired and sexually pent-up than he realized. He knew solving the case would solve his lack of sleep. Ryuu was the solution to his other problem - after all, he's the one who seemed to have awakened the invenous desire in him.

Malik bit back a groan, focusing on the cold touch that spread a numbness through his skull. His eyes fluttered open. As if on cue, Ryuu passed the checkpoint. Malik glanced back over to the clock in the room, noticing he was on time. Ryuu was making laps, wandering to those unaware but a carefully mapped out area that allowed the police to observe his every move. If he should deviate from that plan, it was time to act.

Malik leaned over to the desk, marking off another tally. He knew that the murderer's lack of appearance was problematic, but a part of him was relieved in a way. He knew the killer would act, so for every moment Ryuu continued in safety, the less Malik had to worry. Their plan was carefully organized, not allowing for any error. Jack the Ripper would not get away.

So long as Isis and Ryuu were safe in the end, that was all that mattered.

A noise downstairs caught his ear. Malik turned his head, a few officers wandering upstairs, sleepiness evident on their faces. They had been taking turns on watch, though Malik offered to do the longest shift. The idea of Ryuu being attacked by the killer while he slept didn't sit well with him. He wouldn't let another person he loved slip away from him.

The officers ignored Malik, having figured out in the first few days that he wasn't interested in cards or drinking. Malik threatened to report them to Kaiba if they got as wasted as they did the first night. They seemed to regard him with distrust and disdain but Malik didn't give any fucks. He tried to tune out their conversation.

"How many nights do we have to do this?" He heard one of them complain, the tiredness evident in his voice.

"I'll we catch the killer or Kaiba realizes this is a stupid as hell decision." One of the officers groaned, a bitter note in his voice.

"The detective says he should be planning his next murder here."

"He's also been on this case for months and the murderer keeps getting away. I wouldn't hold your breath."

Malik bit back a remark, knowing it wouldn't accomplish anything. These men were tired and irrationt, hence why they were lashing out.

"I don't care what Kaiba says – I think the detective's behind it all. It's the perfect cover – hunt down the killer while moonlighting as the bastard."

And there went any chance of Malik ignoring their conversation.

"Fucking what?" He snapped, growling out the words.

The officers jumped, almost surprised by his vocal interjection. The officer who last spoke (Malik thought his name was Keith but he wasn't sure), stood up straight, doubling down on his assertion; "You heard me. Why hasn't he caught him sooner? The best plan to catch him is to dress in drag and hope he takes the bait? How do we know this isn't some excuse for him to shag with some queer."

And there went any chance of Malik keep his temper tonight.

His body moved faster than he could think, bolting up from his seat. It didn't matter that Keith had several inches on him – Malik, fueled by rage, had the advantage that the officer didn't anticipate an attack. In a moment of blind rage, Malik clocked Keith across the jaw hard, the blond man collapsing suddenly. Malik's anger wasn't spent; instead, he raced to beat the crap out of the officer.

He was pulled away by two of the officers who realized what he was doing and had enough sense to keep him from getting himself arrested. Malik struggled against them, resisting restraint as the desire to kick Keith's face in for his remarks was preferable. He didn't give two shits if they were bored – how dare they accuse Ryuu of being some perverted criminal.

Keith staggered back to his feet, his eyes livid. Malik wanted a fight, but he also knew that getting in trouble now would force Kaiba to remove him from helping on the case. This wasn't as simple as just helping out Ryuu where he could – he actually had to fall in line. Malik shrugged off the two officers, trying to temper back his anger and frustration.

Malik took a deep breath, gathering himself. "If you think you can do a better job catching this criminal, than why don't you take on the case, jackass? Or perhaps you don't have enough brain cells to figure it out, you lousy son of a bitch?"

So this wasn't his best attempt at controlling his temper. Oh fucking well. Keith's face burned red despite the purple bruise swelling across the left side of his face. Perhaps Malik would get his fight...
Malik felt frustrated, annoyed at being placated. But as he saw the other officers starting to relax, Malik realized that it was pointless staying angry over basically nothing. He couldn't change these officers' opinion on Ryou – they were suspicious about the detective. He suspected this was related to Kaiba's own suspicions towards him as well.

As much as Malik wanted to beat sense into them, it would accomplish nothing. Ryou had mentioned that it was more important to just do his job than worry about what his fellow coworkers whispered and gossiped about. Malik suspected he was right, but that didn't piss him off any less.

Malik sighed, watching out the window. He could hear the officers grumbling, but they became white noise again. It was more important that Malik do his part and just focus on catching the killer. He glanced up at the clock, noticing it was a few minutes past 12:30. He looked back at the road. Ryou hadn't passed by yet.

A frown grew on his face, his heart rate picking up. It was possible that Ryou was just running a bit late, but every instinct told Malik that wasn't the case. He stepped back, realizing that every second counted.

"He's off pattern," Malik stated the fact, trying to remain calm. His heart rate was already up from the fight earlier – he needed to keep calm.

The officers got quiet, standing up. Duke ran to the window, looking out. "How many minutes?"

"Four minutes now."

"…Shit, it's time," Duke muttered, turning back around. "Keith, report to Fordham Street. Ushio -- Lomas. The rest move to the flat. Go!"

Without another word, the men filed out, rushing to inform the other officers and to move in. Malik followed closely after Duke, his breath shaky. This was it. It was do or die.

Time to see if their trap would actually work.
Ryou wasn’t entirely sure how the killer would approach him. He suspected that Jack the Ripper would solicit a prostitute like another patron would, leading her back to his “home” where the murder would take place. Knowing that, Ryou remained guarded, carefully reading each situation as male suitors passed.

The number of men who were convinced he was a woman was disturbing to say the least.

Ryou didn’t like to be reminded of how often he had been teased for his soft features and long hair. He figured this would be something he could leave behind once he got past childhood. Luck had a different fate for him, unfortunately.

Whether Malik realized it or not, his words before had been very reassuring. It was good to know that Malik liked him for being himself. He didn’t see him as feeble nor impervious – Malik could see him for who he was and still embraced him for that. And the fact that Malik was willing to reject preconceived notions to make sense of the confusing narrative that was this case showed his true intelligence and character.

People of such esteem were far too few in this world.

Ryou held his shawl a little closer, eager to get out of his garb. The attitude shift in how men treated when they thought he was a woman startled him. He never realized how... demanding they would be, a sense of entitlement to them. Ryou never really learned this habit, probably because he never connected with people very well. He had always been off on his own, marching to the beat of his own drum so that cultural and societal standards were seen as something to be observed rather than ideals to be internalized.

It offered him a perspective that gave him clarity. It allowed Ryou to see and observe things objectively, without having to rely on stigma to form his bias. He had obviously internalized some beliefs, but part of being a detective meant being able to separate assumptions so that you could see how all the pieces would fit together.

So despite the disrespect Ryou faced parading around as a woman of the night, he knew that all the facts would finally come to order. What seemed so confusing and convoluted would be made clear. All of which started with catching the killer in the act tonight.

Ryou forced himself to take a slow, steady breath, despite his heart rampaging in his chest. He didn’t dare to hope, uncertain whether it was good fortune or terrible luck that he should run into him now. Ryou swallowed hard, shifting his head slightly so he could catch a glimpse into the shadows... "Don’t move." Ryou kept his gaze down, knowing that the gun was already cocked and ready. A simple twitch of the finger would be enough to kill him. Despite the knowledge of death so close, Ryou forced himself to remain calm. This was it. He needed to play the role right. The police would soon notice he was off-killer and that would set off a chain, resulting in the police waiting to capture him at the rented property.

He heard the killer take a step closer, still remaining cloaked in the darkness. "Follow my orders or I will kill you now. You’re going to stand up and walk into this alley way. Any sudden movements and I will shoot."

Ryou inhaled, forcing himself to nod shakily. He resisted the urge to frown, his mind already racing. He knew it was Pegasus waiting, but something sounded off. His voice sounded similar enough, but the inflection was off. Likely, he was disguising his voice and, truth be told, Ryou had never heard him speak seriously – only in giggly squeals. It was really the perfect cover, if he thought about it.

Ryou froze, hand hovering over the watch. He forced himself to take a slow, steady breath, despite his heart rampaging in his chest. He didn’t dare to hope, uncertain whether it was good fortune or terrible luck that he should run into him now. Ryou swallowed hard, shifting his head slightly so he could catch a glimpse into the shadows..."We’re going to play a little game. How does that sound?"

His voice was soft and light, hoping that it sounded meek enough that the killer didn’t notice that it was a male speaking. Jack the Ripper chuckled, the sound sending a chill down his spine. “We’re going to play a little game. How does that sound?”

Ryou swallowed, shaking his head. They were still moving too fast. The questions weren’t slowing his pace. Would a struggle be too risky? Ryou knew they were only two blocks away. He didn’t have time to reconsider.

Ryou jerked away, hoping it was enough to confuse Jack the Ripper but not enough to anger him into shooting. To his surprise, he actually broke free of his grasp. The shock of this startled Ryou enough that he didn’t have time to think of running away. That he should run away. He heard Jack...
the Ripper swear, a shadow quickly darting towards him.

Ryou stumbled backwards, turning as he tried to put some distance between them. He barely got a few steps away when he felt a hand wipe at his hair. The hard yank caused Ryou to fall forward, the detective crying out at the hair being pulled. His head hit the pavement, the pain distracting Ryou long enough to realize his scalp no longer hurt.

It was that moment that Ryou saw his own white hair falling forward around his face.

Before Ryou could even move, Jack the Ripper pinned him to the ground, his knee digging into his back. Ryou gasped, swearing for his own stupidity. The damn wig! "Shit!" he swore, trying to twist away, but he felt the murderer tug as his white hair, whisking for a moment.

"What do we have here? I go searching for a little birdie and instead I catch a little bunny in my trap."

"Fuck you!" he muttered, ignoring the barrel that rested against the back of his neck. The charade was falling apart and Ryou was pashed at himself for screwing up.

"I'd watch what you say if I were you, Detective Ryou."

Ryou's breath caught, his heart rampaging in his chest. In that moment, he realized it was over. In the end, there would be no escape for him now, not when the killer finally had the man who hunted him at gunpoint.

But that didn't mean Ryou intended to accept his death just yet.

Time seemed to come to a halt; Ryou's mind racing to make a plan. He wasn't stronger than Jack the Ripper, but Ryou considered himself to be smarter. He would use his intellect and wit to keep himself alive long enough for the police to find him. It was a lot to ask of Kaiba, but he knew Malik could do it. He could find his trail and catch the killer. Pegasus wouldn't have anywhere to run so they would need to follow the breadcrumbs that Ryou was already planning.

He twisted his head around, trying to glare at Jack the Ripper from his periphery. "What do you intend to do now? You must be aware that a singular gunshot now will have the police flocking towards us."

The killer snorted. "I was wondering where you were keeping your friends. I imagine they have this area on lock down. They can't possibly know where I'm headed next... Unless..."

Ryou couldn't see much in the darkness, but he could see Jack the Ripper smile, his white teeth gleaming brightly. "You didn't try struggling even when I was leading you to the slaughter. Even when you broke free, you didn't try to run. Not really."

He chuckled, leaning in close to his ear. "Wouldn't be interesting if you already knew where my next murder was planned?"

Ryou glanced away, scowling. His breath caught in his throat, the words catching. If he tried denying such claim, Jack the Ripper would see through him. But his silence served as confirmation regardless.

Ryou twisted, still struggling as he realized everything was starting to fall apart. He knew it was futile, the weight of the man above him pinning him into the cold stones. He winced as the killer snapped the chain around Ryou's neck against his chin, holding it tight. A bit more pressure and the chain would snap.

"You can consider yourself lucky, detective. You'll get to live a few more hours before I can finally kill you. I can't dawdle here any longer," the killer whispered, amusement tinging his voice. He didn't seem annoyed by any of the events surrounding them, instead relishing the capture of the detective leading the investigation against him.

Ryou felt himself lurch, the killer tossing him over his shoulder. He tried writhing to force him to break free and escape. But that didn't mean Ryou intended to accept his death just yet.

"If you know you're surrounded, then what good would running do now? They will catch you if they see you fleeing with another person," Ryou hissed, trying to think of something, anything, to break free and escape.

"My dear detective, you don't give me enough credit. You haven't figured it out yet?" Ryou frowned, staring at the stones below him. His eyes were starting to adjust to the darkness.

Despite how the blood rushing to his head was making him dizzy, a thought crossed Ryou's mind. He remembered Isis and how she became tied to the case. He initially wrote it off as a struggle. But that didn't mean Ryou intended to accept his death just yet. He twisted away, trying to see the killer. Jack the Ripper moved quickly, hiding their tracks before slipping away.

Despite the killer's best efforts, Ryou noticed something's about his frame. Though cloaked in black, not all could be disguised by the night. Even in the darkness, Ryou noticed the golden eye sitting at the center of his forehead and the distinct glow of lavender gems that disappeared the moment the grate closed.
In that moment, Ryuou's heart stopped. Any hope of escape seemed impossible as the night sky was blocked. What's worse was the revelation that they had the wrong man. Pegasus had been nothing more than a red herring, used throw off the scent. Ryuou knew the truth, but what good would it do if no one knew who the true enemy was?

Jack the Ripper cackled, kneeling down to pull Ryuou up by his hair. Ryuou cried out, fumbling to his knees. He took in a shaky breath, the killer's laugh mocking his pain.

"Finally pieced it together there, eh Ryuou?"

Ryuou inhaled sharply, glaring venomously through slit eyes. He ignored the stinging pain in scalp, unbridled hatred finally taking grasp of him. "Namu, you bastard..."

Malik didn't want to stay in the flat.

Every fiber wanted to run out and escape the almost suffocating darkness. They had a candle lit to provide a little lighting, but they didn't want Jack the Ripper to realize they had already accessed his estate. They needed to remain hidden until it was too late.

Despite knowing this, Malik wanted to light everything on fire in the tiny bedroom. At least then there would be some light.

Malik forced himself to take a slow breath, staring at the flickering fire. Though small, it cast gruesome shadows along the wall, horrid fiends only found in the darkness. The room reminded him too much of his childhood. It reminded him of when he was a young boy, pressed against the floor to spot the light that slipped in. It was a brief escape from the encompassing darkness around him.

Malik shook his head. Even now, he couldn't escape his fears. He had figured when he got older, he would finally outrun such childish terrors and learn to move past them. He felt ashamed for his own weakness. Perhaps he was doomed to a life of discomfort.

Well, perhaps not. He found himself at ease with Ryuou. His partner knew of his fear of the darkness and didn't mind letting light shine over them while they slept. Ryuou provided a sense of comfort in his life, one that had been long absent.

Which was why Malik refused to let his fear keep him immobile now. Ryuou was putting both his career and safety on the line to save Malik's sister. Malik would make sure everything goes right on their end. There would be no mistakes.

Malik stepped closer to the flame, ignoring the other officers standing alert alongside the wall. He pulled out a watch, frowning at the time. They had been waiting for five minutes already. That meant Ryuou had been missing for ten minutes now. Though seemingly brief, Malik felt a twinge of worry pass through him.

"This is taking a while," he muttered, turning to Duke.

Even in the darkness, the officer's green eyes glowed like cat eyes at night. "The killer may be trying to cover his tracks. We have him surrounded. Even if he doesn't come here, he will run into the police."

Malik narrowed his eyes. Was he surrounded? They tried to cover their tracks, not allowing for any escape but this was the infamous Jack the Ripper. No one had seen him commit a murder and he'd always vanished before anyone could lay eyes on him. Malik wouldn't call it witchcraft, but he sensed that the killer would anticipate the police narrowing in on him. In fact, he suspected that the murderer knew this would happen and had a contingent plan in case such a situation would rise.

Malik's paranoia consumed him. But he knew his instincts had been right before. He knew the killer was tied to his sister's kidnapping. He knew the evidence tied Pegasus to the crime. He knew that Ryuou could be trusted and would do anything to capture the madman.

Malik supposed the detective had rubbed off on him more than he realized.

"I'm going out." Malik decided, tightening the holster to the small pistol at his side. He wasn't sure how he felt about having a weapon, but he knew it was foolish to refuse one on such a dangerous mission.

He felt Duke grab his arm, holding him in place. "You can't. Kaiba ordered us to hold our post."

Malik smirked. "He ordered you guys to do that. Last I checked, I'm not a police officer."

Duke's expression darkened. "Are you trying to get killed?"

"Hardly. But something's wrong. Ryuou is taking too long. We should begin sweeping now."

Duke shook his head. "I'll alert him to our presence and he'll try running."

"What if he already knows? He'll be trying to make his escape now."

Malik argued back, hands resting at his waist. He peered out the window into the darkness cloaking the city.

Duke growled, lowering his hand. He brushed back his bangs. "You're heading out there no matter what, aren't you?"

Malik shrugged. "I have a reputation for being a bit stubborn."

Duke pursed his lips, thinking through his options. He sighed, walking towards the door. "Fine. But I'm coming with you. We'll take a peak around the block and then head back."

Malik didn't say anything. He allowed his silence to be his answer, as if complying to Duke's request. He decided to withhold the fact that he would chase down the killer if it came down to it.

Despite the lack of light in the apartment, the darkness outside seemed blacker than ever before. It was overcast, blocking out any chance the moon and stars had of lighting up the city. Malik forced himself to pause for a moment after rounding the corner, the night suffocating him.

He needed to get over his fear. It was his idea to come out here and search for the killer. He wanted to run out into the streets, where at least the lamps provided light, but Malik could sense something was wrong.

Perhaps he was acting like an old woman, but every instinct told him he needed to be outside searching for the killer.

Malik took his time, carefully checking around each corner for any movements or shadows that might be out of place. He found himself falling into a pattern, scouting each block carefully before
moving on to the next one. Even Duke followed along, parallel to Malik as he silently searched alongside to him.

As if in defiance to Malik's fears, each alleyway stretched as empty as the one before it. Despite his best efforts, it was as if the killer had vanished. Malik knew they hadn't covered half of the area, but he felt his hopes fall. Perhaps he was just paranoid. But the silent streets echoing with their footsteps sent another chill down his spine.

Why had Malik not heard anything?

It was as if they were truly alone but Malik knew that couldn't be right. Ryō should be with the killer. There should be some sign, visual or aural, of their presence, but everything around Malik echoed empty.

The unsettling truth started to dawn on Malik when he heard Duke hiss at him. He snapped his head up, scampering quietly towards where he last saw the officer. The grave look on his face clued Malik in to the horrible revelation.

"Malik. " Duke's voice was gentle, patronizing even, the officer licking his lips. Duke's hands shook around the clue clenched in his white fingers. Malik frowned, his breath growing short. He didn't look at the officer beside him, his eyes locked on the mess of brown hair clenched in his hands. A wig.

Ryō's wig.

"Shit. He figured it out, " Malik whispered, his heart threatening to break free of his rib cage.

"But how? " Duke asked, shaking his head in a mixture of disbelief and horror.

Malik felt himself grow angry, no, furious. He let this happen. He let Ryō use himself as bait. They didn't keep a good enough eye on him. He...

Malik jerked his head away, fury etched in his face. "It doesn't matter! We have to find him. Report to Kaiba. Now. We need to start sweeping immediately. We might still be able find him!"

Duke stepped back in shock, still now processing what had transpired. Malik growled, gripping him by his shoulder before shoving him back, forcing him to move. "Go!"

Duke broke out of the stupor, turning heel as he raced to inform Kaiba of their failed plans. Left alone, Malik felt the world caving in on him. He forced himself to breathe, hand against the brick wall to steady himself.

Jack the Ripper had Ryō. And his sister. Malik felt as if the world was taking everyone important away from him. He had thrown himself into the case, heedless of the risk to himself or others so long as Isis was saved. Never had he thought he could experience this wretched pain again, his heart unable to bear the weight of it all.

Tears burned in his eyes, but Malik would not let them fall. Even if Jack the Ripper escaped, he couldn't go back to his estate. If Kaiba was smart, they would seize Pegasus's manor. They would hunt him down like the rat he was. Malik refused to let this murderer walk away victorious. He would find him and he would save his and Ryō.

Malik buried his own grief, anger moving his feet forward. No more hiding in the shadows. He would drag Jack the Ripper away from the darkness, and Malik would make certain that he paid for all of crimes.
As a child, Ryou loved myths and fables.

His father had been a publisher and had an intense love of literature and books. And although Ryou enjoyed reading, it was the legends and stories of the impossible that gripped his imagination. While Amane asked to hear the story of Handel and Gretel again, Ryou was devouring the harrowing journey of Odysseus back to Ithaca yet again.

He supposed that he enjoyed the escapism aspect of reading, imagining himself as Perseus facing the Minotaur or fancying himself as Herakles, strength unmatched. But there was something about these Greek myths that spoke depth about the human condition. While these stories were intended to explain how and why the world worked around them, Ryou read his own meaning into them, intended or not.

And of all the legends that he read, his favorite was the story of Orpheus. The tale of a beautiful, young woman, in the prime of her youth, suddenly stolen away by death. Hades emerging from the underworld, stealing her away from the land of the living. So motivated by his grief and despair, his lover Orpheus makes a desperate plight to save her. And how despite all his valiant attempts, he fails and loses her for eternity.

When Ryou lost his entire family, he found himself drawn to the legend. He thought of his little sister, so young and bright and lively, wasted away as a corpse from the same disease that should have killed him. Instead, the god of the dead stole her and his parents always, leaving him to grieve their lost.

Death always felt like a close shadow to Ryou, always present yet always out of reach. And much like Orpheus, nothing he could do would bring them back. They had been lost forever to the void, and Ryou was sharply aware of his loneliness.

Not many people take interest in myths. Outside of historians seeking to preserve this knowledge, those stories were often swept away as children's fables. So when a mysterious serial killer started to sweep the streets of Whitechapel, leaving cryptic messages in dead languages, Ryou felt an old spark. He felt that burning intrigue of discovering a new myth unfolding.

That was why Ryou enjoyed his work as a detective. He liked to solve mysteries and piece together these enigmatic narratives around him.

But more than that, Jack the Ripper offered him a challenge. A challenge to defeat death at his own game. Unlike Orpheus, Ryou could save his Eurydice from Hades himself. He felt compelled to rewrite this narrative and rescue those he once could not save from this hidden enemy. Jack the Ripper truly felt like a god of death himself, cloaked in darkness and stealing from the living.

Ryou thought he could triumph over death.

But Hades was not a dark figure. He was incandescent, bold, unapologetic. His hair like a golden mane, framing his manic expression. Though death hid in shadows, it's god shone as radiant as the sun.

Ryou wasn't living the tale of Orpheus but rather of Icarus. Jack the Ripper was like the searing light of the sun, and Ryou had flown too close. His wings had fallen apart and now he descended into hell itself.

Ryou didn't remember when he had fallen unconscious. He remembered being blinded and hoisted back up, being led through a maze of tunnels. As he blinked open his eyes, lips dried and throat parched, he knew that he was no longer in the sewer by scent alone.

Where he was, he had no idea.

He looked around, brows furrowed at the plain room. He noticed the metal frame of a broken bed, chains hanging off its legs as well as a few off the wall. Everything was an off-white color, though Ryou didn't want to examine the dark stains on the floor. Whether it was blood or some other bodily fluid, he didn't want to find out.

Ryou forced himself to sit up, noticing the chain tightened around his ankle. He yanked at the metal, noticing how it only extended a few feet away from the wall. He knew he had no chance of breaking the chain, the cold metal chilling him even through the stockings.

Ryou frowned, mind trying to process his surroundings. The first thing he needed to figure out was how to escape, and it wouldn't help if he had no idea where he was. There was one small window in the room. Ryou contemplated using it to affirm his location, but the window was fogged and crossed with iron bars that served to remind him of his imprisonment. He wouldn't even be able to slip through the bars to escape if he wanted to.

Ryou sighed, glating straight as he leaned back against the wall. He knew his captor would be back soon. And with no grates or windows he could escape through, his only means of escape would be the locked door in front of him. So he needed to get this chain off of him, unlock the door, and slip away unseen.

These were tasks easier said than done.

Ryou had to assume that the police would not find him. If he wanted to live, he needed to use every resource at his disposal to get out. Of course, being chained to the wall limited him to what he had around him in this small area. It didn't give him much to work with, regretfully.

Ryou glanced down, noticing that he still wore the dress from before. Though not fond of the material, perhaps he had more in hand than he initially thought.

Ryou didn't have time to act when he heard the metal clink of the lock. He flinched as the weighted door screeched open. A sudden light flooded the room, his guest slamming the door shut, lantern held high. The smirk he gave him was all teeth, a sense of delight emanating from the killer.
Ryou knew it was pointless, but he struggled against the chain boiling him to the wall. He didn't want to be seen as submissive or weak. As he drew closer, Ryou scowled, his disgust made plain across his face. "Name."

"In the flesh." He towered over Ryou, setting the lantern down so he could observe his prey.

Ryou snorted, eyes watching Namu carefully. They exchanged glares like two wary cats about to launch into a scuffle. "Any reason why I'm still alive? Can't kill a coworker?"

Namu cackled, a deliriously manic noise. It was as if the mask of annoyance and bond indifference had finally fallen off now that Ryou knew the truth. No longer did Namu have to keep up appearances as the exhausted coroner, but he took pleasure in the power he held over the man trying to catch him. They had played a hunter's game, only now Ryou became the hunted.

"Don't flatter yourself. The police have gotten themselves in a tizzy over your disappearance. Kaiba will want any and all information I can provide on the victims. I need to scope out what they know in case I need to throw them off scent. Once I'm certain I'm not a suspect, I can kill you off with no consequences."

Ryou felt his stomach give an uneasy lurch. A mere delay of his death was a huge boon but he felt a desperation consume him, realizing he lived on borrowed time.

Ryou lowered his head, his short white hair framing his face. He chuckled to himself. "Can I even trust that you did your job right? What would have kept you from falsifying the autopsy reports?"

Namu gasped mockingly. "Detective Ryou! I'm hurt you would think so poorly of me. Why would I deprive you the opportunity to learn the full extent of my craftsmanship?"

Namu grinned, a gleam in his eye. "As for the dead languages, well, I knew you had a fanciful mind and were desperate. I thought I'd have some fun watching you puzzle over those. Anything that led you to snatch at any other possible suspects would lead you away from me."

Ryou narrowed his eyes, glancing away. He had been so desperate to create some narrative, to make some meaning out of this mystery, that he was trying to make sense of myths and legends. He had thought the killer was leaving him secret letters, a shared sense of wit and drama that drew them closer. Dore had said, Ryou almost felt some sort of kinship with this madman, believing him to be far more intelligent and clever than the average man.

How the mighty had fallen from their pedestal. Ryou had placed too much hope in epic history. Reality was far more grounded.

Ryou narrowed his eyes, anger boiling within him. "So you've been mocking me from the shadows, watching me struggle to find you. Did you enjoy the show? Was it all worth it?"

He glanced up, noticing the hungry grin on Namu's face. Namu pulled out a knife and twirled it lazily in his hand. "Well, you know what they say. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." His grin widened. "And you already know that I don't have any friends."

Namu knelt down, his eyes bright and glowing in the harsh light. The lantern cast gruesome shadows across the room, making everything seem more harsh and cruel in Ryou's mind. Ryou pressed against the wall, trying to maintain some space between him and his captor. He forced himself to breathe steadily, unflinchingly glaring back at his captor.

Namu chuckled. "You seem dissatisfied. Were you hoping this would end differently?"

Ryou narrowed his eyes. The question was rhetorical, though his thoughts still flew. The investigative part of him wanted to deconstruct the myth evolving in his life. He needed to understand the motives of a demon to make sense of this horror story.

"No, I was just thinking why? What devils have driven you to this end?" Ryou asked quietly.

Namu didn't answer, raising an eyebrow at his prey. Ryou tilted his head, studying the man before him.

"You were hurt as a child. Your father... he was relentless. Abuse... It's shaped you into who are now. It's why you lash out now. But why?"

Ryou kept talking, the pieces floating just out of reach. "Is this all some sort of means of taking back control? And the prostitutes? Perhaps he abused a whore he rented... You would have been impressionable as a child... Abuse victims often avoid situations where they are powerless... Is this just a play for pow-"

Namu smiled, a gleam in his eye. "As for the dead languages, well, I knew you had a fanciful mind and were desperate. I thought I'd have some fun watching you puzzle over those. Anything that led you to snatch at any other possible suspects would lead you away from me."

"You still don't get it. How disappointing."

Ryou frowned, still confused. Before he could ask, Namu hiked up the skirt. A moment later, Namu's knife flashed, plunging downward into the exposed leg. Ryou watched as the blade sunk into his thigh, seeing it disappear into flesh before the pain registered.

Reality was far more grounded.

"Tell me, detective. Did I just stab you because of my abusive father?"

Ryou's eyes fluttered open, staring hazily at the gray floor beneath him. He struggled to catch his breath, suddenly feeling as if he couldn't get enough air. Namu turned his knife away, not moving deeper but dragging it along the skin to create a shallow ravine, Ryou jerking as the pain continued to spread like scars splintering down a tree by lightning.

"Tell me, detective. Did I just stab you because of my abusive father?"

Ryou pushed himself up, his eyes wild and unfocused. "Namu..."

Namu shook his head.

"The police have gotten themselves in a tizzy over your disappearance. Kaiba will want any and all information I can provide on the victims. I need to scope out what they know in case I need to throw them off scent. Once I'm certain I'm not a suspect, I can kill you off with no consequences."

Ryou glared at him, his expression a mix of anger and confusion. "Namu..."

Namu chuckled. "You seem dissatisfied. Were you hoping this would end differently?"

Ryou narrowed his eyes, his expression hardening. "Tell me, what's this all about?"

Namu didn't answer, raising an eyebrow at his prey. Ryou tilted his head, studying the man before him.

"You were hurt as a child. Your father... he was relentless. Abuse... It's shaped you into who are now. It's why you lash out now. But why?"

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"Or is it perhaps my mother was a whore and that's why I kill prostitutes?" Namu's voice was light and curious, almost teasing. He let out a loud cackle, laughing at his own joke. "Or maybe I fancy myself some dark god over the weak, eh? A coping mechanism to regain control in my life?"

Ryou panted, finding it difficult to consider all of his theories as pain consumed his mind. He was aware of Namu making light of all of his hypotheses. Months of research, of trying to deduce motives and understand why the killer acted as he did added up to nothing.

He left clues to mock the detective at his work, not as an actual reflection of his true character.

"So is this some sort of game?" Ryou spat out, the only thing that made sense in his muddled deduction.

Ryou glanced up, his face only inches away the killer. Namu gave him a manic grin.

"I killed those people because I could."

Ryou felt the mystery unravel around him. The all enigmatic air surrounding Jack the Ripper finally disappeared as he finally saw his true character. It was not how he imagined it all unfold, with himself chained and at the mercy of his captor. He had tried to find the source of all the suffering. The mystery of what drove a man to commit such atrocities. The questions on what hardships and trials the madman suffered to justify his actions. These very ideas drove Ryou to the truth.

In the end, there was no justice. Only madness.

Ryou lowered his head, a noise bubbling in his chest. Before he could stop himself, he started to laugh, free and unchecked. There was something almost liberating in the act, urging Ryou to laugh even harder to the dark ceiling.

Namu leaned back, scowling at his victim. "Why are you laughing?"

Ryou shook his head, a smile growing on his face. "This whole time, I thought all the clues left behind were indication of some genius, revealing something deeper into your mind."

Ryou snorted, finally meeting the suspicious lavender eyes. "But it turns out that there's no greater meaning. You hurt people and that's it. No tormented genius, no tortured artist, nothing."

Ryou smirked, shaking his head pityingly. "I hate to admit it, but you're ordinary and banal. How disappointing."

Ryou could see how his words angered Namu, the veins bulging in his neck. Ryou felt no fear, a strange sense of detachment as he inadvertently upset a deranged killer. He didn't even flinch when he felt a hand grip his throat, thumb pressing just hard enough that it hurt to breathe.

Ryou locked eyes with Namu, studying his face. He noticed how his nose was knobby, as if it had been broken and mended. A thin slice at the corner of his eyebrow prevented the fine, golden hairs growing back neatly. The more Ryou watched him, the less impervious he seemed. Each mark that marred his face made him seem less like a god carved in marble, but rather a man crafted in clay, cracking and crumbling under the weight of his own humanity.

This entire hunt for Jack the Ripper had been like chasing after a god. He was elusive, careful, and so cruel that it seemed unearthly. Ryou wanted to catch this deity and bring him down to earth. When he felt all hope stolen away from him, he truly felt mortal. He was at the mercy of a vengeful god.

But in that moment, Ryou realized that Jack the Ripper was no god. He was painfully human - flawed and dull.

And that was both a comfort and a fear.

Ryou wasn't dealing with some omnipotent god, unouchable and vexing. The air of mystery surrounding this infamous serial killer seemed to dissipate. And now he saw him for what he was, not how he wanted to be viewed. Gods couldn't be made to stand against human justice. Namu could not escape his earthly fate.

But Ryou was all too familiar with how cruel and malicious humans were. He only needed to reflect on his own life experiences and what he had witnessed thus far into the case. It was cruel to take a life, but the precise method that Namu used in torturing his victims before finally letting them die was worse than what any cruel god could inflict in Ryou's life. Namu was one of the damned, turning his back to the gods.

What Namu was capable of was truly disturbing and gave reason for fear.

Namu's hand tightened around his neck, cutting off his air. Ryou gasped, panic clenching his chest. He raised both hands, trying to pry away his grip and find his breath. His eyes searched desperately the face before him, knowing even then he would find no mercy.

At the last second, Namu let go, leaving Ryou to collapse in. He gasped grateful breathes, the blood rushing in his head as he fought to see straight. He was only just regaining awareness when he felt the knife pulled from his leg, causing a new fresh sting of pain. He cried out, still dizzy as he gripped his leg.

Namu narrowed his eyes, reaching into his coat pocket to pull out a needle and thread. Some stupid voice in Ryo's head praised the killer's change of heart, but Ryou knew better than to expect kindness. Left unnoticed, Ryou could bleed out before Namu returned. And lord forbid Ryou deprive his captor the opportunity of choking out his life.

The stitches were jagged and uneven, a quick fix to keep Ryou from bleeding out. Namu snorted, a smile flicking across his face. "I don't want you to die so quickly. That would just ruin my day, after all. The benefits of being a doctor is knowing how resilient the human body is and where to draw the line."

Ryou bit his lip, his stomach squeezing at the thought. He didn't want to give Namu the chance to display his medical knowledge. The careful tightrope between pain and death terrified Ryou, his heart clenching. Namu wasn't merciful - he was indulgent.

Namu stood up, his voice a low rumble. "Next time I won't be so kind. I intend to enjoy skinning you alive. I'll make you suffer and relish every second of it."

Ryou stared at his feet, not looking up. He knew that Namu would likely dissect him as he did his other victims. He didn't want to think of the unimaginable pain. He watched Namu leave, the killer humming lightly to himself.

As soon as the door closed, Ryou leaned his head back against the cool stone. Fear served no
purpose, despite how it tried to claim his heart. He was aware he likely would die in a few hours, his corpse to be discovered days later.

But Ryou didn't want to die yet.

Without a second thought, Ryou reached down, shaking off the heavy skirt. He grabbed the off-white garments, tearing it to shreds to bind his wound. Namu stitched the wound, but Ryou needed to give himself every advantage he could get. He wrapped the cloth around the stitches, red seeping through the cloth, though the bleeding seemed to slow. Though not personally comfortable with women's clothes, Ryou realized the various assets on his side that might prolong his life.

Ryou smirked, reaching into his hair. As expected, he found a few bobby pins still in there. He looked down at the dress, pulling away the pins that helped hide the lack of curves in his masculine body. Ryou knew he didn't have Malik's skills, but their conversation about lockpicks still hung in his mind. Malik had let himself into his flat enough times that Ryou was curious about it.

He would teach himself now, like Malik taught himself how to escape as a child. His life depended on it and Ryou worked well under pressure.
Malik paced outside the interrogation room. After the police force combed the perimeter and all surrounding areas for hours, Ryoo and Jack the Ripper were nowhere to be seen. Kaiba didn’t need any word of mouth to order his officers to seize Pegasus’s manor.

But to everyone’s surprise, Pegasus was there asleep.

That should have been a warning in some way. Something about this felt completely off. Everything seemed to be falling apart, but Malik didn’t know how or why. Ryoo had been certain of Pegasus’s guilt. Hence why Kaiba was laying into him behind the closed door. If anyone could get a confession out of his impossible boss, it would be an extremely angry and irate Kaiba.

Probably for the best that Kaiba forbade Malik from revealing himself to Pegasus. It took everything in Malik to slow down his heart rate, his mind buzzing. The fact that the man responsible for kidnapping his sister and his lover sat just beyond the door was agony. He knew if he entered that room, he likely would pummel Pegasus until he was a bloody pulp and Malik was jobless.

Still, it was torture to wait. He had been outside for near an hour. He couldn’t sleep. He knew he couldn’t sleep. Not when every second counted and the chances of Ryoo and Isis both still breathing was fading quickly.

Malik snapped his head up as Kaiba left the room, closing the door behind him. The commissioner stared straight ahead, anger etched into every feature of his face. Malik pushed off the wall, rushing over towards him. “Where are they?”

Kaiba raised a hand, pressing a knuckle against his lips. He didn’t respond as his eyes stared at something unforeseen.

“Where’s he hiding them?!” Malik demanded, a desperate edge to his voice.

“He’s not,” Kaiba replied, his voice dipping low as he shook his head slightly.

Malik felt his heart drop at those words. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t see, he couldn’t do anything. He felt his vision grow dark, feeling trapped in his mind and unable to lockpick his way out. He thought there had been a chance. He thought… “You mean, he—”

Kaiba dropped his hand, clenching it into a fist. “He confessed quickly upon my entering the room. But not to any of the murders.”

Malik blinked, inhaling a shaky breath. His eyes focused momentarily, meeting icy blue. “Wait, what?”

Kaiba sighed, stepping away to head towards his office with Malik at his heels. “He had been selling off rare Egyptian artifacts for his own profit. He was terrified at having been caught and gave me a list of all the antiquities sold for his own personal gain. But when I pressed him about the Whitechapel murders, I realized he couldn’t be our killer. He handed over everything—according to his datebook, he was out of the country on the night of three of the murders.”

Kaiba held up the agenda in question. Outside of Kaiba’s office, Duke stood waiting, gray shadows hanging under their eyes. Nobody had gotten any sleep last night after the detective was taken hostage. “Duke, contact the individuals in all of these meetings, including the ones overseas. We need to verify whether he made these trips and if his alibi checks out.”

Malik was still in shock, the words not registering in his mind. He thought about the missing artifacts; the scepter, the pin Ryoo found in Pegasus’s manor. Mysteries laid before them yet the most important one remained unanswered. Malik stepped into the office after Kaiba, who didn’t bother closing the door. He seemed to resign himself to his presence. “Wait— are you telling me that Pegasus isn’t Jack the Ripper?”

Kaiba sighed. “So it would appear. At least, it seems unlikely.”

Malik couldn’t feel relief or disappoint at this. It was like Kaiba told him the truth but he refused to accept this reality. That meant that they had been wrong. That meant they didn’t have any other leads and with Ryoo missing, nobody to solve this mystery.

Without him, they couldn’t figure out who the true killer was.

“Then what do we do now? We have to find them!” Malik demanded, desperate for some sort of direction.

Kaiba sank down into his chair, his fingers digging into his hair. Malik had never seen the commissioner so exhausted. His usual neat and well-kept appearance was starting to slip, his control over the situation unravelling.

“I don’t know. Ryoo was our best bet at finding the killer. We put all our eggs in that basket and now we’ve failed.”

“So we’re going to let them die?”

Kaiba pinned him with a tired gaze, a sense of terror and agitation spreading in the room. “They could already be dead for all we know! It’s over! Jack the Ripper got the ace on us and we have no leads. The one suspect we had was a false lead! We have nothing!”

Malik felt the same rage and panic that had consumed him in the alleyway. The one that made him stop and unable to act. An overwhelming sense of defeat threatened to swallow him. He pulled out the photo of his sister, hand trembling as he tried not to crumple it. He didn’t even have a single picture of Ryoo to remember him by, yet his body felt the imprint Ryoo left on him.

Malik didn’t think before he acted. He grabbed a small statuette on Kaiba’s desk. It looked like some sort of lizard but he didn’t have time to observe as he chucked it into the corner of the room.

“Where’s he hiding them?!” Malik demanded, a desperate edge to his voice.

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Malik licked his lips. "I'll solve it."

Kaiba stared at him, uncomprehending. "What?"

Malik stood up straight, shoving himself away from the desk. "The case. Jack the Ripper is not going to steal everything away from me. I've had it up to fucking here with him. We've come too far for it end like this."

Kaiba frowned, eyes narrowing. "Malik, we have no other leads and we're running out of time."

"I don't care!" Malik snapped, raising his voice. He shook still, knowing that he was this close to falling apart but he couldn't. Not yet. Not when Ryou still counted on him.

Malik paused, an odd thought crossing his mind. Ryou relied on him. For so long, he felt as if he needed the detective, but the idea that he was there for Ryou, that he could reciprocate the help he had received, seemed foreign. Ryou had staked everything on this case. He had done everything he could. And he could almost hear Ryou chiding him to stop lazing about and do his end of the work.

Ryou had always put him to work on the case. Even from the beginning, when Malik insisted on being part of the case, Ryou never once shot him down, but accepted his aid without question. Malik had feared he would be dead weight, but Ryou never doubted him for a moment. Ryou counted on him.

And Malik refused to let him down.

Malik turned back to meet Kaiba's gaze. Despite how he struggled to keep his breath steady, his voice was even and clear. "Please. We have nothing to lose – let me pick up where Ryou left off and finish this for good."

Kaiba didn't move, his eyes locked with Malik's. A strange calm fell over them, an acceptance of their fate. This was their judgment day, where they would finally catch the killer or fail and he would escape for good. The gloves were off and neither were willing to accept defeat.

In that moment, Kaiba didn't need to speak. Malik already knew his response.

"Tristan's in charge of building management. He'll have a spare key to Ryou's office. Second floor."

Malik nodded, releasing a breath he didn't realize he was holding. He didn't have a second to waste. He knew that Ryou would be counting on him to figure out the last piece to this puzzle. He knew Ryou wouldn't give up the challenge until the last second. And neither would Malik.

Until they were both in his arms again, Malik wouldn't rest until he found them.

Ryou swore as his hand slipped, snagging against the metal. He pulled it back, sucking on the cut for a moment. He had been working on the lock from the moment Namu left and had broken four hairpins thus far. The chain was a bit different from the door lock that Malik had told him about and thus stickier to figure out.

But Ryou didn't have time to complain.

He smiled as he heard the gear fall loose. With careful attention, he slipped chain away, rubbing at his ankle. The metal had been rubbing him raw, the skin aching and red. Of all his injuries he had received thus far, this was the one that concerned him the least.

Ryou gritted his teeth as he shifted away from the chain, more to put distance between it and himself than anything else. His leg still throbbed from where Namu had stabbed him. He stared at the blood staining through the skirt. He scowled before tearing away the petticoats, until he was left in nothing but undergarments. A thin short skirt over a pair of drawers remained, the red sharply contrast the white linen.

Ryou shoved the heavy blue skirt away, his costume left in a dirty pile stained darker by his blood. His lips were dry and cracked, reminding Ryou of how long it had been and how thirsty he had become. He knew that losing blood had not been good given his current condition.

Freed and injuries accounted for, Ryou began the arduous task of standing up. The very act made him feel faint and weak, his head spinning. He used the wall to steady himself, not trusting himself to place any weight on his leg. It was only after he fully stood that he dared to step forward.

He nearly lost his footing, the pain screaming through his body. He stumbled forward, balancing himself on his left leg. He panted, trying to ignore the stabs the speckled his vision. If he was going to escape, he had to get a move on. He couldn't be weak now – not when his life depended on it most.

Ryou hobbled his way to the other side of the room, finally catching his breath as he pressed against the door. He still had a multitude of bobby pins. He was certain this door he could break his way out. He peeked through the small barred window into the hallway, trying to catch a glimpse to see if Namu was back. He knew he had some time, but he didn't want to take any chances.

Ryou had only taken a few of the pins out when a voice made him freeze. "Hello? Is someone there?"

Ryou felt panic seize him for a moment before he realized the voice was female. He pressed against the opening, glancing around. "Yes? Who is this?"

Ryou narrowed his eyes before settling on a door across from his. Another heavyset door with a small window. A pair of blue eyes met his, hair black as night with facial features too similar that it couldn't be anything less than family resemblance.

"I'm Isis. And you are?"

Ryou felt his mind racing, the cogs working. He smiled, raising his voice. He shook still, knowing that he was this close to falling apart but he couldn't. Not yet. Not when Ryou still counted on him.

"I'm Detective Ryou. Malik has been working with me to help catch Jack the Ripper and save you."

"Where is Malik? He's not here, is he? Is he okay?"

The mention of her brother caught her attention. "Where is Malik? He's not here, is he? Is he okay?"

Ryou shook his head. "Don't worry, he's safe. He's working with the police right now." Ryou...
assumed he was, given how much of a stubborn ass Malik was.

Isis sighed, a worried look crossing her face. "That's good, then. But what do we do now? I don't think Namu will likely let you live, detective."

Ryou, despite the gravity of it all, chuckled. "No, I doubt he will… You're familiar with Namu?"

Ryou already knew the answer from Malik, but he waited to hear from his sister to better understand their past connection. Isis frowned. "Of course I do. We were old childhood friends. I was shocked to find out that the man who tried to murder me was an old companion."

"So why did he target you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, why you? Was it for your knowledge of Egyptology? What information could he desire?" Ryou puzzled. He had postulated that was why Isis was taken hostage, but given that Namu didn't have any particular interest in ancient history, that seemed less likely. Perhaps it was a ruse to throw off his scent. He had done so in this case.

"I'm not sure what you mean. I've barely seen him outside of providing me food. I don't really know what he means to do or why I'm still alive. I suppose it's because we know each other, though I don't see why that has stopped him from killing me before."

Isis shook her head, a sad look crossing her face.

"Namu realized after choosing her in the dark that he knew her. Too risky to kill someone he knew, someone who could be tied to him. Her death would have been an outlier among his victims and would have drawn the most attention. But he couldn't let her go, now that she knew who he was."

Ryou started laughing, shaking his head. All this time, he had thought Jack the Ripper to be this immaculate genius. But as he found out from his conversation earlier with him, he learned he was less god and more human that he had realized. He hadn't kidnapped Isis, or at least he hadn't intended to. He never planned on killing her.

She was a mistake.

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Ryou frowned. That didn't make sense. Namu didn't request anything from Isis nor did he have anything to gain by keeping a hostage. His situation was far more precarious having kidnapped someone who knew him. So what was the point of it-

"Jack the Ripper made more mistakes than I realized. That's reassuring," Ryou muttered, a smile growing on his face. Perhaps if he was as imperfect as the rest of them, then this hairbrained scheme he was tossing around in his head just might work.

He turned back towards Isis, his mind racing. "Isis, are you chained up at all?"

She shook her head. "No. I've been left in this room for days now, but I can move about freely. Why?"

"I'm hatching an escape plan," Ryou explained, turning back towards the lock. He needed to get his door open first.

"How will we get out?"

"Isis blinked, a nervous flicker crossing her eyes. "What if he comes back?"

"We have a couple of hours at worst. He'll have business to tie up at the station before offing me,"

Ryou explained. He grinned when he felt the lock come undone. He was getting pretty good at this -- Malik and Bakura would be proud of him.

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"I held her breath, fear still evident. She seemed reluctant to anger her kidnapper, but they had no alternative. She couldn't remain prisoner here forever. "How will we get out?"

Ryou shook his head, scooting the door open slightly as he staggered across the hall. He wasted no time working on her lock. "Not us. You. I can't move fast enough, but you'll have enough time to get out and lead the police here. Especially if I buy us some time."

"I can't leave you here! It's too dangerous! I don't even know where here is!"

Ryou gave his best patented smile, reassuring and confident. "I can take care of myself. Don't worry. As for where we are, I have a fairly solid guess on that one as well."
"Are you sure you want to go with me now? I can always come back after I finish up at the police station."

Serenity shook her head. "It doesn't make sense for you to go all that way to come back for me. A short morning walk will do me some good."

She could hear her brother sigh, but he didn't comment further. Serenity imagined Joey was rolling his eyes at the moment. Still, she didn't enjoy being cooped up all day. The furthest she felt safe venturing outside was their garden and that only because it was gated.

Serenity never left home any more, since Joey was often between his job and house chores. She tried to help out where she could, but cleaning was difficult in a foreign kitchen. She was starting to build a physical memory of the place, but it would take more time before she could move at ease through the house.

It had been months and Serenity still struggled to get use to the life of the blind. One doesn't realize how much they depend on their sight in their daily life. Even as her other senses tried to compensate for the missing vision, she still found herself searching, desperate for a glimmer of light in her torn, scarred eyes.

She and Joey planned to see a doctor who had worked with a partially blind man. He was able to regain some of his lost sight and a pair of powerful glasses helped him get by. At this point, that's all Serenity hoped for. To just get by.

She felt guilty about burdening her brother so.

Serenity didn't like weighing down her brother, but she had little say in the matter. Unmarried and blinded, her prospects for marriage were slim and any hope of working in a factory taken away with her sight. Joey insisted that it was not an issue, knowing that she needed the support more than she would like to admit. He would joke about, saying that he always wanted an opportunity to spend more time with his little sister.

But she could hear him working late into the night.

So even though Serenity felt nervous about traveling around the city, she refused to make her brother's day longer by making him double back to fetch her. She could manage a quick detour to the hospital. Perhaps she could drop by and say hi to Ryou. He had been rather nice to talk to him again, despite the topic of discussion.

And Serenity secretly hoped to run into a certain commissioner. She hadn't had the chance to speak to him since…

Serenity was distracted by her thoughts as she heard Joey return, likely ready for their outing. She felt his fingers brush against her shoulders, Serenity turning as she took the shawl from her brother. Though spring was upon them, winter seemed to linger in England longer than most places.

She held out her hand, knowing that when Joey was ready, he would take hold and lead them both out. Serenity could feel the sun on her face even without her sight to guide her. She smiled, the city still fairly quiet this early in the morning. The cold air felt refreshing and rejuvenating, and the birds chirping resonated with her.

Their pace was leisurely, having departed with enough time to get to both appointments. For as disorganized and scatterbrained as Joey could be, he was extraordinarily timely. She supposed he'd have to be, being a clock smith.

Serenity smiled as she caught the scent of bread baking, making her mouth water even after having eaten. Joey's hand was warm and firm around her, assured in his touch as he guided them wordlessly through London. As her feet trailed down the cobblestone path, the soft chattering of the city waking surrounding her, Serenity could almost forget about her blindness, lost in the senses that filled the blanks for her.

Almost.

Serenity giggled, a memory flitting into mind. "Hey Joey, remember when we went to Brighton beach as kids?"

Joey hummed. "This was before mom died? Yeah, I remember that." He let out a soft chuckle. "It was a rather cold day."

Serenity nodded, a smile growing on her face. "It was September but it had gotten cold that one day, you insisted that it was still summer and wanted to go swimming."


Serenity shrugged. "I figured I'd let you test out the water for me. I'm certainly glad I did."

"That was a miserable day at the beach."

If Serenity could roll her eyes, she would have. "No one forced you to get in the water."

"Nobody stopped me either!" Joey exclaimed, growing indignant.

Serenity laughed, feeling lighter than she had in weeks. It was nice to relax and enjoy her brother's company and not think of the darker things in her life.

Joey slowed their pace. Serenity perked her head up, her heart skipping a beat. "We're at the precinct. Let's find you a place to rest while I fix that clock of theirs."

Serenity nodded, a burst of courage suddenly letting a question slip past her lips. "Could I perhaps say hi to Commissioner Kaiba? If he's not too busy, that is."

Joey didn't respond immediately as they approached the building. Serenity felt cold being shielded from the sun. "I don't see why not… is there a reason you wish to speak to him?"

Serenity hated the teasing tone in her brother's voice, heat rushing to her face. "I- I just want to see how he's doing. I haven't had a chance to speak to him in person since I left the hospital and I-"

She cut herself off, too embarrassed to go on in front of her brother.

A soft chuckle caught her ear, Joey struggling to restrain himself. "Of all the men in this city Serenity, why him?"
"Does that mean you won't introduce me?"

Joey huffed. "Never said that. Just wish you had better taste."

Serenity bit back a smile, feeling victorious over her brother. Though he teased and complained, she suspected that Joey didn't have any real ill intent towards the commissioner. Their personalities certainly clashed, but they respected each other. And Joey could never say not to his sister.

Serenity felt excitement bubble in her chest at the chance of seeing the commissioner again, trying to better mask her emotions. These elated thoughts flattered through her mind as she and Joey entered the precinct, the warm air greeting them. But, more than just warm, it was hot and rather humid, Serenity frowning at the sudden shift.

The calm, quiet morning was interrupted by the sound of a bustling office. Serenity wasn't sure, but she could feel the air turning around her and the footsteps and voices told her of how crowded the air was. The sudden onslaughter to her senses caught her off-guard, a panic rising in her chest. She brought her other free hand to grasp Joey's hand in both of hers, feeling disoriented in all the noise.

Joey tightened his grasp on Serenity, placing a free hand along her back to help guide her along. She furrowed her brows, caught between nervousness and frustration at her own handicap.

Wherever Joey was leading them, the noise seemed to follow them, the precinct much busier and more chaotic than usual. Serenity felt someone push past them, people brushing about leaving her lost. Joey guided her, assured in his steps. Serenity knew they reached Kaiba's office by the cool air.

Sitting in his office, the air was noticeably cooler. Serenity sat on the couch, Joey on the other side. Kaiba's presence was felt, as if he was in the room even though the door was closed.

"What the hell is going on here?" Serenity caught the muttered question from Joey. He seemed just as baffled and annoyed by the chaos around them, though she suspected it was for her sake more than anything.

A sharp voice cut through the rattle both siblings turning towards the source. "It's about time you got here, Mr. Wheeler."

Serenity perked up, recognizing the brusque voice. Joey huffed, likely a scowl already on his face. "Piss off, Kaiba! I'm seven minutes early. What the hell has got your station in a fit? Everyone's running about like chickens with their heads cut!"

Kaiba sighed heavily. "Things are rather stressful at the moment. Matters have taken a turn for the worst in one of our most important cases."

Despite the chaos around her, Serenity felt her heart jump to her throat. Ryou flashed in her mind before the words passed her lips. "Do you mean the Jack the Ripper case?"

Kaiba didn't reply immediately, Serenity turning to where he last spoke. The very man still struck fear into her, but ignorance terrified her more than the truth. She hated not being in the know, or for lack of better words, being in the blind.

"Serenity." Kaiba's voice was soft and placating. As if he didn't want to discuss the topic, knowing that it would likely upset her.

"I'm fine," she mumbled, her voice weak. Joey's grip tightened, forcing Serenity to speak the words again, stronger and firmer. "I'm okay. Just a bit lightheaded. It's rather warm in here."

She felt Joey's hands grip her, Serenity realizing that she had grown faint. Her brother held her close, trying to get her attention. She shook her head, stumbling as she regained her balance after having slumped into her brother's arms.

"I'm fine," she repeated, her voice gaining some strength. "I'm okay. I just got a bit lightheaded. It's rather warm in here."

"What the hell is going on here?" Serenity caught the muttered question from Joey. He seemed just as baffled and annoyed by the chaos around them, though she suspected it was for her sake more than anything.

"Maybe you should sit down for a bit. It's rather loud and hot right now."

Serenity nodded, feeling a blush burn on her cheeks. Sitting sounded wonderful, if only that it gave Joey some time away from watching her every move like a parent with a toddler. She needed to be away from the bustle of the office.

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She knew that Joey didn't believe her lie, but let it go nonetheless.

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Here." Joey took her by the elbow, gently urging her downward. She took the hint, her free hand reaching to her side until she felt the arm of the chair. She used that to help lower herself into the chair, relaxing into the soft cushion. It was a welcome reprieve from the whirlwind entrance into the police precinct.

"Will you be okay to wait here while I finish up the repairs?" Joey asked, his hand still holding hers.

Serenity nodded, her dizziness already fading. "I'll be fine. Go take care of business."

Joey grunted, but squeezed her hand briefly before letting go. The door slid open once more, the sound bouncing off her for a second before closing again. Only after her brother left did Serenity sink back into the chair, exhaustion muddling her mind. So early in the morning and already, the news she received hung like a dark shadow over all of them.

Serenity clenched her hands together, slow measured breaths calming her nerves. She wouldn't let herself panic now. The tears couldn't reach her and fear wouldn't help her in this situation. Commission Kaiba and the rest of the police would take care of the situation. They would find Ryu and stop…

The door swung up, the hinges creaking over the necks outside. Serenity jerked her head, instinct demanding that she search for the new guest. Before she could ask, a voice greeted her, low and gentle.

"It's just me, Serenity. Sorry to have startled you."

Serenity sighed, her cheeks warming. "It's alright. I wasn't expecting you to enter." She realized how stupid her statement sounded only after the fact. Of course Kaiba would go back to his office. Serenity should make herself scarce, not wishing to draw unwanted attention from peering eyes.

She paused when the door clicked shut. A soft shuffle drew closer to her and Serenity could sense Kaiba's presence near her. Serenity made to stand up, but Kaiba reached out a hand to rest on hers, a gentle command.

"You don't have to go. Rest. Nobody will bother you here." He reassured her, his hands an icy shock to her system.

Serenity could feel her ears burn but she nodded. She couldn't think of much to say, more preoccupied by the cold hand holding hers. The difference jarred her in how two people she trusted could feel so different. Joey's hands were always warm, even a little sweaty at times. There was comfort in that, an expression of who he was.

Kaiba was the opposite. His hands were always cold, like ice.

Perhaps it would be easy to write this off as a display of character. But Serenity didn't pay heed to the cold touch, rather the gentle hold he had on her. For someone who was usually so brusque, his touch served a buoy in the chaotic swirl to her senses, delicate and attentive to her needs.

Perhaps his hands were cold, but Serenity sensed that his heart was warm.

"Thank you," Serenity muttered, now feeling bashful that she was alone with Kaiba.

"It's no trouble. How have you been?" Kaiba asked, his voice still keeping its gruff edge.

Serenity smiled, amused at how Kaiba seemed to act indifferent, but his words betrayed him. "I'm okay. I'm going to see a doctor who specializes in optometry. He's going to take a look and see if there's anything that can be done with my eyes."

Despite the fact that Serenity sat and no longer needed guidance, Kaiba continued to hold her hands. It sounded as if he were right in front of her, likely sitting or perhaps even kneeling. She wondered if he had work he needed to do, but figured that he probably needed a break from the chaos of the precinct as well. She wouldn't blame him.

"That's good news. Perhaps you'll have your solution sooner than you previously thought."

Serenity's smile faltered, dropping her head slightly. She remembered when she had still been recovering. Kaiba had visited with Ryu for the case. More surprisingly, Kaiba visited her outside of work hours. He insisted it was because he never stopped working, but Serenity couldn't help but suspect it was for her own comfort and company. Those first days had been horribly terrifying and lonely. Kaiba had helped her feel less lonely, encouraging her to not yet give up hope on regaining her sight.

And it had worked for a while. But the months had worn on her and Serenity felt her faith crumbling with each passing day.

"You seem unsure." Kaiba's soft words distracted her.

"It's a bit grim to think this way, but I'm coming to the realization that the key to happiness is low expectations." Kaiba didn't respond quickly. She felt his thumb brush over her knuckles, the sensation electrifying. "Serenity…"

She shook her head. "It's not that I've given up hope, but attaching my happiness to the possibility of regaining my sight isn't helpful either. I'm trying to find a middle ground. I will continue to look for a means to restore what was lost but I'm learning to be content with my current life, as difficult as it may be."

Kaiba hummed at her words, almost thoughtfully. "What you say makes sense. Though I imagine it's easier said than done."

Serenity frowned, debating how much to say. She normally didn't spill out her thoughts, but Kaiba was easy to talk to. "I'm... struggling with this new life. It gets easier each day, but I'm always reminded of what is forbidden to me as well. I can never be independent again - I fear that I will always be a burden to my brother."

"You know he would never think that," Kaiba chided.

"Perhaps, but it doesn't change the fact that watching over me is causing a strain in his life. Caring for me as well as working to provide for both of us is unfair to him." Serenity argued back. Maybe she was being too hard on herself, but she wouldn't play ignorant. She could see how difficult this adjustment to their lives had been on both of them.

"Things will work out. It may be hard right now, but putting yourself down for things you have no control over or were your fault to begin with will do nothing for you in the long run."

Kaiba's voice was clipped and short, as if giving an order. He left no room for further argument.
"Nor should you. I do have a reputation of being right around here. Most of the time."

Serenity giggled. "I'm sure that's the case. There it was again, Kaiba's brusque attitude hiding his truly caring nature. It never failed to amuse her.

Before Serenity realized what she was doing, her free hand reached forward, tentative and curious. She didn't know what compelled her but her fingertips reached until they brushed against cotton. She traced along his coat, crawling up to shoulders. There was a brief moment where her fingers left the fabric, lifting up until she brushed against his cheek.

Serenity had never met Kaiba prior to her injury, nor would she have needed to. Now that she could no longer see, she was curious as to what he looked like. Perhaps that's why her fingers traced along his jaw, trying to create visual through touch alone, learning more of the man in front of her through bins and pieces.

She could feel the stubble beneath her fingertips. She traced upward, fingers slipping into his short hair. It felt fine to the touch, yet clumped between her fingers, the silky texture rather pleasant.

Kaiba said nothing, letting her explore by touch. Serenity wasn't sure why he was letting her do so, but then again, she wasn't sure why she reached out to touch him in the first place. Perhaps he was just as confused as she was and he couldn't find the words to ask why. Maybe he was too scrutinized to speak. She prayed that wasn't the case.

Serenity let her hand drop down, tracing along his cheeks. She noticed how pronounced his cheekbones were, stronger than his jawline had felt. Strange that despite how cold his hand felt in hers, his cheek felt warm under her touch.

"Serenity." Her name was like a whisper on his lips, softer than any breeze.

"What color are your eyes?" Serenity blurted out, curious as she started to gain a better picture of who Kaiba was.

"...Blue."

Serenity smiled. "That's my favorite color."

He chuckled. "Mine as well."

"It appears we have much in common, Mister Kaiba." Serenity teased as she lowered her hand. She could feel the heat rushing to her face as she realized what she did. If she was more witty and clever, she would brush the action off as just a habit she developed upon losing her sight. But Serenity knew the truth as it blazed across her cheeks.

He chuckled, bringing Serenity back to the moment. She drew her hand away, realizing how exceedingly forward and uncouth she had been.

"Wait, don't-" A cold hand reaching out to hold hers, freezing her to her spot.

A loud knock at the door made them both jump. Serenity swung her head back toward the new sound. Kaiba snatching his hand away. She imagined they both looked like shy youths having the gesture.

Serenity furrowed her brows, confused. "I'm sorry?"

"Please." Serenity felt the heat spreading to her ears. Was that nervousness she detected in his voice? "Don't stop... I, er-"

Serenity was frustrated with her own blindness - it now denied an opportunity to see Kaiba blushing in front of her. And she knew he was blushing, almost as much as she was.

"Okay...." Serenity grew bashful, uncertain of using his first name so freely. Her hand returning brushing against his jaw, feeling flushed and praying that this moment would last. If she couldn't see Kaiba, she could at least have this moment. No other thought mattered except their shared time now.

So distracted her own sensory exploration that she didn't notice Kaiba moving his hand until she felt a tingle of cool against her cheek, cool and refreshing after the unbearable warmth that had spread from affection and embarrassment. She froze, allowing Kaiba to brush his fingers against her cheek, sweeping her hair back behind her ear. Serenity felt her breath hitch, her heart racing at the gesture.

Even though they had left the lobby to find some fresh air, Serenity felt too warm. She didn't mind though, with the way her heart fluttered in her chest. She had feared her thoughts and feelings were not reciprocated. It didn't occur to her that Kaiba would have those same fears.

Serenity leaned back in the chair, tuning out the conversation at the door. Kaiba was muttering something about autopsy reports, which she suspected tied to the Jack the Ripper case. She didn't want to hear the specific details, knowing that an in-depth analysis of another victim would make her feel ill.

Or at least that was what she had planned until she heard a second voice speak up.

"The latest victim was killed by a sliced artery. Aside from our killer liking knives, I can't tell you what sort of knife nor the make."

Serenity felt her blood run cold, his breath stopping at the gravelly voice.

She squirmed, unable to escape the weight pinning down against the cobblestone path. "What's a lovely thing like you doing out so late? Didn't your parents warn you not to walk so strangers?"

"Damn. I was hoping we could outsource on this and find a seller," Seto muttered.

"Ryou had already asked me about that weeks ago. I'm afraid that's a dead end."

Serenity shook her head, wrapping her arms around herself. She knew that voice. She knew the awful, growling sound that echoed in her very bones.

Purple eyes leaned in, a sharp gleam in the darkness. "Why don't you give me a scream? See what happens when you try to escape. It's more fun when there's a struggle."

"Is there anything else you need from me? If not, I'm going to drop off this last report to Malik and
be on my way.”


Serenity couldn't breathe, growing lightheaded. She couldn't escape him. He was right here. He was here. He was.

His laugh was mocking, cruel. "Beg all you want - I intend to enjoy every moment of this." A flash of steel glinted in the night.

His laugh.

Serenity couldn't hear anything except his laugh.

She couldn't even remember what she last saw, but his laughter rang in her ears, delighted and manic.

It was all she could remember before everything went dark.

...

Serenity didn't remember blacking out. She was so used to swimming in darkness. It was only when she heard a voice calling to her, muted and muddled as if she were trapped underwater.

One voice became two, as Serenity finally seemed to break through the surface. She groaned, aware that she was no longer in a chair but almost cradled. She thought for a moment it was Kaiba until she was able to differentiate the voices around her. "Joey?"

"Are you okay? You passed out nearly half an hour ago," Joey asked, his voice urgent and desperate.

Serenity didn't understand the question, her mind still slow to respond. She heard footsteps across the hardwood.

"It's fairly warm in here. I'll open a window."

Kaiba left and Serenity heard a distinct creak of wood. The sound of rain falling filled the quiet room. Serenity shook her head, as if fighting a bad migraine. She sat up, a desperation filling her chest.

"Where is he?" she demanded, her heart pounding in her ears.

She could sense her companions' confusion in their silence.

"Where is who?" Joey asked.

Serenity shifted away, reaching out until her hand found a desk. She stumbled clumsily to her feet, ignoring her brother and Kaiba's attempt to help her up. "The man with the purple eyes. The one who came by your office."

Kaiba paused, a curious note in his voice; "Namu came by awhile back... but how did you know he had purple eyes?"

Namu. That was his name.

Now she knew the name of the man who tried to kill her.

"It was him. He's the one who blinded me. He's Jack the Ripper."
Chapter 20

Malik's office was a mess, but it wasn't without order. Malik suspected that it was because he had grown used to Ryou's method of organization. As he started to sort through the papers, he could see the flow of logic, how the information was gathered. Despite his exhaustion, Malik could view the larger picture of the case as a whole.

Malik searched through the details, desperate for something that they had missed. Some missing piece to the puzzle that would finally wrap this case up perfectly with a bow on top. It was stupid and unreasonable for him to expect to solve a case that Ryou spent months working on, but he didn't have time to consider any other options. It was sink or swim, and Malik struggled to keep afloat.

Malik studied a variety of potential escape routes, trying to piece together how Jack the Ripper escaped that night. What had they missed? Where had they gone wrong? These questions swam in his mind, a constant swirl like waves washing over him.

Malik hadn't realized he had fallen asleep until he felt a hand shaking him awake.

Malik snapped his head up, panic and shame flooding him. It took him a moment to recognize the office around him. He brushed his hair back, desperately grabbing at the papers. How could he fall asleep like that when Ryou and Isis were counting on him?

He heard a low chuckle. "Don't worry. I won't tell the commissioner."

Malik turned his head, remembering what initially woke him up. Standing next to him, Namu held out the last autopsy report. Malik sighed, relaxing a bit. He didn't give a shit if Kaiba found out he fell asleep— it was Ryou he didn't want to disappoint. Too much was at stake— Ryou's life remained in peril.

"Sorry, I haven't gotten much sleep," Malik muttered, not sure why he was explaining. He knew Namu didn't care. He was probably there just to get a paycheck like most of the other officers.

"Sounds about right. This case has been hell," Namu snorted, leaning against the desk.

Malik leaned back, taking the file from Namu and read over it. "Makes me long for the days back in Egypt, eh?"

Namu shook his head. "Not me. I never liked home. England's been a lot more interesting."

Malik sighed, the file falling from his hand. He and Namu had been pretty close when they were younger. After Namu's parents died, he moved to England with his aunt and uncle, who were medical doctors. Namu picked up the trade after them and had stayed in the country since. Malik supposed if he had lived in this country for as long as Namu did, he wouldn't long for his homeland as much either.

Then again, Malik didn't really want to go back to Egypt. Not really.

He just wanted to find Ryou. That was home for him.

Malik felt a hand on his shoulder, tensing at the touch. Even though it wasn't threatening, it was too close to his scars and he wasn't comfortable with just anyone touching him. Even if Namu was an old acquaintance.

"I'll be alright. Just keep calm and pick up where he left off," Namu spoke softly, a small smile on his face. The encouragement felt almost mocking given the circumstances.

Malik pulled away, standing as he paced, mind still racing. "I'm trying. But I'm not Ryou. I'm not a detective. I can't." Malik cut himself off. It didn't matter if he couldn't. He had to.

Namu watched him for a long second before sighing. He left the file on the desk as he made for the door. "Fine. Then backtrack and see what he missed. I don't know. I'm just trying to be helpful."

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Malik let out a breath, looking up at the map spread across the wall. On it displayed the various murder locations as well as information regarding the name of each tenant Jack the Ripper used as an alias. "I'm just doing my job. I'm not trying."

Namu shook his head. "I know. I'm sorry. I'm just trying to be helpful."

Malik glanced back to meet his gaze before tearing his eyes away. He looked back at the wall, studying the map for something, though not sure exactly what. "Yeah, maybe," he muttered, still not convinced.

Namu didn't say anything else, but Malik heard the door close behind him. He knew he should scowl the new autopsy report for any details, but Malik held off. He stared at the map, still irritated. The clues were hidden here.

Malik knew that the true identity of Jack the Ripper and their failed attempt at capturing him were somehow tied together. Ryou was right on the money in terms of where he would target his victims as well as the housing switch-a-roo. How did he escape with Ryou out from underneath their eyes?

Malik stared, feeling the minutes tick by while he looked at the map for some alleyway, road, street, garden, anything the serial killer could have used to make a getaway. Time dragged on, each second a reminder of what was at stake. His eyes glossed over the notes made at each murder site, the details of each murder blurring into the next.

Dealing with death, it became easy to just see each victim as another statistic, another number to the equation. Malik felt so familiar to and distant from these individuals that nothing seemed to click.

Victim #1: Mary Ann Nichols – August 31 st , 1888 on Buck's Row

Approximate time of death: 3:30 am

Flat rented under Jack Dowry on August 22 nd , 1888.

Obituary listing Jack Dowry posted on August 15 th , 1888, natural causes

Victim #2: Annie Chapman – September 3 rd , 1888 on Hanbury Street.
before he could provide an explanation; “It's Namu. He's Jack the Ripper!”

alarmed than he had previously. Malik didn’t have time to think, the words leaving his mouth

He seemed to have caught Kaiba off guard as well, the commissioner looking more frazzled and

skidded to a halt, shocked that Kaiba opened the door before he could get there. He knew it was

got to Kaiba's office soon enough. Before he could even arrive there, the door swung open. Malik

malarky, thinking Ryou had been trying to correct an error, but there was no question about what

He turned back to the desk, searching for the file containing Abigail Richards. He brushed past the

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At that point that Malik noticed that though it was signed on the 9th, it was postdated to the 12th, after the weekend had passed.

Malik frowned, trying to make sense of this. By that date, Jack the Ripper should not have had any knowledge of Mr. Sims's death. That information wasn't made public until the 10th, the day after the lease was signed.

Malik remained frozen at his desk, tapping his finger. He was probably overthinking it and Ryou had already looked into this lead. But the numbers and dates all blended together so that it was possible that both Ryou and the killer had overlooked this error. This one potential mistake that could lead them to the truth.

Malik left the office, leaving the door open behind him as he made his way towards records.

Something was off and he intended to get to the bottom of this. He pushed past the officers, who didn't question his presence. The records room had been left unlocked. Malik skimming through the files. If Andrew Sims was a homicide victim, then he likely would have passed through here, or Namu's office at least.

It took Malik a while to find it, but he snagged the file, which was fairly light and thin. The statement was brief - two gentlemen had gotten into a scuffle down in Whitechapel. One of them had a pistol and shot his friend in anger. Two officers arrived on scene, arresting the assailant and rushing an injured Andrew Sims to the hospital.

Or at least, he should have gone to the hospital. Malik blinked, seeing a note about the damages done to the state hospital building. Yugi had mentioned that the building had been deemed structurally unsound after the recent fires. Near the beginning of the month, the hospital had been shut down as Yugi's department moved to make plans for renovations. Needless to say, the process had been very slow.

So Andrew Sims ended up being rushed to the police station, since Namu technically was a doctor. Despite his efforts, Mr. Sims died from his gunshot wound, Namu's signature certifying the place and time of his death.

Malik frowned, something clicking in his mind. Only a handful of people would have known about Mr. Sims death. His friend was in jail on manslaughter charges. That meant there were two officers, Commissioner Kaiba, and Namu who were all involved in this case. Could it be that one of them was also…

Malik closed the file, bringing his thumb up to his mouth to bite at his nail. It was a longshot and very risky to accuse someone without the police task force, but Malik was running out of options.

He had a hunch to go off of. Perhaps one of the officers had seen where Mr. Sims lived and thought it might be a good place for their lives. Perhaps this was the perfect cover for Kaiba to commit crime in a position that left him untraceable. Perhaps-

Malik flinched, his heart pounding. He dropped the file, racing back to Ryou's office. He was stupid. Ryou was stupid. They were both stupid. They were looking at the wrong clues. They had investigated it right from the beginning and they were too stupid to realize the answer before them.

Because the idea that the killer would so carelessly give away his craft and skill was ridiculous to them.

They had gotten to the heart of the case from the start but failed to see it.

Malik struggled to catch his breath when he arrived in Ryou's office. The door remained wide open as he fumbled through the files. He pulled out the photos of each victim, the bloody massacre to behold in each image. Before, it made Malik queasy, finding it hard to look at it directly. Now, Malik looked unflinchingly, looking at the opened cavities where organs had been harvested.

The sight was gruesome, but Malik noticed it immediately. The hearts had been removed, with cuts made precisely severing the organ from the body. Skilled, precise incisions that were made by a surgeon or a coroner.

Malik stumbled back, his heart jumping into his throat. Panic and a sharp awareness of the truth paralyzed him, staring down at the photos. In that moment, it no longer felt like these women were numbers. They fought and struggled for their lives. Did Namu just laugh at their resistance? Was he laughing from the shadows now?

Malik tore away from the office, his mind racing faster than his body could keep up. He couldn't get to Kaiba's office soon enough. Before he could even arrive there, the door swung open. Malik skidded to a halt, shocked that Kaiba opened the door before he could get there. He knew it was incidental, but it still caught him off guard.

He seemed to have caught Kaiba off guard as well, the commissioner looking more frazzled and alarmed than he had previously. Malik didn't have time to think, the words leaving his mouth before he could provide an explanation; "It's Namu. He's Jack the Ripper!"
Malik was expecting that he would have to explain himself and why he had made such a wild assumption. He probably shouldn't be throwing around accusations like that, but he didn't want to waste time. The conviction was sealed in his heart and he would convince Kaiba his case.

But the words never needed to be spoken. The commissioner glanced back, Malik now noticing Joey and Serenity who had been following him. He didn't know when they had gotten there, but there was a grave look on their faces, a grim air about them. Kaiba just nodded, not surprised by the assertion.

"We don't have any time to waste," Kaiba snapped, sweeping past Malik. He blinked, stunned momentarily, before chasing after the commissioner. Time was of the essence. If Kaiba accepted his deduction, then they needed to use this time to capture Namu before something happened to Ryou or Isis.

Several officers joined them, Kaiba barking orders as they prepared a squad to go fetch Namu from his home. Malik noticed how Kaiba said nothing when he followed him into his cab and decided to not remark on it either. The rain pounded on the hood of the carriage as they raced downtown, after their true killer.

It took them only twenty minutes to arrive at Namu's home, but by then, it was too late. The coroner must have realized he was running short on time and was nowhere to be found.

Malik had been worried, punished at the thought of chasing another false flag when so much rode on their success. It seemed the Serenity recognized her killer's voice, corroborating his accusation. It surprised him that Kaiba was willing to arrest his own coroner based on such flimsy arguments, but he supposed the commissioner was desperate to get closure on this case.

The flat was relatively small and a bit untidy. Nothing about it showed any indications of a deranged murderer living there. Malik wasn't sure what exactly he had been expecting. He supposed he expected pencil scratching of a madman's nonsense on the walls, photos and pictures of the victims, a profession of guilt. Something that indicated that not everything was as it seemed.

However, five minutes into the search, Duke raced out from one of the back rooms, a sickened look on his face. Malik, despite his better judgment, went back to examine what had shaken up the officer so badly. He blinked, confused as he looked at what resembled a pantry.

Malik felt his stomach lurch when he saw a heart submerged in liquid in one of the jars.

He struggled to keep upright, ignoring his own disgust as he started to make a mental list. A thought crossed his mind and he ran back to snatch a piece of paper. Other officers, including Kaiba, followed him, a stunned silence at the collection of organs and bones laid before them.

Though Malik didn't have any of his notes with him, he remembered how much time he and Ryou spent pouring over the meaning of the missing hearts and what message was being sent. Apparently, it had been Namu's own home experiment, the various organs preserved or decomposing at different rates based on the viscous liquid that surrounded it.

Kaiba quickly located what appeared to be Namu's medical findings.

Malik sighed, checking the numbers once again before looking up at the commissioner. Kaiba watched him patiently, waiting for confirmation. Malik gave him a nod. "These are all the missing organs accounted for in the autopsy reports... and then some."

Kaiba frowned. "It appears we found our killer as well as some new victims to locate."

Malik didn't want to think who these new victims were. Until he found his sister and lover, he refused to accept their deaths. "So where is Ryou then?"

Kaiba sighed. "Not here. We've searched the building and there's nobody hidden or caged or hanging from hooks from the ceiling. Namu had at least an hour head start on us. For all we know, he's already left the city."

Malik shook his head, refusing the option. Not when they had gotten so close, not after everything they had suffered through. "It can't end like this."

"It won't!" Kaiba's voice was harsh and angry. "How dare he masquerade about the police force, leading us on a string. I won't rest until I see him hanged for his crimes." Kaiba snapped as if he were giving orders to their elusive killer. As if he had the power and authority by sheer force of will to do so.

Malik bit his lip, trying to think. Jack the Ripper always wanted his victims found, so why hide Ryou and Isis now? If Namu knew they were on to him, he had no reason to keep them prisoner. But if he hadn't killed them yet, where had he kept them? Where was he hiding?

Namu was still somewhere in the city. Malik would find him.

"I'm going back to Whitechapel. I'm going to search for anything we might have missed." Malik started to leave, letting the police take care of business here in the flat. Perhaps Namu left another clue for them to follow, another mistake to exploit.

"When you're done there, meet me at the station." Kaiba didn't bother turning around, surveying the area. "I'm going to reach out to Yugi. It's a long shot, but he might know something about the area that might not be privy to us. He's a city planner so maybe he has access to building permits and floor plans."

Malik nodded, though didn't hold much hope on that. He knew how long it took Yugi to provide Ryou renter records - Kaiba was asking for much more in not enough time. Still, there was no reason not to outset. They needed every hand on deck.

Malik stepped outside, his drying hair suddenly soaked in the downpour. He frowned, worried that the rain might wash away some evidence. Malik's boots kicked up water as he ran to catch a cab, trying to make up for lost time and close the gap separating him from Jack the Ripper.
Ryou didn't realize how much he wanted to live until he was confronting death head on.

He wouldn't say his outlook on life had been dismal, but he had often thought about death. Having been surrounded by it as a child, it was both familiar and enigmatic. He never understood why people feared death, but, at the same time, Ryou wasn't rushing to end his life. He simply saw his life as a predetermined allotment. He would live until he ran out of time.

But Ryou learned that when his inevitable demise drew nearer, he wanted to fight. He still wanted to conquer death.

Ryou remained hidden against the wall, just around the corner from where he had been held captive. He left his prison door open, knowing that this would catch Namu's eye upon returning. Ryou's mission was suicidal, but he had few options. His leg injury made escape through the sewers too dangerous. Ryou didn't trust himself to have enough time before Namu got back.

He needed more time. And the only way he could think of buying himself more time was ensuring that Namu wasted time on a pointless chase. Much like what Ryou had ensured they do through this entire investigation.

Ryou held his breath as he heard a scuffling down the hallway. His heart caught in his throat and he remained frozen in his spot. The silence between the steps was deafening, Ryou sure that Namu would see through his trap. No. It would work. Namu walked into his trap before but had a contingent plan back then.

Perhaps Ryou's trap would work, but he couldn't count on it holding him off forever. But then again, the idea was to redirect Namu's focus onto him so that he didn't notice other elements that had gone amiss. Like a certain other prisoner who was no longer in her cell.

The footsteps stopped as they drew closer to Ryou. He didn't need to look around the corner to visualize where the infamous serial killer stood. A rush of steps echoed before coming to an abrupt halt.

Namu would have no reason to go into the cell. It was a matter of convincing him that there was something in there he missed upon imprisoning the detective. Ryou couldn't hope to escape through the tiny window, which was too small for anyone to fit through.

But he needed Namu to question it.

Ryou staggered from his spot as quickly as possible, his gait uneven as he scrambled for the open door. Namu realized his mistake too late, studying the torn dress turned into a rope out the window. He realized there was no point in the open door if Ryou had escaped through other means. That this had all been a set up.

Ryou slammed the door shut, the iron clang echoing down the basement hallways. Namu snapped around, fury etched into every feature.

"Ryou!" he screeched, flying towards the tiny window at the door.

Ryou shoved away, hobbling down the hallway as fast as he could. Ryou didn't have time to feel any sense of satisfaction or accomplishment at his successful trap. It was only one step among many to stay alive. Gloutous and self-congratulations would only cloud his mind and distract him from his task.

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The rain remained steady, soaking Malik to the bone. His coat did little to shelter him from the rain and he could feel the fabric weighing him down.

Malik explored each alleyway, much like how he the first day he helped Ryou investigate his sister's disappearance. The police still milled about, interviewing passing travelers and using their authority to enter each home. Kaiba had pulled quite a few strings with city hall to get a manhunt authority to enter each home. Kaiba had pulled quite a few strings with city hall to get a manhunt under way. They needed every hand on deck to help locate the serial killer.

Malik sighed, his body shivering in the cold spring rain. When they had investigated last night, there had been no blood. Malik had taken this as a sign that Ryou was taken hostage. It would make sense, especially if Ryou recognized the killer. Namu would need time to cover his tracks.

Still, Malik didn't trust that he would keep the detective alive long. He wasn't sure if Namu had already killed Ryou. There was nothing holding him back. Still, Malik refused to give up hope until he confirmed they were alive or dead with his own eyes. He still hoped his sister was alive, as bleak as it seemed, and he still believed Ryou would keep fighting until the end.

Malik paced up and down the alley, unsure of what he was looking for. He felt frustrated, searching for something that would help them locate Namu. He felt stupid, knowing that Ryou would have found something by now. The detective had always been good at sniffing out what seemed like useless clues and spinning them into full narratives, speculations that could move them, if not towards the truth, at least forward.

"Damnit, Ryou, what would you do?" Malik muttered, leaning against the brick wall. He scowled at the ground, heavy drops of water hitting the back of his head. If Ryou was here now, what would he search for?

Malik blinked, a thought crossing his mind. Perhaps he needed to think more like Ryou. He was focused too much on channeling how Ryou would act right now when in actuality, Ryou had
already been here. Ryou must have realized their plans failed last night. If he knew that, what would he have done to help the case?

Ryou must have known his options were limited and decided to leave clues for those who were still free. Ryou would have done something to make sure the trail didn't die here in this alley. He would have left some sort of sign that he had been here, some hint as to where they were heading. Something...

Malik's pushed off against the wall, thinking of the lost wig they found. There had been a struggle, intentional or not, Namu left that wig to let them know they failed, but it also told them where he last was. And Ryou was nothing but determined. He would have used that opportunity to lay a new trap for Jack the Ripper.

Malik frowned, tracing his steps back to where he first found the wig. He had always come back to this point, trying to clear his mind. He was so focused on what clues Jack the Ripper would leave behind. But Ryou was here too, leaving his own trail of bread crumbs to lead them back to him.

Malik wound down the path, checking each corner for any detail. The water made the path slick and Malik nearly lost his balance on the wet stones. He caught himself, trying to avoid getting his pants wet.

That's when Malik realized it wasn't the wet stone he had slipped on.

He frowned, looking at the dirty beard. He almost ignored it until he spotted two more down the path and then a third laying in the gutter. Malik picked up the bead, wiping it to reveal a bright blue color that had been marred by the dirty stone.

Malik's thoughts flew to his sister, who left a necklace behind in her struggle for freedom.

Malik crawled forward, ignoring the rain water as his fingers traced through the puddles. He found several more beads, scattered about. Before he could write it off as refuse, he finally spotted it, a broken silver chain with a few beads that had refused to come off. A necklace that had snapped during a struggle or perhaps Ryou tossed it like a life preserver out in the ocean, hoping some ship would find it and pull him in.

Malik's heart started to race. It wasn't a coincidence that a necklace should be found. His sister's necklace had sealed the deal weeks prior. It was a necklace here that Ryou left for Malik, a plea for help and to not let the killer escape.

Malik frowned, staring at the pile of rubble before him by the necklace. It was as if Ryou guided him, telling him that not all was as it seemed. Even now, Malik realized that the best way to escape was in plain sight. While they were scattered above checking homes and gardens for an escape route, it was in the most inconspicuous place that Ryou left the trail off.

Malik shoved the wooden debris away, the musty scent hidden by the fresh downpour. He knew the moment he found the necklace how Namu escaped. Even now, as he drew the rubble away, he spotted a hidden grate leading to the sewers. One that would have completely unnoticed otherwise.

Malik stood up. It was pointless to keep searching Whitechapel. He realized that the sewers provided him a means to travel anywhere in the city. It served Namu to have the police searching the city where they last saw him.

But the truth was that Jack the Ripper could be anywhere now.

Malik turned to leave, making his way back to the precinct. Yugi should be there by now. Their last hope was that Yugi had a map of the drainage system of London and could map out where Namu escaped to. Time was not on their side and Malik still refused to accept death until he saw his and Ryou again. He could only pray that they could narrow their sights somehow or that Kaiba found something that would give them a lead from Namu's residence.

Either way, Malik found himself running through the rain, racing to get back to the precinct before they ran out of time.

It was a miserable day outside that Bakura wanted no part in.

He sat at the bar, smirking at a couple who tried to run across the road to safety, but the cabs and carriages offered no such comfort. The wheels splashed water up, soaking the young woman's dress. Her partner tried to shield her with his coat, but nothing could protect them from the rain.

Bakura shook his head. Nobody wanted to be outside today. It was better to pass the time inside getting a head start on booze than bother with such mundane things like work. Bakura lifted his tankard, finishing off his drink before turning back to grab another one.

The bartender had a different idea in mind, eyes narrowed. He snatched the tankard away, his greasy, black hair slipping back into his face. The pub was steamy and warm compared to the cold rain outside. "And how do you plan on paying for this?"

Bakura smirked, shrugging. "Add it to my tab."

"So you can forget what you owe me and keep drinking my beer? Fat chance."

Bakura rolled his eyes, his hand crawling up the wood to try and snatch a new glass. The bartender noticed, deciding the albino had overstayed his visit. He snatched Bakura's wrist, who growled. Bakura tried to yank it away, but the man was twice his size and heavier still.

Bakura let himself get dragged out, the bartender shoving him out of his pub and into the pouring rain. "Don't bother coming back until you pay your tab off!"

"Fuck off!" he swore, storming away from the pub. So much for drinking the day away. It took Bakura until he saw the bartender storm inside before pulling out the wallet he snatched. The idiot had been stupid enough to let a pickpocket near his pockets.

Bakura smirked, flipping through the bills. This would cover his tab and then some, but there was no point in returning the cash to that prick. He would find a better bar with better alcohol to waste the afternoon away. If the rain let up by tonight, then Bakura could look into a new job. With Ryou busy with the Jack the Ripper case, the police had turned a blind eye to his recent nightly excursions.

An added benefit to this city going to shit.

Bakura stared up at the sky, realizing that taking the main roads was a good way to get drenched.
Though it would take longer, the alleyways would have better coverage. He had one pub in mind that he knew his reputation hadn't reached yet (or at least he hoped they hadn't heard of him). It would take him by the West End and lord knew there were travelers everywhere there and cash to be made.

Bakura slipped into the shadows, the rain catching him only when the wind picked up. It sloshed against him, getting the side of his pants soaked, but he was mostly dry. The sound of rain echoed around him, calming and soothing. If he were a richer man, he would stay home, leave his windows open to listen to the sound of the rain over the city. But since Bakura lived in a real shithole, he didn't feel like listening to the screaming neighbors and drunkards a floor below.

Bakura felt the sound wash over him when he heard a harsh clang. The noise stopped Bakura in his tracks. He looked around, seeing nobody. Nosiness usually wasn't wise (that was how he got wrapped up in the Jack the Ripper case only a few weeks ago), but he wasn't anywhere near Whitechapel. He was fairly close to the center of the city, where the pinnacles of government and the establishment rose above the neatly aligned houses.

That meant money.

Perhaps the noise was Bakura's next target. It couldn't hurt to check.

Bakura kept his ears pealed, the strange metallic sound ringing in the air. It came sporadically, somewhat soft and muted in the rain. He wasn't sure what was causing the noise, so Bakura felt no desire to rush into what could possibly be a trap. It sounded as if it came from one of the smaller side roads.

Bakura was certain he had found the source of the noise, though there was no visual in sight. The tiny side road was empty of any passersby, everyone (wisely) staying in. Perhaps someone had been running outside and he had just missed them. Bakura was about to write off the entire scenario when he saw something move in his periphery.

Bakura turned just in time to see the storm drain shift. He blinked, wondering if he had one too many drinks back at the bar, but the grate shifted again, the iron cap struggling to move up. It looked like someone was trying to get out, but, by the water pooling around the entrance, they were having trouble pushing the grate up and away.

Bakura probably should ignore it, but he was too curious for his own good. He liked to stick his nose where it didn't belong because that was usually how he found his next paycheck. If things looked bad, all he had to do was drop the piece of metal back down and walk away like he never saw anything. He sighed, walking over and pealing back the grate.

Bakura blinked, confused by the pair of blue eyes that looked up at him in shock. The person stumbled back, both in confusion and to avoid the waterfall of rain that flooded into the sewer. Bakura frowned. He had run into a lot of weird shit in his day, but this might take the cake.

He looked down at the woman standing in the sewer drain below. “What the hell are you doing down there?”

She shook her head, her black hair shining from water. “It... It's complicated. Can you help me up?”

Bakura rolled his eyes, realizing this was just a jad and not his next paycheck. His curiosity landed him in the role of the Good Samaritan and he never liked playing that role unless he benefited from it (which defeated the point of doing good deeds selflessly). He knelt down, accepting that he was going to be drenched today and nothing would change that. An outreached hand gave the sewer maiden some stability, though she struggled with the slick ladder rungs.

It took some time to maneuver but after a few minutes of wrangling, the young woman was finally up.

“Please! It’s about the Jack the Ripper case!”

Bakura turned away, leaving the crazy sewer woman to find the police on her own. He paused when he felt a hand grab the sleeve of his coat.

“She told me to find you! The Whitechapel shithole, she said!”

“Detective Ryou interviewed me for the case. He showed me your picture.” Bakura figured it would not be wise to mention that he had been a suspect in the case. If she really was Isis, then getting her to Ryou (and thereby clearing his name) was of top priority. Ryou might be part of the system, but he’d always been willing to break the rules when he found it necessary. Ryou would hear him out and know how to make sure Isis’s escape wouldn't be used against him.

Ryou was decent in his book, though he really needed to loosen up. Kaiba had not been good for his health.

Bakura was just trying to recall how to get to Ryou's flat from here when Isis stepped forward, alerted. “You know Detective Ryou?”

“Yes--” Bakura asked, finding the question strange. “How do you know him?”

“He’s the one who helped me escape. He's still trapped and Jack th-”
Isis didn't need to finish up her sentence. Bakura remembered his conversation with Ryou, how they had laid a trap for Jack the Ripper. Ryou had warned him off so that Bakura wouldn't get unnecessarily entangled in the case again. He hadn't needed to do that, but he still did. That's just the kind of person he was.

He didn't know much about the case, but he knew that Isis had been taken prisoner by Jack the Ripper. Bakura had thought that had been a bunch of hogwash, but Ryou had been certain of it. And just as they tried to catch the infamous serial killer, Isis shows up saying that Ryou helped her escape. Something went wrong with their plans and Ryou was trying to do what he could so that the trail didn't end there.

Whatever grievances Bakura had with the cops, he couldn't let Ryou die on his watch.

Bakura grabbed Isis's hand, a sense of urgency gripping him. She jumped, startled by the sudden contact, but Bakura didn't let go. He nearly dragged her through the pouring rain. "We have to hurry. The precinct is not far from here. Kaiba might not listen me, but he'll listen to you."

"You… You're helping me?" she asked, a hesitant note in her voice.

Bakura bit back a sigh, settling for a shrug as they ran across the road. "I owe Ryou a favor. The thought of him being dissected by a deranged sociopath is something I'd rather avoid."

"… Thank you." Isis's voice wavered, a wariness and tiredness still clinging to her. Bakura didn't know what she had suffered these past few weeks under the care of Jack the Ripper. But he also knew that Ryou wouldn't be so lucky as to stay alive for long. He had made himself an active enemy of the serial killer.

Gratitude wasn't something Bakura was used to. He glared through the haze, bracing himself for a confrontation with the irate police commissioner. "Whatever. Let's move. I'm sick of all this fucking rain."
Chapter 22

Malik could feel the eyes on him. Even before they asked, he knew the protest on their lips. He must have some place to lay low. That's where he's keeping Ryou and my locks. "We're looking at this wrong. We know how Namu escaped. We need to figure out where he's hiding."

Kaiba gave a growl, tossing the papers onto his desk. The three of them had been pouring over the police force searching the sewers below, I'm not sure what else we can do."

Yugi nodded, aware of this problem. "Perhaps, but it's all city hall can do. Unless we want to send transports. No train, boat, or carriage can leave or enter the city."

Malik frowned. "That won't mean much if Namu can escape under our feet."

"Let's see what it takes to break you..."

Ryou tried to quiet his breath, panic growing in his chest. His prison was too damn big. There were too many stairs, too many long hallways, too many doors that didn't lead outside, too many blocked doors that were chained and bolted.

Malik let out an annoyed sigh as water speckled the maps across the desk. He pulled his bangs back, still drying from the downpour outside. Even after one of the secretaries had given him a towel to dry off, Malik knew that he would be feeling the cold chill for the rest of the day.

Kaiba stood nearby, reading through a set of records. They heard Yugi speaking softly on the telephone line, in touch with city hall. When Malik had returned and told them about the serial killer's means of escape, their intense search in Whitechapel served them little to no purpose. Yugi had pulled up every map of various city corners he could think of, but the thought that Namu could be anywhere made the situation more dire.

Malik frowned. "That won't mean much if Namu can escape under our feet."

Yugi nodded, aware of this problem. "Perhaps, but it's all city hall can do. Unless we want to send transports. No train, boat, or carriage can leave or enter the city."

"We're not the military. Even if I must every man on the job, we're trying to find one man in this entire city. Namu must be aware that we're on to him and he'll be hiding."

Malik pushed away from the desk, brushing back his bangs. His fingers curled into his drying locks. "We're looking at this wrong. We know how Namu escaped. We need to figure out where he escaped to. He must have some place to lay low. That's where he's keeping Ryou and my sister."

Malik could feel the eyes on him. Even before they asked, he knew the protest on their lips.
Malik decided to ignore their little spat and focus on the task ahead. "So we need to create a...

"I'll be sure to pass on the good word to him," Yugi snapped back, somewhat testily.

Kaiba shrugged, a bitter note still lingering. "It was worth asking. It seems your brother isn't as...

Yugi snorted. "Fat chance. Unless Jack the Ripper was targeting government officials, this is...

"So no chance of mobilizing the military?"

Malik nodded. "There were quite a few buildings barred off from the public. Structurally unsound."

"Perhaps." Malik snorted. He didn't think Namu would stay in Whitechapel. It would work to his...

Kaiba nodded, his pen scratching through several neighborhoods. "That'll rule out residential...

Yugi frowned. Where would people not be in a city? He contemplated the cemeteries or a nearby...

Even the cold rain outside was tempting now.

Malik snapped his head up, looking at the city planner. "Yugi, you're still trying to figure out...

Yugi's head dropped down in exhaustion. "Don't remind me. It was a nightmare trying to figure...

Malik resisted the urge to snap back with something sarcastic. Sure, his job wasn't at risk, but he...

Kaiba sighed, his eyes flicking up Malik to express his irritation. He realized that the circular logic...

Malik snapped his head around, anger boiling in him. Malik hated the pitying sound in Yugi's voice. He snapped his head around, anger boiling in him. "He's alive. I know it."

"He has no reason to keep him alive," Kaiba retorted, a resentful note in his voice.

He found himself channeling his partner's quirky yet efficient analysis. If he needed to keep a level head. Tensions were running high. Kaiba's office felt small and too warm.

"He's alive. I know it."

Malik shook his head. "Not necessarily. If I were trying to hide away or keep hostages, I would...

Malik frowned, trying to think. It was strange acting as the detective, speculations and facts...

Yugi raised an eyebrow. "That sounds like Whitechapel. Anyone worth their salt knows not to go...

"Better than the whole city," Malik muttered. "It'll be away from where people live. He can't risk any neighbors hearing anything suspicious."

Malik nodded. "There were quite a few buildings barred off from the public. Structurally unsound."

Kaiba looked alarmed. "That's everything from Victoria Bridge to the Royal Docks we would need to search! We're talking over about six miles along the piers that we would need to investigate."

"No, but we haven't found his body. And you know damn well that Jack the Ripper would make sure everybody knew he murdered the man hunting him. He's never been subtle before and he sure as hell won't be now after having caught the man trying to arrest him."

Malik could tell that Yugi and Kaiba weren't sold. They were reluctant to embrace hope. Perhaps that's all it really was - hope. Malik hoped that his sister and Ryou were still alive. That was the only thing keeping him at this task. He had no other reason now than to save those he loved.

And if there was no chance of that, then what was it all for?

"Malik..."

Malik resisted the urge to snap back with something sarcastic. Sure, his job wasn't at risk, but he needed to keep a level head. Tensions were running high. Kaiba's office felt small and too warm.

"Still, the city was busy and loud all the time. Maybe Namu made his base in the sewers somewhere. It wasn't ideal though. He would need to find a way to keep his prisoners from escaping. Some sort of facility that he could maintain without any eyebrows being raised."

"Or somewhere people wouldn't go near."

"Someplace people wouldn't go near."

"Some sort of facility that he could maintain without any eyebrows being raised."

"Someplace people wouldn't go near."

"And if there wasn't a better option than blindly searching all of London."

"Better than the whole city." Malik murmured, watching Kaiba's face as he considered the option. It wasn't a lot to work with, but it was certainly a better option than blindly searching all of London.

A knock on the door interrupted their meeting. Kaiba glared at it before returning his attention back to the map. "I'm in a meeting. Go see my secretary." His voice was harsh, leaving no room for debate.

"Kaiba," Malik sought the commissioner's attention, feeling angry and ready to do something.

"He's alive. I know it."

Malik snapped his head around, anger boiling in him. Malik hated the pitying sound in Yugi's voice. He snapped his head around, anger boiling in him. "He's alive. I know it."

Kaiba shrugged, a bitter note still lingering. "It was worth asking. It seems your brother isn't as useful as I thought."

"I'll be sure to pass on the good word to him," Yugi snapped back, somewhat testily. Malik decided to ignore their little spat and focus on the task ahead. "So we need to create a..."
"You realize I command a police force and not the Royal Guard?" Kaiba growled as he stepped around his desk. He settled into his chair as he grabbed a pen, making notes to himself.

"Do we have any other choice?" Malik murmured. Desperation drove them to these means. What other clues did Namu leave? What else could they do?

Kaiba was about to reply when they heard a click. Malik snapped around, a sudden rush of anger.

"What part of 'in a meeting' do you not understand?"

Kaiba stood up, glaring at Malik and not the newly opened door. "Now you see why it pisses me off when people come barging in here?"

Malik didn't respond, knowing he had no right to complain when he'd let himself into Kaiba's office more than once. He felt his anger melt into confusion when he saw white hair. His heart skipped a beat until he saw the harsh features and not the familiar, beautiful face of his lover.

"Bakura, what the hell are you doing here? Get the fuck out of my office!" Kaiba snapped, eyes murderous at the conman who had let himself out of custody a few weeks prior. Malik had no idea what on earth he was doing back here. He didn't think the criminal had a change of heart and was confessing to his crimes. In fact, he was certain Bakura would never admit to such a thing.

Still, his interruption was wasting valuable time. Time that could be used to save Ryou and his sister.

Bakura rolled his eyes. "Calm down, commissioner. I'm here to present a piece of evidence."

Malik felt his brows furrowed, disgusted by the delighted smirk on the albino's face. "We don't have time for your bullshit! Just get out of here!"

Bakura turned his attention to Malik, his smirk softening a bit. Malik frowned, confused by this reaction. Instead of speaking, Bakura stepped back, another person coming into view.

Malik froze, his heartbeat stuttering the moment his eyes settled on the young woman. He knew that raven-colored hair, those sky-blue eyes. He recognized that soft smile, shaky yet relief still evident in her features. His voice escaped him, a hope that he had clung to so desperately filled him that he thought his chest would burst with such elation.

"Isis?" Her name was like a joyful laugh on his lips, a moment of relief in such darkness. Malik rushed towards her, wrapping his sister up in an embrace. She was soaked to the bone and Malik could feel that his frame seemed thinner. He suspected the shivering was not from the cold but from the unsteady sway of her body. She was exhausted, tired and hungry, but she was here in his arms. Isis shivered again, her weight pressing into Malik. He realized that she was struggling to stand. He gripped her tight, everyone breaking from a trance. Kaiba grabbed a chair next to his desk, the legs screeching against the hardwood. Malik carefully led his sister into the office, lowering her down so she could rest in the seat.

She shook her head, grateful to finally be sitting. Her gaze kept returning to Malik, relief etched but Isis gave a shaky laugh, tears running anew. Even with no words, Malik could feel the relief and joy in that bratty noisy. He found himself offering a small smile, chuckling as he fought to rein back his tears. It was a tender moment between lost siblings.

Despite having wiped away her tears, Isis gave a shaky laugh, tears running anew. Even with no words, Malik could feel the relief and joy in that bratty noisy. He found himself offering a small smile, chuckling as he fought to rein back his tears. It was a tender moment between lost siblings.

But it would only remain for a moment.

"What happened? Is it true that-" Kaiba stopped talking, a sudden display of tact. Malik flicked his eyes towards the commissioner before returning to his sister.

They needed answers but his sister needed rest and a doctor. Would it be cruel to push her? His sister's cold hand clutching his own distracted Malik. There was a sharpness to her gaze, the same intelligent glint that he knew all too well. This new harshness reminded him of before, his sister confident and assured.

"It was Jack the Ripper. He kidnapped me. Malik-"

It's Namu, isn't it?" Malik asked, no longer reserved. He could tell that his sister had no desire to be coddled. Not when the killer was still loose.

"Yes, I don't think he meant to target me, but it ended up being my saving grace. He kept me locked up. It's only thanks to the detective-"

But it would only remain for a moment.

"What happened? Is it true that-" Kaiba stopped talking, a sudden display of tact. Malik flicked his eyes towards the commissioner before returning to his sister.

"What part of 'in a meeting' do you not understand?"

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"Do we have any other choice?" Malik murmured. Desperation drove them to these means. What other clues did Namu leave? What else could they do?

"We were in a hospital," Isis frowned. "I'm not sure which one, but Ryou said it was the closed down one. I'm sorry, that's probably not helpful. I escaped through the sewers and I didn't have any sense of direction down there."

Malik blinked, rushing back towards the maps. His mind raced through old conversations, spotting the state hospital in the fire zone. The very hospital that had been closed because it was structurally unsound. They had been on the right track.
"Do you have a floor plan, Yugi?" Kaiba asked, keeping afoot of these new developments.

Yugi bit his thumb, shaking his head. "No, I lost them, remember? Several weeks ago - I came back to search for them here."

The three of them looked up, exchanging a look. Malik let out a heavy sigh. "That would have been right after my sister disappeared. Namu knew that you were working on renovations and realized that would be a good holding location for his prisoner."

"He must have stolen them, knowing no one would bother going into the barred off hospital," Kaiba murmured.

Malik swore under his breath. Namu had been playing them for fools from the very beginning. He couldn't let him have the last laugh now. "We need to go. Now. He has no reason to keep Ryou alive if he realizes that Isis escaped."

Kaiba nodded, agreeing with the sentiment. He strode across the room in a few steps, barking orders as he gathered a squad to come with them. Malik gave a quick nod to Yugi, following him out.

He stopped when he felt someone tug at his sleeve. "Malik! What are you-"

Malik chuckled, giving a smile to his sister. "I have to find Ryou. After all he's done, it's only fair that I should ensure he lives through it all."

"You can't! Namu will kill you!" Isis warned, panic flashing in her eyes at the thought of her brother confronting Jack the Ripper. "Just because he spared me doesn't mean he'll do the same for you."

"I know." Malik sighed, pulling his sister in close. He felt her rest her forehead on his shoulder. Even though she was older, he often forgot that he was bigger than her now. She seemed even smaller now, like a child in his arms, though Isis would scoff at such a description.

"I'll be back. I need to do this. Please," Malik murmured, pulling away enough so he could press a light kiss on her forehead.

He could tell she wasn't happy with his decision, but also realized that the decision had been made. "You have that Ishtar stubbornness in you."

Malik chuckled. "Sorry."

"Don't be. Just come back safely," Isis pulled away, her smile brittle. It pained her to see her brother rush into danger, but Malik had to see Ryou. He had to save him from his own stupid plan made selflessly for their sakes.

Perhaps Ryou was a stubborn fool as well.

Malik passed the door, pausing when he noticed Bakura still hanging about. He struggled to find the words, not sure what to make of the criminal with a heart of gold and silver tongue. "Thanks. For helping my sister."

Bakura raised an eyebrow, a smirk on his face. "I can think of a few ways you could repay me."

That was the familiar bullshit he had been expecting. He didn't dignify him with a response, brushing past him. Malik could hear Bakura follow him.

"Let me help you."

"Ryou's in trouble, right? Let me help - he's a decent kid. You might need my nimble fingers and innovative techniques to get into that building," Bakura shrugged. His face grew blotchy in a blush, sharply contrasting how Ryou's expression would soften into the color of roses.

Normally Malik would have rejected this offer. Bakura was too shady and conniving to be trusted. But Malik wasn't about to turn help down now. He knew that the conman and the detective had some history and understanding between them. Even if they sometimes clashed, they seemed to have well wishes for the other.

More importantly, Malik didn't have the luxury to be picky about the help they got.

Malik turned back around. "Fine. Let's go."

He heard Bakura laugh behind him. "That easy? No questions asked?"

"Ryou allowed me to tag along when I didn't have any experience. Let's see if you don't slow us down."

"Gee, thanks. How do you think Kaiba will react to me helping?"

"Kaiba can go stick his dick in a cactus. He's not going to stop me from catching this serial killer."

Bakura cackled, stepping next to Malik so their strides matched. A grin grew on his face. "Shit, you sound just like Ryou."

Malik felt his face burn, but he didn't respond. He had more important things to take care of.
He didn't even need to look to see Namu grinning from his spot to the side. His eyes finally fluttered open, taking in a shaky breath. Several seconds of dry heaving left Ryou feeling sweaty and drained, his wretched, threatening empty what little remained in Ryou's stomach. He tore his head to the side, as if the fire never left, his skin too hot and likely melting from the burning touch. His stomach pricking in the corner of his eyes.

Ryou felt like a patient, institutionalized and not allowed to leave. The bindings reminded him that he was a prisoner and that this was not for his own benefit. Well, that and the fact that a mad sociopath was busy setting up instruments of torture, carefully and meticulously bringing in various tools to dissect and take apart the detective. Ryou didn't want to think about what would happen, choosing to shift into a more comfortable position on the hard hospital bed.

Ryou didn't know what to do at this point. He needed to think of some way to distract Namu. He couldn't count on an outside force intervening. He had done everything in his power to prolong his life span, thinking of various methods to get the word out and leave clues leading the police back to them. But Ryou wasn't sure if they would solve it in time.

Had Ryou done enough? Would they find him before it was too late? Or would Namu torture him until his grisly but inevitable death before skipping town, escaping all repercussions for his actions?

Ryou forced himself to breathe deeply. Panic couldn't help him. He relied on logic and deduction. Yet, bindings dug into his wrists, reminding him of how powerless he was. Perhaps Namu was ordinary and no god, but that didn't take away the power he held over his life.

Finally, Namu stepped into view, light illuminating his features as he drew close. Ryou couldn't see all that had he brought over, but perhaps it was best not to let his imagination wander and consider all the ways a human could die. Namu gave him a smirk, a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"How's my patient feeling?" he teased, his hand resting on Ryou's hip. Even with the slightest graze, the pain prickled up through his body, reminding Ryou of the bullet that had not yet been removed.

"Meh. I've had worse days," Ryou shrugged, refusing to let Namu see his pain. He didn't want to feed the madman's ego. He knew that Namu sought the satisfaction of his suffering and he would be disappointed because Ryou was damn sure he wouldn't give him that much.

"Don't worry. I'll be certain to take care of that," Namu growled, his smile growing. Namu didn't seem disappointed by Ryou's resistance. In fact, he probably saw it as a challenge. That's all this ever was between them – a challenge. A constant fight to see who was stronger, who was smarter, who would win.

Ryou was worried that he staked too much on this battle of egos.

"So how are you going to kill me? Dissection, I assume? Or do you plan on being a bit more creative than usual?" Ryou asked. Perhaps he could get Namu monologuing long enough until he came up with some manner of escape. Unlike but it was worth a shot.

"Please, detective. I'm a man of science and art. There are certain things you can't learn from corpses," Namu retorted, leaving momentarily. Ryou heard the sound of metal shifting, but couldn't see what was going on.

"Such as?"

Namu returned, carrying a short metal rod. The end glowed white, tinging into red as the heat tapered off. The sight caused Ryou's heart to clench, his mind already racing.

"Humans have an astonishing pain tolerance. They reach a point where something is so painful and damaging to the body that they can't process pain any longer. The nerve endings become too damaged, see?"

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Ryou was worried that he staked too much on this battle of egos.
"There's a debate among doctors as to what is the most painful experience known to man. They say that burning is one of the most painful ways to die." Namu chuckled, turning back to heat the metal up again. "I've heard scaphism is worse, but frankly I don't have the patience nor the time to observe that at the moment. I'll have to add that to my bucket list."

Ryuu tried to muster some sort of retort, but the words were snatched from his lips when the hot rod returned to his skin a second time. Just to the left of the first burn, the heat returned, blistering white flashing into Ryuu's vision. He inhaled sharply, biting his lip as he tried not to think of the scent of his burning flesh that caught his nose.

Though it was only a few more seconds, the metal did not leave his skin soon enough. He knew that there would be blisters and awful scabbing before this was done. He tried to open his eyes, but darkness danced across his vision. Ryuu became hazy, stuck between consciousness and unconsciousness.

Namu was a patient man, unfortunately.

When Ryuu's breaths finally steadied and the darkness faded from the corner of his vision, Namu stood nearby, a wide grin on his face. He tsked mockingly at the detective.

"Passing out after two scars? Is that all you've got? How far can you go, detective? What will it take? I'm dying to know what will break you."

In that moment, Ryuu knew he could not give Namu what he wanted. He knew that he sought the satisfaction of torturing him. Ryuu still had his pride, if nothing else. Even as the hot metal seared his skin a third time, right below his sternum, he gritted his teeth, muffling the scream that slipped through.

He would not beg nor plea for mercy. Such things were a waste of energy. He needed to survive. He needed to escape...

... But any thoughts of hatching a new plan ceased, his mind scrambled by the bursts of sudden pain erupting across his chest. He couldn't formulate any possible schemes when the pain blinded him to everything. Each time the hot metal returned to his skin, Ryuu couldn't breathe, couldn't move, couldn't think, even though that was his only hope of survival.

After the fourth mark, Namu leaned back, a frown on his face. Ryuu, while unable to bite back his muffled cries, managed not to pass out this time. He didn't want to give Namu into thinking of some new ways of torturing him, but had little choice on the manner. For now, the cool air was a refreshing reprieve to his tortured skin when compared to the heated metal.

Namu turned away, shaking his head. "It's like you want me to suffer, Ryuu."

Ryuu tipped his head back, exhausted and weak. He wasn't sure how much fight he still had in him but he was going to find out. "Good. Didn't want you to get the wrong impression."

Namu smirked, his blond head tipping back. "God, I fucking hate you. I want to make sure you know that when I finally decide to kill you."

Namu smiled as he turned around, the metal rod still in hand. Ryuu was confused, surprised that they were continuing this torture further. He had thought Namu grew bored with it. But the wicked smile on his face had Ryuu's chest hurting in a new way. "I'll have you begging for mercy before I'm done with you."

Before Ryuu could ask, the metal returned, the fifth one to be added to the set. The heat that continued to radiate suddenly exploded, the damaged, blistered skin exposed. The cool air had tricked his body into relaxing, convinced the worst had passed. The brief reprieve only made the burn even worse in the end. The pain was paralyzing, shooting up through Ryuu's body until his breath froze. It was too much, his mind shattering at the reapplied fire to his body.

Namu didn't give Ryuu a chance to catch his breath, digging into the skin and holding down longer. Ryuu had been fighting for too long, desperate to win this battle of minds. But his body was already caving, any remaining pride being swallowed up by the fire consuming his mind and body.

Ryuu screamed, blacking out a second time, knowing that he would be awoken for even more punishment to follow.

Malik leaned against the edge of the building. He hated all the waiting and damn bureaucracy that slowed everything. He understood why Ryuu never bothered going through the police department for half of his work – he would waste most of his time waiting for things to happen.

Still, Malik recognized that they needed to set a perimeter. And as the police moved into position, posted at each building around the block, on rooftops, a squad to the sewers, the reality of it all started to sink in. They were about to rush into the hospital and capture Jack the Ripper.

Malik forced himself to swallow the hard lump caught in his throat. He could hear people moving and running through the rain, puddles splashing dirty water onto his coat. Malik couldn't be bothered by such a thing. Instead, he kept his gaze focused on the pistol in his hand. The same weapon handed to him when they had first staked out their initial trap to capture Namu.

Malik hadn't given the gun much thought when he got it. He had assumed the police would move in and he would need the weapon in self-defense. But the situation had changed now that Namu had a hostage and Ryuu was in danger. Malik had never asked if he was ready to shoot somebody. Defend himself, perhaps, but aim to kill was a different matter.

"Malik, are you going with a-team or b-team?" Kaiba sounded like his usual, irritable self as he crossed the pathway towards the hospital.

Malik turned his gaze back up, the pistol still in his hand. "A-team." Kaiba had given him the option to stand guard outside or move in with the interception team to confront and catch Namu. He knew that he should have promised his sister better regard for his safety, but he was taking after a certain detective too much. Standing by idly was not an option in Malik's mind.

Kaiba didn't say anything, his eyes narrowing at the large, gray building before them. Malik ignored the rain falling into his face, studying the labyrinth before them. Having the floorplans to the building would have been preferable, but since Yugi didn't have them any longer, they would have to go in blind. They could only hope that Namu hadn't been alerted to their presence yet.

"Ever fired a gun before?" Kaiba's words wound through the rain, catching Malik off guard. He glanced up at the commissioner, who kept his gaze forward.

Malik sighed, looking down at the pistol in his hand. "No."
Duke turned back to talk to Malik. “This place is huge, so I recommend we each take a side and mirroring each other down the hallway.

He, moving left towards the east wing. They travelled all the way down to the end doors, his nerves, Malik felt better about moving, finally having a direction and purpose. Duke inclined his head, “next.”

“We’ll break into four teams, taking a separate wing each. Clear each floor before moving to the next.”

Damaged any light that could have slipped in. Kaiba walked ahead, pausing as he looked around.

Malik didn’t release his breath until the lanterns were lit. It was still evening, but the storm outside dampened any light that could have slipped in. Kaiba walked ahead, pausing as he looked around. The silence was more harrowing, leaving Malik to think about what he was doing. He didn’t want to think. He just wanted to move and get his and Ryos’s survival, but he didn’t know how he would react when finally put under pressure.

Kaiba snorted, but didn’t say anything else. He, too, was occupied by their impending mission.

The six other men reached them, forming a loose circle so that Kaiba could give orders. The officers came ready with lanterns and weapons, a grim look on their face. The only one who looked out of place was Bakura, who was still garbed in his usual attire. His sweater and coat were all but soaked as he tied his white hair back into a loose ponytail.

Kaiba gave them a sharp look, his gaze enough to silence any muttering about the group. “Our sources tell us that Jack the Ripper is in that building. Our mission is simple – detain Namu and ascertain Ryos’s whereabouts. If you’re able, escort the detective off the premises so as to remove any potential hostages.”

“And if Namu resists?” Duke asked, adjusting his gloves.

Kaiba gave him a dark look. Malik unsure if he saw his lips twitch into a smile briefly. “Then you have permission to shoot to kill.”

Nods rippled through the circle. Bakura ignored them, his eyes fixed on the building. Malik crossed his arms, a shiver running through him as the cold rain was starting to chill him to his bone.

Kaiba turned his attention to the comman. Malik had expected the commissioner to turn down his aid, but perhaps he was as desperate as Malik was. “Bakura, have you found a way of entry?”

Bakura cracked his knuckles, looking back at the hospital. “All of the main floor entrances have been blocked. It seems he barricaded them from the inside.”

Malik frowned, turning back to the commissioner. “Have we found the sewer entry point?”

Kaiba shook his head. “Not yet. Any ideas on getting in?”

Bakura sighed, swinging his arms as he stretched them. “There’s an office window on the second floor. If I can clamber my way in, I can let you guy in from the inside by removing the barricade.”

There was an awkward silence that followed, Malik flicking his lavender eyes back to Kaiba. He knew that this was an uneasy alliance between the three of them. Of all of them, Bakura seemed to have the least reason to be there, yet insisted on helping Ryou out to call it even. He knew that this was suspicious to Kaiba and he wasn’t sure if he would be sold on this idea.

Kaiba’s dark brown hair hung into his face, studying the white-haired criminal before him. The idea of letting him wander the building before they could properly search the premises was risky on multiple levels. It was risky if Bakura decided to betray them, meaning that Namu would have time to escape. It was risky if Bakura was caught and Namu realized this new trap.

It was risky because they were running out of time and options. Perhaps that was the greatest of all and the one that rang in all of their minds. Kaiba growled, walking towards the entrance. “You have five minutes to get us in. If not, I will personally file the paperwork for your arrest.”

“Blah, blah, throw my ass in jail, blah, blah, blah, put me on death row – I know this shtick by now, commissioner.” Bakura complained up to the sky, splitting off from the group. How the two managed to remain as irritable and annoying as always was unfathomable to Malik.

Bakura watched Bakura walk around the corner of the building, following the group as they moved towards the main set of doors. Though he was getting better at faces, only Kaiba and Duke were recognizable. They stood under the awning, shielding themselves from the rain as they waited for the door to open.

Malik hated how they all stood there silently. There was none of the friendly banter and annoyed mutterings he had gotten used to on the stake outs. The silence was more harrowing, leaving Malik to think about what he was doing. He didn’t want to think. He just wanted to move and get this done.

“I swear to god, if Bakura is warning Namu, I will tie the noose around his neck myself,” Kaiba growled none to quietly.

Malik sighed. “Of course that was what the commissioner up. “He’ll get us in. I believe him.”

“Thanks babe, I think you’re pretty sexy too.”

Malik swore, jumping back as Bakura opened the door to the hospital. He had a large smirk on his face, taunting Malik to test him.

Malik felt his face burn, trying to ignore the darkness beyond. “Fuck off, you prat. Now I know why Ryos hated dealing with you.”

Bakura laughed, stepping back as Duke passed him. Malik followed after the officers, drawing his pistol. He didn’t have time to think about the thief any longer. The darkness engulfed them, the rain a distant murmur behind them as they entered the decrepit hospital.

Malik didn’t release his breath until the lanterns were lit. It was still evening, but the storm outside dampened any light that could have slipped in. Kaiba walked ahead, passing as he looked around. “We’ll break into four teams, taking a separate wing each. Clear each floor before moving to the next.”

Malik didn’t argue with that logic. A quick look at Duke was enough to affirm their team. Despite his nerves, Malik felt better about moving, finally having a direction and purpose. Duke inclined his head, moving left towards the east wing. They travelled all the way down to the end doors, mirror each other down the hallway.

Duke turned back to talk to Malik. “This place is huge, so I recommend we each take a side and
examine each room as we're able. Once we ascertain that the floor is clear, we'll move up to the
next.”

Malik nodded, a hand resting on the pistol holstered at his side. Even though Duke remained calm
and hadn't even drawn his weapon, Malik couldn't shake his nerves. “Understood. Let's get this
over with.”

Duke snorted, but said nothing. They both split as they went down the hallway. Initially, Malik
felt hesitant, as if there was a bomb behind each door. However, this fear turned to annoyance
since most of the doors were locked and the few that opened held nothing, showing only storage
or old hospital rooms. Nothing in these rooms indicated any use.

Malik supposed that with a building this big, most of the resources would be untouched. Namu
wouldn't need all of the rooms, so it made sense that most of them looked untouched since being
marked off for fire damage. Still, Malik felt antsy to get moving as he waited for Duke.

The second floor was much the same and even Duke couldn't hide his growing annoyance. That
left the third floor and Malik could only hope they found him quickly or that one of the other
teams had located him. Duke tilted his head back as they climbed the last set of stairs.

"Maybe he's not here at all?"

Malik shook his head. "Isis said they were in a hospital. This is the only logical option. Also, why
barricade it from the inside?"

"Fair point. Maybe he's hiding, or he got out ahead of us, though," Duke frowned, rounding the
corner as they reached the final flight.

Malik snorted, looking down. "I certainly hope not."

Malik passed as he stared at the floorboard beneath him. There was a strange discoloration. He
lowered the lantern a bit more, noticing the rusty smears against the metal tiles. He froze. Malik
wasn't certain, but he suspected that this wouldn't have happened when the hospital was still
active.

Malik looked, noticing how the blood smeared, trailing down from where they came. Malik turned
back around, his heart thudding as he started to descend.

"Malik?"

He snapped his head back to Duke, who gave him a nonplussed expression.

"I want to check something out. Go on ahead," Malik responded, still going down the stairs.

He heard Duke mutter under his breath, a hint of annoyance. "Right. Let's split up and look for a
serial killer. Sounds like a great plan, commissioner.” Perhaps it was dangerous, but Kaiba gave
orders that the secondary team follow after them in a half-hour's time. They wouldn't be so stupid
as to divide up their forces that much.

Malik's steps echoed down the stairwell, following the rust trail that was left behind. He got all the
way to the first floor, confused when he saw the trail continue around the corner. The stairs didn't
go any lower. It seemed to end before a heavy door that Malik had assumed led outside. He didn't
think Namu would take his victim outside.

Thinking for a moment, Malik lowered his lantern, moving to try opening the door. The door was
heavy, barely moving. He threw his weight against it, the door cracking up open a bit more. Malik
noticed that it led downward to a basement. The torches were lit down the stairwell, revealing the
bread crumb trail he had been following.

Malik's heart started to race, as he squeezed through the opening. He descended down the stairs,
terified at going in blind. He paused at the door at the end of the stairwell, twisting the knob to
find that it was locked.

In his gut, Malik knew that Namu was down here. He also had enough sense to know that he
needed to get back up. Malik started to run up the stairs, meaning to grab Duke or whoever was
nearby to provide him cover (or them cover since Malik had the least amount of experience).

That was the plan until Malik heard an awful scream.

Malik froze in his steps, panic consuming him. The noise had come from behind the locked door,
doubtful that anyone else would have heard it in this massive building, hidden in the corner away
from the world. Malik raced back down, hands trembling as he shook at the locked handle in
frustration.

Malik knelt down, fingers fumbling as he tried to pick the lock. He couldn't steady his hands
enough, the thin rod slipping and not catching the pegs as they needed to. Malik swore under his
breath, realizing that this was a different lock than the ones he had grown accustomed to. These
were an older model, stiff and reluctant to open.

"Fuck!” Malik tossed the broken rod away, moving to find something else he could use to open
the door. That search was cut short when he heard another scream, distressed and sharper than the
one previous.

Malik leapt back to his feet, his hands suddenly steady as he unholstered his gun. He held the
pistol with both hands as he aimed at the lock. Reckless or not, he wouldn't, he couldn't let Ryou
die.

Malik pulled the trigger, the sound echoing with the scream that filled the hospital.
The line between pain and numbness became difficult to draw. Just when Ryou felt as if he couldn't feel any more, Namu continued to push his body past its limits. His chest felt as if it were on fire, the heat licking up to his neck as he struggled to find his breath. He knew he had lost quite a bit of blood from before and that his stamina wasn't the best.

Namu had branded him with five burns on his chest, likely permanent scars if Ryou survived this ordeal. Ryou learned that even if it wasn't as painful as before, each new exposure to a different form of pain was just as startling and excruciating as before. Even if his body knew it wasn't life-threatening as other injuries might have been, his brain convinced him that the pain was real.

It wasn't Ryou's life on the line, he would have admired the serial killer's mastery and study of psychosomatic pain. The threat and tease of greater pain was enough to drive him mad.

Ryou tilted his head over to the side, Namu seemingly sharpening something. It didn't necessarily mean to have to be knives. Even from his position, Ryou could see the various "equipment" Namu had gathered. The rod, or rather a poker at this point, sat among a collection of various knives. Ryou morbidly wondered if he had named any of them.

His eyes settled on a pair of piers, which Namu hadn't used thankfully. Ryou didn't particularly want to think about that. The liquid worried him the most, not eager to find out of the deranged serial killer just wanted a glass of water or if he was looking at acid. Strangely enough, the only thing on the table that didn't concern Ryou was the gun. The Colt M1877, i.e. the "Lightning," the very weapon that landed a bullet in his hip.

He figured that Namu would only use it when he got bored or if something interrupted them. Shooting Ryou would be far too merciful. Even the detective understood that he was meant to suffer until he finally died, no matter how long it took.

Ryou's pride became a distant memories, his screams and exhaustion laid bare to his captor. Despite his fear that this would soon becoming boring to his captor, he quickly realized his agony fueled the madman, urging him to learn what else he could do to break the detective. And the straps cutting into Ryou's wrists reminded him of how helpless he was and how hopeless the situation had become.

Ryou felt tired, aware that if Namu didn't kill him soon, then he would pass out from blood loss. If he blacked out again, there was no guarantee that he would wake.

Ryou fluttered his eyes open, his breath shallow. Namu stood over him, grinning.

"Tired already? We've hardly done anything."

"I didn't realize... you need this much foreplay to get off," Ryou snapped back, though the words were slow to leave his lips. If he couldn't fight the man off physically, he could at least sass him, for what little it would do. Ryou didn't want to be seen as submissive and obedient, not in front of his killer.

"I'm worth the effort." Namu snorted, his lavender eyes flicking over the burns and cuts and bruises along Ryou's chest with a sense of pride.

"Are you, though?"

Namu chuckled, a smirk on his face. "Deflecting now? Trying to steal away my fun. Is it that you're afraid to die?"

"Not particularly," Ryou rolled his eyes, a pitiful attempt at boredom. Even now, tremors wracked through Ryou's body and his mouth felt sluggish, the words coming in broken phrases. Maintaining the façade became too difficult. "If you keep this up... I'll die of boredom sooner than anything you can think of... You're pretty unoriginal... in terms of torture... It's disappointing, really."

His words had the effect Ryou had been looking for. Namu slammed him across the face, Ryou flinching away. The slight sting barely registered against the agony that was his chest. Ryou glared defiantly as Namu gripped his jaw tightly, his fingers digging into his skin. Ryou refused to back down, gathering up some saliva before spitting at the face hovering above him.

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"Malik? Get out!" Ryou screamed, desperate.

Namu lunged across Ryou, snatching the gun resting on the other table. The Colt M1877, i.e. the "Lightning," the very weapon that landed a bullet in his hip.
Ryou took a deep breath, looking up at the table that had rolled away when Namu lunged for the gun. The collection of knives flashed in Ryou's mind and he crawled away from the safety the bed had given him. He heard the gunfire above him, keeping his head low. He snapped his gaze up, noticing how Namu looked furious, cackling as he tried to goad Malik out.

"Decided to join in on the fun, Malik? I'll give you a souvenir to remember me by!" Namu took another shot, the bullet grazing against the door frame. Ryou caught the motion of Malik moving back, trying to engage but stay out of harm's way.

Ryou didn't trust himself to speak. His voice seemed to fail him, He reached an unsteady hand up, feeling around until he gripped the handle of a knife. He brought it down close, scooting out of sight. Namu was focused on Malik, convinced that Ryou was immobile and effectively trapped.

Ryou could hear Malik's breathing, an almost panicked tone to the unsteady gasps. "Give up, Namu! The police have closed in on your location! Put down the gun and surrender!"

Namu snarled, insulted by the idea of laying down his weapons. Ryou moved slowly, trying to avoid detection. He shifted so that he was behind Namu, approaching him from his blind spot.

Ryou's eyes flicked to the doorway in front of the serial killer. Though Malik was out of sight, he could see the shadow of his silhouette in the dim lighting on the wall across the hallway. He was nearby, poised to strike. Any attempt at talking the criminal down failed when Ryou watched Namu clench his pistol, aiming at the doorway.

"Like hell I'm surrendering!"

Malik flipped around the corner, gun raised as the two fired off a shot. Ryou's heart froze when he saw Malik fall backwards onto the ground, crying sharply from pain as a bullet found its mark. Knowing he couldn't move fast enough, Ryou screeched. With more energy than he thought was possible given his condition, Ryou lunged at Namu, closing the few feet that separated them.

Namu snapped his head back, startled as Ryou leapt onto his back. Ryou didn't know what he was doing exactly. He just knew that he had stop Namu at whatever cost, all planning be damned. Malik wasn't about to die for his sake. Ryou remembered the knife that he had gripped, struggling to bring it around to slice at his throat.

Namu suddenly found himself fighting off Ryou, one hand trying to pry Ryou off of him while the other deflected the raised knife. Ryou struggled, trying to pull the knife closer. Ryou hated how the cotton of Namu's shirt rubbed up against his raw and bloodied chest, ignoring the pain. It became easier to ignore as he became more desperate. Ryou had never killed anyone before, but he would if he had to. He would kill this serial killer, fuck due process, if it stopped him here and now.

Justice didn't matter any more. Only survival.

Namu snarled, snatching at Ryou's wrist to keep his knife at bay. Ryou dug his nails into his shoulders, certain he felt the skin break. Namu yowled, his lavender eyes catching Ryou's.

"You bitch!"

"Ryou yanked to free his wrist, his hatred unbridled at the man he fought against. "That's for fucking up my chest!"

Namu stumbled back a few steps, struggling to stay upright with Ryou's weight. Even though he was lighter, Ryou was fueled by desperation and anger. Ryou thought naively he might actually have a chance of weakening Namu. When Namu managed to tear his hand out of his shoulder, Ryou flung his fingers at his face, digging into whatever soft flesh he could find. Anything he could think of slow the madman down and keep them alive longer.

Namu huffed, glancing back as he stumbled back some more. It was then that Ryou realized that it was intentional. Namu backing both of them up until he could slam Ryou against the stone wall.

The impact was jarring, Ryou feeling his breath stolen away from him. The back of his head smacked into the stone, Ryou sprawling at the sharp pain that exploded across his vision.

The thought of protecting himself crossed Ryou's mind. He forced his eyes open, searching for the dagger he had lost in the scuffle. He spotted the knife across the room and away from the two men. His vision grew fuzzy, Ryou struggling to focus, aware that he couldn't give up now. Not after pissing off his captor so.

Ryou willed himself to move, knowing he didn't have time to lie around. But his body didn't seem to realize that, his muscles unsteady as he tried to lift himself back up. He had only just barely struggled to his knees when a sharp kick brought him back down. Ryou was stupid to think that Namu was going to overlook his little act of rebellion.

Ryou curled in to where he was kicked, knowing that his pale skin would bruise even more than it had. He panted, glaring up from his spot at the serial killer. To his delight, he had done more damage than he had initially thought. Namu's lip was torn, his eye was squinted from where he dug his nails in. He could see the bloody scratches on Namu's shoulder, his shirt rumpled and torn from their struggle.

It didn't even register to Ryou when he saw the raised pistol, aimed at his head. There was a grim satisfaction as he glared up at his executioner. At least he gave him a few scars to remember him by.

Ryou took one last breath, the sharp crack of a gunshot cutting through the air.
Ryou took in a breath, the moment finally setting in on him. Like a terrible nightmare, he was waking up and trying to regain sense of what was real. His body shook, Ryou wincing as he tried to slide himself towards Malik. Now that the danger had passed, the adrenaline dissipated, reminding Ryou of all of his injuries. His burning chest, his throbbing leg, his broken hip.

Ryou could handle the physical pain. It was the weight of everything else that was too much to bear.

A ragged breath tore from Ryou's lips. He tried to fight it, tried to fight the cascade of emotions that threatened to sweep him away. But as Malik staggered towards him, exhausted and trembling, it consumed Ryou. A broken sob slipped through, Ryou shaking his head as he felt too overwhelmed, too overjoyed, overburdened and whatever else he could think of.

Malik tumbled down next to him, on his knees as he reached a hand out to Ryou. The weary look in his eyes captured all that Ryou felt where words failed them. Ryou couldn't stop the tears that fell, leaking away his tears. Sitting up was too difficult, so exhausted that Ryou collapsed into Malik's lap, feeling broken by all that had occurred.

"It's over." Ryou whispered, trying to ascertain that all that had transpired had finally come to an end. Even with the body of the infamous serial killer laying near, Ryou couldn't process it. His brain didn't know where to separate reality from fantasy. The only concrete thing, the only thing that could reassure him was Malik's fingers brushing against his cheeks, wiping away his tears.

"It's over. You're safe." Malik muttered back, offering reassurance as much as seeking it. Ryou felt his fingers brush through his hair, gentle and reassuring.

In a flash, Ryou felt the earlier sting of pain - a slap to his face, his windpipe being crushed, the fire burning his chest still, the physical trauma that haunted him. He shook at the memories, trying to replace them with the soft caress that reassured him that it was all over. That Namu couldn't hurt him anymore. But his body shook, his defenses still up, yet with each brush of fingers against his cheek, Ryou felt his guard crumbling away, piece by piece.

Soon, the sobs overwhelmed Ryou. He was tired of being strong. He had done everything he could think to survive. From the moment their plans fell apart, Ryou had been in survival mode the entire time. He didn't have time to grieve or mourn his situation, to give in to despair. He had been certain that he would die in this stone coffin, only to be found too late.

Ryou heard the sound of footsteps, the police now finally catching up to Malik in their pursuit of the killer. Ryou didn't pay them any attention, seeking comfort from all that happened. The months of research, agony of the chase, the terror of these last 24 hours, was finally at an end. They had finally caught Jack the Ripper.

And yet it was not how Ryou expected it to be.

Ryou felt himself grow tired, blood loss and lack of sleep weighing on him. Malik's touch was
warm and soothing, a welcome difference from the pain that had been inflicted on him. He would file a report with Seto later. He would close out the case properly and move on to other work. The city at large would learn of the death of the infamous serial killer and finally move past this shadow.

But Ryou knew this shadow would haunt him long after these events had passed. He would bear this burden, remembering the horrors and hell that was wrought in this place. He would wear these scars for the rest of his life.

Yet Ryou took comfort that he alone wouldn't carry this burden. Even now, he felt tears dropping down to his cheeks, mixing with his own.

Chapter End Notes

Link to artwork here.
Malik still felt confused, struggling between the horrors he last saw with the warm sunlight that welcomed him. He didn't have much time to gather himself when the door swung open. As he turned and saw his siblings, he suspected it wouldn't be as cheerful of a reunion as he would have wished. Malik had been so convinced that if he let the light leave, it would never come back. It was a foolish plan, but it was child's desperate wish.

That darkness seemed overwhelming when his father stole away the light from him. Malik never took orders and commands well, even when he was little. He was stubborn even back then, an idiosyncrasy as his sister would tell him. As a kid, Malik knew he hadn't done anything wrong. He had upset his father, but not for any reason a parent should be upset. So Malik didn't see any issue and refused to back down.

When his father dragged him by the arm and locked him in the closet for his behavior, Malik was angry. He screamed and yelled and made whatever noise he could think of. But as time wore on, Malik felt the weight of it settle in. The panic of being trapped, of being in pitch darkness with no light, of wondering if his father forgot or worse, knew he was still in there and refused to let him out.

The fear grew, like the darkness that swallowed him.

It got to the point that Malik grew terrified to go to sleep. He couldn't bear the thought of falling asleep in the dark. He knew that the moment he closed his eyes, the darkness would wash over him and suffocate him. He cried and pleaded for Rishid to let him keep the lamp burning, to keep it lit all night until the sun rose each morning.

Rishid promised Malik he could keep the lamp on until he fell asleep. Malik wasn't satisfied with such an arrangement, the terror so painful that he struggled to breathe. He didn't know then that Rishid was still trying to protect him. That if their father knew that he kept a light on at night, he would have lashed out, his short-temper clouding his judgment.

That first night, Malik told himself he wouldn't fall asleep. He would force himself to stay up until dawn if it meant the light would never leave. It was a foolish plan, but it was child's desperate wish. Malik had been so convinced that if he let the light leave, it would never come back. And perhaps it wouldn't. At least, not on its own.

Like most stubborn children with the best laid plans, Malik fell asleep. When he woke the next morning, he struggled to remember Rishid's promise. He felt terrified, scared to wake up in darkness. To his surprise, Rishid and Isis were sitting in his room, the shades pulled back to let in the sun. They had suspected that Malik would stay up as late as possible. Even they understood what it meant to be stubborn.

The joy that Malik felt to be greeted by the light, by the warmth of his siblings, taught him something that day. There are times when it felt like darkness had won over the light. That when the door was locked and closed, there was no way out. Sometimes, you had to fight for the light, claw your way out until you figured out how to open that door yourself.

Sometimes, you couldn't even accomplish that much. But that's when others were there to bring you to the light.

Malik couldn't keep the sun, but he could cherish it when it was there. And just like the stars and the moon that lit up the night, there was light to be found even in the darkest of nights.

AN: It took an extra day but we're finally at the end! Artwork was added to chapter 24 so if you missed it, hop back a chapter or you can check it nat's artwork [here](link).
I asked one thing of you and you couldn't even do that!” Isis snapped, though Rishid had a bemused look on his face.

Malik felt his cheeks burn, feeling small under Isis's glare. "I'm alive? Does that count?"

He knew the answer didn't ease his sister's mind as Isis crossed the distance between them. She plopped herself on the bed next to Malik, a stern look on her face. "Why do you have to be so damn reckless? You were nearly killed! Does that mean nothing?"

Malik huffed, annoyed at being lectured after not having time to fully wake up. "I didn't mean for things to get out of hand! Ryou was in danger and I had to do something! There wasn't any time."

Malik cut himself off, a panic replacing the irritation he felt. Thoughts of the detective he loved swam into mind, shifting his focus altogether. "Ryou! Is he alright? Where is he? Di-"

Malik ignored his irate sister, who looked miffed at being dismissed, though not nearly enough to refuse his questions. Rishid stepped into the conversation quickly, sensing his brother's alarm.

"The detective is okay. He just woke this morning, actually, and we spoke to him earlier this morning while you were still asleep. We were surprised that he woke up before you've been out for three days."

Malik let out a sigh of relief, despite his shock at the passage of time. Ryou was okay. Isis was okay. Everything would be okay, despite his current pain. "Thank god, I thought." Malik didn't finish the thought. He didn't want to worry about how close they had come to failing. How Namu nearly broke them and destroyed everything they loved.

Malik's mind raced back to the case, the event from days before still seemed blurry. Everything that happened after he had pulled the trigger didn't feel real, like a dream. He remembered holding Ryou, being rushed to the hospital, Kaiba probably barking orders. It all seemed so long ago. Longer than three days at least.

"What happened?"

"We can worry about what happened at another time. Let's not weigh on such matters." Rishid caught the look Isis gave him, still defiant yet and demanding answers for some of Malik's more dangerous actions. "While I don't condone what actions Malik took the other night, we should be celebrating our reunion, not souring it with reprimands. We'll have plenty of time for that discussion at a later time."

Malik hid his growing smile, ready to sing praises for his brother's intervention. It was easy for Malik to get defensive quickly, even with his own family members. Isis rushing in and venting her worry and frustration at his reckless behavior was not a good start for the three siblings. Like always, Rishid knew how to de-escalate the situation, soothing all the nerves in the room.

His glanced away, looking somewhat meek under his rebuke. Malik took mercy on his sister, giving her a wry grin. "I'm on Rishid's side of these things, if that's good with you, sis."

She snorted and shook her head. "Of course, you are. Still, I suppose I shouldn't ruin this good moment. It's been so long since we've all been together."

Malik nodded, his heart feeling warm. His sister had been missing for weeks and the agony of wondering what happened to her had wreaked Malik's heart. He had even felt distant from his brother, desperate to find her and stave off any feelings that could muddle his search. It became difficult to cling tight to what they had left when it seemed as if anything could tear them apart.

So to see Isis sitting on the bed next to him, tired yet bright eyes gleaming in the morning light, stole his breath away. Rishid was more relaxed, comfortable with his company and finally at ease after their long and harrowing time.

"It's good to have you back Isis. Are you feeling okay?" Malik asked, letting himself enjoy the moment as well.

Isis nodded, her defender falling away. "I feel good. Namu didn't mistreat me in any way, but fresh air certainly cured what ailed my soul."

Rishid narrowed his eyes, pulling up a chair so as to not cramp Malik on his bed. He was always polite like that. "Why would Namu kidnap you to begin with? He didn't harm you nor are you dead. It doesn't make sense."

Malik bit back his initial reaction, a bitter retort about how madness has no sense or logic to follow. If there's anything he had learned in this case, Jack the Ripper had been very meticulous and careful in all of his actions. Why Namu would target someone who had known him previously didn't align with his actions. Even Ryou admitted that much, reluctant at first to look into his sister's disappearance since she didn't match the profile of his usual victims.

"Did he ask you anything about Egyptology?" Malik asked, going back to their initial theory.

She shook her head, a frown on her face. "He didn't ask me anything. I was left alone mostly unless it was to feed me. I'm not sure if he even knew what he was planning." Her head jerked up, alarm on her face. "Oh god, what's happened to my beloved department since my departure?"

Malik had to bite back a laugh. Of course his sister would have a panic attack over her work, the only child he was convinced his sister would ever want. Rishid adjusted his coat as he sat down. "I've been holding down the fort. With two Ishtars missing in action, someone had to keep up with all the work."

"Two missing Ishtars?" Isis asked, Malik already sensing the impending glare.

He shrugged, avoiding all eye contact. "I was helping Ryou with the case."

His rolled her eyes. "Pegasus will be livid. Lord knows how much work we'll need to catch up on."

"Pegasus has different issues to take care of at the moment, legally speaking." Rishid remarked.

Malik blinked, turning to his brother. "Wait, what happened?"

Rishid gave him a deadpan stare, almost questioning if Malik was being serious. It took Malik a few moments for him to remember the confession his boss had given to the commissioner, admitting to stealing ancient Egyptian artifacts to be sold off. He blushed, remembering how he incidentally uncovered that.

"I, however, was not part of that new development. "Rishid, what do you mean?"

Rishid sighed, not looking forward to explaining how their brother uncovered their boss's less
savory business dealings. Malik glanced away, looking down at his wound. He wore a clean, white shirt, unbuttoned as he examined the bandages. Aside from his earlier sharp movements, he felt relatively okay. For a bullet wound, it didn't hurt as much as he thought it would. Perhaps it only grazed him. All the same, Malik felt well enough to even try walking.

Which was important for his next course of actions. Malik shifted in his spot, swinging his legs off the bed. Rishid stood up, as if to urge his brother to lay down. Instead, Malik took a deep breath, preparing himself. "I'm going to go see Ryuu."

It was a request, despite Malik's firm tone. Isis and Rishid exchanged a look before standing up with Malik. He blinked, surprised by the lack of resistance. "Wait, you're just going to let me get up and go see him."

"Malik, we're Ishtars. I will fight you on many things, but I know when your mind is made up, there's no point in fighting back," Isis gave him a smirk, hiding her amusement. Rishid didn't say anything, but gave a solemn nod, as if this stubborn trait of theirs was the greatest law of their family. Malik grinned, shaking his head. How ironic that they would reach an accord by recognizing their own pigheadedness.

Malik swayed once he got to his feet, feeling woozy. Rishid grabbed him for a moment, but Malik shook off his aid. If he was going to stand by his stubborn decision, then he could at least make the walk himself. The first few steps were a struggle, but as Malik gained momentum, it became easier to force himself forward.

The three of them walked down the hallways, Isis and Rishid guiding Malik to Ryuu's room. They mentioned that the detective had been awake when they saw him earlier today. Malik hoped that meant that he was okay and not in dire straits. Ryuu risked everything for his family, to give them back their peace and happiness. No thanks would ever be sufficient.

Malik saw no reason to fight the current, realizing he would like some time to speak with Ryou alone. This would be easier.

The thought clogged up in Malik's chest as he struggled to ignore it. He felt his emotions getting the better of him and it irritated him. Malik shook his head, ignoring the dizzying effect as he held onto the door frame momentarily. Isis gave a tentative knock on the slightly opened door. It figured that his siblings would give more respect to the detective and ask for permission before entering.

Even though Malik had seen Ryuu the previous night, had rescued him, nothing really prepared him for what he saw. As he walked in, he caught himself staring at Ryuu, sitting propped up in the hospital bed. His chest was bandaged, a brace at his hip that caused Ryuu to sit at an odd angle. The sheet covered his lap, hiding any other injuries he may have sustained. The full extent of what happened to Ryuu was still unknown, but he felt anger swell in him at the gauze on his forehead and the bruises that couldn't be hidden by bandages.

And yet despite his own frustration and anger, his heart lifted when Ryuu turned to them, a large smile on his face.

'I was hoping you would drop by!' Ryuu chirped, sounding full of energy despite his haggard appearance and pallid features. He looked much paler than usual but… Malik felt his cheeks burn. Even now, Ryuu was still so beautiful.

"I think I'll win that bet," Malik turned back to his siblings, courtesy finally demanding he at least pretend to play the polite sibling and friend. "Ryuu, you've met Rishid. This is my sister Isis."

"We actually met earlier, Malik." Isis chuckled, moving to sit near them, taking the chair by the bed. "Ryuu is the reason I escaped."

Malik remembered that detail, turning back to Ryuu. The detective just gave him a shrug, a small smile on his face. "I promised I'd find and save your sister."

Malik shook his head, words escaping him. He didn't trust his voice, not in front of the people he loved so much who had given him so much. He knew the moment he tried to express his gratitude and thanks for all Ryuu had done, he would not be able to stop the tears from flowing. Almost abruptly, Isis stood up, sitting for only a moment. "I imagine you two are hungry. Why don't Rishid and I grab some food and bring it back here so we can all eat together?"

Malik didn't even get to voice his opinion on the matter as Ryuu nodded vigorously, his expression delighted. "Yes! Food! I'm starved!"

"Lunch sounds great," Malik turned back to his siblings, courtesy finally demanding he at least pretend to play the polite sibling and friend. "I promised I'd find and save your sister."

Malik smiled, the pang in his side distracting him from any hunger he felt. "Hardly. I'm hungry too. We mentioned that the detective had been awake when we saw him earlier today. Malik hoped that meant that he was okay and not in dire straits. Ryuu risked everything for his family, to give them back their peace and happiness. No thanks would ever be sufficient.

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"Unless you said something directly to your siblings, they're very intuitive," Ryuu mused out loud, trying to hide a smile.

"Don't give them too much credit. I'd be surprised if they saw this as anything more than friends."

"Looks like you'll have to figure out that battlefield then."
"Oh, joy." Malik rolled his eyes. He watched Ryou's face carefully, trying to figure out if he was putting on a smile to be strong or of a genuine show of happiness. He was pretty good at hiding his feelings, though Malik had gotten more used to the deadpan expressions than his smiles. Ryou should smile more though, as Malik marveled at how lovely he was even as frail as he was.

Without too much thought, Malik reached a hand out, brushing his fingers against Ryou's cheek. The skin felt cool under his fingers, yet a blush that naturally spread immediately followed where his fingertips lingered. "How are you. Really."

Ryou hummed, leaning into his touch. "Okay. I hurt, but I feel much better than before. I've had a lot of odd visitors, truth be told."

Malik snorted, somewhat curious. "Like who?"

"Bakura dropped by, telling me I owed him. Don't want to know about that," Ryou glanced over to the table next to him, where some flowers sat in a tumbler. "Serenity, Joey, and Mai all came by to wish me well. Even the good commissioner came by to scream at me for being out on sick leave and not finishing up my paperwork on the case."

Malik chuckled, a grin growing on his face. Even after all they had been through, some things never changed. He never expected to feel so light and free with the shadow now cast off.

Ryou shook his head, clearing his mind. "This case will be a nightmare to file a report on."

Malik nodded in understanding. "Who knew the worst part of chasing down a serial killer would be the paperwork?"

Ryou gave a dry laugh. "You joke, but I wonder what's worse – being trapped in a room with Namu or with Kaiba?"

Malik gave a weak smile, but his thoughts were distracted. The two fell silent for a moment, Malik's gaze slipping down. He licked his lips, his hand dropping down to take Ryou's. "Hey Ryou."

"You want to know why?" Ryou asked without missing a beat.

Malik nodded. Ryou seemed to know his thoughts before he could even speak. "What was the motive? Why go through all of this? Do you know?"

Ryou frowned, glancing away. "… He claimed to have no motive. That he hurt people because he could. I'm less certain of that. I think there's truth to that, but I refuse to accept madness as the end all answer to this. Whether it was something psychological that wrought pleasure in harming others or something as base as survival turned hobby, I don't know."

Ryou let out a heavy sigh, a defeated look on his face. "Kaiba confirmed that Namu was killed. Any questions we had, any truth that may have been hidden, is gone with him. Still…"

"You don't like to leave questions unanswered."

Malik watched Ryou's face, his brown eyes flitting up. He gave a small shrug. "I like to answer all questions involved in a case. But reality is less tidy, less neat than that. It's messy and cruel and twisted."

"Sometimes there aren't answers." Malik finished the thought, lifting Ryou's hand up in both of his hands.

Ryou gave him a tentative nod, a bitter smile growing on his face. "I'm terrible. Even now with the killer caught and dead, I'm not satisfied."

Malik gave a light chuckle, kissing him on the knuckles. "You're a detective. Being anal is part of the job."

Ryou snorted, pulling his hand away. "I save your sister and catch her kidnapper, and this is how you repay me?"

Malik grinned, bringing a pale hand to his bandaged waist. "No, this is how I repay you."

Ryou stared at him, his stern expression breaking as a smile cracked his lips. A giggle slipped past his lips. "I-"

"Sometimes there aren't answers," Malik finished for him.

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"Ryou, you saved my sister. Everybody else had written her off for dead and you never once gave up. He fought and struggled and did everything in your power to rescue my sister. You did what I couldn't do and-"

Malik took in an unsteady breath. He felt himself shift from struggling with what to say to unable to speak. "She's back. She's back and we're whole again. I-"

"You don't like to leave questions unanswered."

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"Ryou-"

"Sometimes there aren't answers." Malik finished the thought, lifting Ryou's hand up in both of his hands.

"Ryou—thank you."

Malik flicked his eyes towards Ryou, who stared at him. He looked slightly confused. Malik sighed, turning to face him and then deciding he couldn't do that and turned to stare at the floor. "Ryou, you saved my sister. Everybody else had written her off for dead and you never once gave up. He fought and struggled and did everything in your power to rescue my sister. You did what I couldn't do and-"

Malik took in an unsteady breath. He felt himself shift from struggling with what to say to unable to prevent the flow of the words that now came. "She's back. She's back and we're whole again. I didn't realize how much of me was breaking and broken and you made us whole. All of us. My sister's alive. And you're alive. Oh god, you're alive. You were taken, and I thought you would die. But I couldn't let myself believe that. I had to believe you'd survive. That you were alive and I—"

Malik jerked back as the soft brush against his cheek. He realized it was Ryou reaching out to comfort him. Ryou shushed him, his thumbs brushing across his face. That's when Malik realized that he was clung to Ryou like a candle at night. "Ryou-"
But Ryou never faded. He was real, here in his arms. Malik could feel his short white hair tickling his brow, his pale fingers running through his hair. Malik pulled back enough, looking up at Ryou. Tears glittered in the corner of his brown eyes, a fragile smile on his face. The same sense of relief, or joy, or unspoken horror they had shared swam in his eyes. And just like Malik, Ryou needed this moment to exist.

Ryou sighed, pressing his forehead against Malik. "I kept telling myself to keep going. Just hold out a bit longer until you figured it out. I knew it was a long shot, but the hope that you would solve the case where I couldn’t kept me going. I had to believe in you or else I’d give into despair. I had to believe that you would keep searching and find me."

"I would have looked for you until my dying breath." Malik watched Ryou’s eyes flutter shut, tears yet unshed. Malik brushed their lips together, his voice growing soft. "I don’t fear any darkness so long as I have you."

Ryou gave a giggle, nervous and choked full of emotions. Malik started to feel embarrassed, realizing how serious he must have sounded. Even though he meant those words, he still felt his ears burn, unsure of how Ryou would respond.

Before he could react, Ryou leaned in, stealing a kiss from him. Their eyes locked, Ryou beaming, the happiest Malik had ever seen. Ryou cupped his face, Malik’s heart skipping beat when Ryou whispered back sweetly;

"I love you too."
Ryou huffed a lock of hair that fell back into his face, trying to focus on his work. He was more annoyed than ever about his short hair. It was at that unfortunate stage where he couldn't put it up in a proper ponytail, but still long enough to irritate him. Malik begged that he grow it out and Ryou was willing to accept an excuse to have it long again. Still, every moment until he could pull it back for good was too long.

Of course, Ryou was annoyed for another reason. He frowned at the typewriter before him, hastily plucking out letters to splatter ink on the page for him. He didn't understand why Kaiba insisted on them using this machine. Ryou was certain could write faster than this machine could write for him, but Kaiba insisted that automation was the key to the future.

Ryou hadn't known his boss to be such a progressive.

Ryou reached the end of the row, sliding the lever across to move the sheet back. He knew that his report would take a long time, but he suspected the stupid machine was making it take even longer. Even without his boss screaming at him, Ryou had wanted to get out of the hospital as soon as possible. He never did well with having too much time on his hand.

Ryou still felt quite sore and moving about proved to be a struggle even now. Still, it was better than being confined to a bed all day. The doctors had been reluctant to let him out (not to mention furious with Malik for sneaking over all the time), but eventually he was permitted to leave so long as he attained transportation for himself.

Ryou hadn't planned on walking to work for a long while regardless. Despite the lovely weather that finally arrived in London, Ryou felt winded by short walks still. His hip and leg still ached and Ryou was reluctant to push his body too far. He knew regaining strength and reaching a full recovery would take a long time. And even then, he would never fully recover from his injuries.

And yet it was worth it.

Even now, as Ryou groaned and gripped to himself about this damn report, he was glad for all he had done. Every drop of sweat, every all-nighter, every moment spent scouring the clues to catch this murderer was worth it. Isis was safe and the killer of several innocent women was dead. The streets were now a bit safer for those working in the night. Even if the law wouldn't protect him, Ryou had done his bit to help.

So even as he shifted in his seat, trying to take off some of the pressure on his hip, Ryou accepted the pain. Malik had been extraordinarily supportive during this time. Ryou hadn't been sure what form their relationship would take post-rescue, yet Malik was always there. Ryou suspected he hadn't told his siblings yet, though they must know since Malik rarely returned home in the evening.

Ryou was starting to see it as their home nowadays. And he liked that. The horrors of that night seemed to fade to the back of his mind. There were nights where he couldn't sleep, the terrors so real that only his screams could break him free of them. He would wake up, clawing at the burns that still set his chest aflame, panicked that the torture never ended. And, without fail, Malik would be there to hold him, to reassure him that they were only dreams and they couldn't hurt him.

The first few night terrors that disrupted their sleep, Ryou felt terrible about waking Malik up. But he was reminded that his partner had his own demons he still struggled with that woke him during the night as well. Ryou often found himself offering comfort as much as receiving it, embracing Malik, shielding him from the shadows that haunted Malik to this day. Perhaps they both needed each other in their weakness, to find strength in each other's company. After the fear of losing it all, Ryou wanted to cling to each moment, to each breath they shared.

This case had been the toughest case Ryou had ever taken on. Emotionally, it had exhausted him and physically, he bore the scars. In a way, it was a struggle of egos that nearly cost him his life. Ryou had come to see the battle between him and Jack the Ripper as a battle of wills. Who would triumph and find victory over the other.

Ryou had won, though he still lacked all the answers.

That was the agonizing part to the detective. Even now, there were details that he could not fill in. He had made survival his priority that any further insight and research into how and why Namu became Jack the Ripper became secondary. And now, Ryou had no way to find those answers. Kaiba wanted to close the case out and for that, Ryou needed to finish up his paperwork.

Ryou could take a small bit of comfort that he was nearly done though. He grabbed the court's letter, ascertaining Namu's guilt in the crimes. He figured Kaiba just wanted this information verbatim for the records. After that, Ryou would sign off as the detective to close this case for good. Or rather, at least for now.

Ryou had spoken to Kaiba at length regarding the case, doing his best to brief him on all the details he could think of. There was always work to do at the precinct and Kaiba wanted him to finish this case up so he could move him on to other projects. Yet despite his stubbornness, even Kaiba was willing to admit how much he owed Ryou for his work on the case.

Ryou still had many unanswered questions, many answers that still eluded him regarding the case. But finding the truth behind it all would take time and was not of top priority. Still, Kaiba knew that Ryou wasn't satisfied with how everything ended. He promised to give Ryou time in the future to further examine the case. To explore Namu's past and connections to see what came up.

But that would come at a later date.

Ryou finished the last sentence, pulling the last page. He took the pen on his desk, scribbling his signature to certify the documents as verifiably accurate. With some effort, Ryou scooted his chair back. A dark, cane sat to the left of him. Ryou used the desk to help him stand straight before taking his cane. He just needed to make the long and arduous trek to drop this off at Kaiba's office.

And with that, the Jack the Ripper case finally came to an end.

"Commissioner Kaiba, I have the prime minister on the line."

"Tell him I'll call him back when I have something to report," Kaiba snapped angrily, pacing around as he reviewed the case file one more time.
Malik checked, leaning back in his chair. "Sounds like you've bitten off more than you can chew. I figured you'd be hunting down Bakura at a time like this."

"It would be if it weren't for the fact that I already have him detained from an incident two days ago. So my prime suspect is no more," Kaiba spat out the words, storms out of his office to yell at more officers.

Malik sneered, crossing his arms behind his head. He knew the commissioner would be back soon. The only reason he was more panicked than usual was because of their client. People were more willing to turn a blind eye to a serial killer targeting lower class women, shameful as that may be.

But no one could ignore a thief stealing royal artifacts from Buckingham Palace.

Malik leaned back, hearing a crowd of officers rushing about as they raced down to the scene of the crime. From what he could gather, a golden royal scepter, a ring, and a pair of armills was stolen. Needless to say, everybody was in a panic over their mystery thief.

Malik heard the door slam, not moving as Kaiba stormed around his desk, glaring at the paperwork before him. It always seemed the poor commissioner was swimming in reports and files and more mishaps of this city. If he weren't such an asshole, Malik would pity him.

When Kaiba didn't acknowledge him any further, Malik stood up, closing the distance between him and Kaiba as he leaned against the desk. "Sounds like you might need some backup on this."

"Ryou needs to close the goddamn Ripper case file before I start him on a new task. The moment he has something new to do, he'll never go back and finish that up."

Malik rolled his eyes. "He can finish it later. You have a problem on your hand right now."

"I have to give a public briefing in three days regarding Jack the Ripper. It needs to get done now," Kaiba retorted.

Malik knew that fighting Kaiba was pointless. He could only hope Ryou was almost done with the report. Malik hated standing around and waiting for something to do. "Is Duke's squad about to head over to the palace?"

Kaiba didn't reply, his eyes narrowed on his paperwork. Malik took that as a yes. Over the last few weeks, he had started to get a sense on how to handle the commissioner. And given their new working relationship, Malik needed to carefully toe the line and not risk pissing him off. As difficult as that may be.

"Why don't I join him out there? I can take a look at thi-

"Commissioner, it's me. That soft voice caused Malik to perk up, turning around to face the closed door.

Kaiba paused, almost internally debating whether to stand his ground. For what it was worth, Ryou promised to stop picking the lock on his door should he help make arrangements with his recent condition. Malik didn't think that Kaiba believed him though, noticing a new bolt on the door.

Finally, Kaiba sighed as he stood up straight. "Come in, detective."

Ryou opened the door, a wary smile on his face. One hand gripped his cane as he cautiously stepped forward, his gait still uneven. Malik resisted the urge to offer a helping hand, less for fear of outing themselves and more because he knew it would piss Ryou off to be babied in such a manner.

Ryou held a file in his other hand. "The report's done, signed and completed. Though I could have probably finished a day sooner if you hadn't added that new death trap to my office."

Kaiba snorted, taking the file as he briefly looked it over. "It's called a typewriter. All the government departments have made orders to have those installed. They'll make our work faster."

Malik noticed how Ryou rolled his eyes in silent disagreement. The detective's timing was rather fortuitous, Malik grinning. "Hey Ryou, did you hear about the robbery at Buckingham palace? Someone targeted the Crown Jewels."

Ryou smirked, leaning on one leg to give his hip a rest. "Why no, I haven't heard. The Crown Jewels? That's rather noteworthy. Has the culprit been caught?"

"Nope. And wouldn't you know? Bakura was detained during the time of the crime so it can't be him."

"Scandalous. If you chuckled, giving a dramatic sigh. He raised a hand to twist a lock of hair, almost absent-mindedly. "Such a shame I have to go through the process of closing out this report when there must be a secretary around here who could do it as fast as if not fas-

"Don't you two ever shut up?" Kaiba snapped, rubbing at the crease between his eyebrows, trying to ward off a headache. Even through the bitter words, Malik knew they had won the commissioner over. Kaiba placed the file down, locking eyes with Ryou.

"… Send Tristan in before you leave the precinct, got it?"

Malik bit back a grin, knowing the order was permission more than anything else.

Ryou had enough sense to give a serious nod, better at placating his boss than Malik was. "I'll do that. Thank you, commissioner."

"Get the hell out of my office before I change my mind," Kaiba grumbled, though Malik could have sworn he saw his lips twitching up into a smile.
It wasn't until the door was closed behind them that Malik dared speak his mind. He grinned as he looked over at Ryou. "Call me crazy, but I think Kaiba's more relaxed now than ever before."

Ryou raised an eyebrow, trying to hide a grin. "You noticed it too? I initially thought it was related to us finally catching Jack the Ripper, but I'm starting to think that some outside influences might be at play."

The two stopped by the main desk to speak to Tristan briefly before heading towards the exit. Malik couldn't help himself, barely repressing the grin on his face. "Any idea what Serenity sees in him?"

Ryou laughed. "Your guess is as good as mine."

Malik held the door open for Ryou, ignoring the haughty look that his partner gave him. Ryou's pride could be damaged a little if meant a bit more ease getting around. He knew Ryou tried to hide how much his hip still pained him. Malik knew he could make sure he did what he could to help his partner. That was part of the reason he asked about joining the police force.

His siblings had thought it madness at the time. They didn't understand why Malik wanted to jump back into the danger and join the police. Malik didn't understand either. He had thought he would have been grateful for the peace and quiet that followed. But the moment he walked back to the university to join his siblings in research, he felt stuck.

Trapped.

Everything was mundane. What once used to intrigue him now seemed boring. The gold that shined was now cloudy and dull. He wasn't sure if it was the environment or himself that changed the most, but after experiencing the chase, the thrill of the hunt, the pursuit to outwit and outmaneuver a criminal mastermind, Malik couldn't shake it.

This case had forever changed him.

Malik spoke to Ryou about becoming an officer. Ryou had a better idea and suggested that he worked as his assistant. Malik had no idea what Ryou said to convince Kaiba this was a good idea. Maybe he didn't need much convincing. For all the flack he gave him, Kaiba was well aware that it was Malik's determination and refusal to give up that allowed them to figure out who Jack the Ripper was and catch him before he got away.

Malik knew Isis and Rishid worried about his well-being. He figured he would do the same if he were in their position. But Malik knew that he could do this. While he had never considered such an option before, he learned that he could do it. That he was sharp and could be an asset to the case. Ryou thought as much.

Though it was tempting to think it was because of their budding relationship, Malik knew that Ryou would not have bothered to take him on as a work partner if he didn't think he could handle the work. Malik had proven himself before. He hoped to continue to prove his value and worth in their work.

As he hoped to continue to prove his love and affection for the man by his side.

Malik waited as the cab slowed down, gesturing for Ryou to get in before him. "Ready for our date at the palace?"

Ryou rolled his eyes, but still chuckled nonetheless. "Well, when you put it that way…"

Malik grinned, stepping in the cab after him, making their way towards the palace.

Chapter End Notes

And that's all she wrote!!!

Thank you so much for sticking through to the end! I hope you had as much fun reading this as I did working on it. Thanks again to the incredible Nat for her amazing artwork (link to her Tumblr: here)!

And as always, thank you all for reading! Until next time!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!