**The Importance of Being Malleus**

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/109.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Categories: | Getting Together, Queerplatonic Relationship |
| Fandom: | Twisted Wonderland (Video Game) |
| Relationships: | Malleus Draconia & Yuu \| Player, Malleus Draconia & Lilia Vanrouge, Grim & Yuu \| Player, Riddle Rosehearts & Yuu \| Player, Azul Ashengrotto & Yuu \| Player |
| Characters: | Malleus Draconia, Yuu \| Player (Twisted Wonderland), Lilia Vanrouge, Grim (Twisted Wonderland), Riddle Rosehearts, Azul Ashengrotto, Sebek Zigvolt |
| Additional Tags: | Nonbinary Yuu \| Player (Twisted Wonderland), Misunderstandings, Fluff and Humor, Major Character Injury, Nonbinary Character(s), Loud Sebek Zigvolt, Crimes Against Cooking, No Beta We Die Like My Gem Stash, Fluff and Angst, angst is pretty light and mostly localized to the climax |
| Language: | English |
| Series: | Part 1 of Much Ado About Yuu |
| Stats: | Published: 2022-06-03 Words: 15,067 Chapters: 13/13 |

# The Importance of Being Malleus

by GloriousBookwyrm

Summary

It started at the housewarden meeting, when Yuu invited Malleus, and the lurker from outside Ramshackle showed up. And-and he'd just looked so sad to have his cover as "Hornton" blown, and they had to give him some kind of out!
Or, Yuu thinks they're mutually maintaining a polite fiction, and Malleus thinks he has cruelly deceived an innocent human into believing he has a twin.

Notes

Note from Present Me:
So, it turns out you can't import works from ao3, so I had to copy/paste this chapter-by-chapter, lol. I didn't use all the same original tags, partly because my opinions on how this work is correctly tagged changed, and partly because I didn't feel like retyping a bunch of tag chatter. I waffled on all the extra relationship categories a little, but I eventually decided that in light of the fics I wrote in this continuity, Getting Together + QPR probably fit best. Most of my original notes have also been copied over, but I left out a couple of stuff about later edits, since I'm only posting the final edited version.
This work was originally posted between March and June 2022, but I can't find when I originally posted each chapter, so they're all dated with the fic completion date.
Also, some weird formatting stuff happened on a couple chapters when I copy/pasted them, and I don't know how to fix it. If anyone knows how to remove those weird fancy line breaks at the end of a couple chapters, I'm all ears.

ETA 11/04/2026: I made a cover for this fic, using a moodboard that Thorn made for my birthday a few years ago! If you downloaded the epub of this fic and want to add a cover, you can find it here!

Note from Past Me:
So, this started with me and cupckeshrk8D joking about Yuu acting like Malleus and "Hornton" are actually two people, and then it snowballed until I had a whole fic outline's worth of ideas, so this is for them.

See the end of the work for more notes

# Chapter 1: The Invitation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yuu stepped nervously through the mirror, looking around at Diasomnia's dorm. It had been a warm, sunny day back on campus, but here the wind pulled at their uniform jacket with the force of impending rain. Yuu hadn't gotten used to the strange feeling of taking a single step into a totally different climate and suspected they never would. They looked down to tuck the paper they were carrying into the inner pocket of their jacket just in case, and immediately walked straight into someone. "Ow! Uh, sorry I wasn't looking where-hey wait a minute! I'd recognize those horns anywhere! Hornton!" The tall and somewhat bewildered looking boy looked down at Yuu, opening and closing his mouth.

"I-you-What?" He eventually managed.

"Remember the other night? You were lurking outside my dorm and you said to call you whatever I wanted, so I'm calling Hornton. Unless, of course, you want to share your actual name?"

"…Hornton is fine. Is there something you need here?" Nodding vigorously, Yuu pulled the paper they had just finished tucking away back out.

"Yeah, actually. I got a schedule of the next few housewarden meetings and I wanted to give them to Malleus since he's apparently missed a bunch of them, do you know where he is?" Hornton, who had just managed to regain some of his composure, lost it again.

"He's-uh-he's out. I can take a message?"

"Oh, I'd rather give it to him directly, will he be back soon?"

"No! I mean, no. He'll be gone all day. You shouldn't bother waiting. You could give the schedule to the vice housewarden though?" Yuu looked where Hornton pointed, and recognized the young looking junior from the Spelldrive tournament.

"Thanks, I'll do that!" Yuu jogged over to Diasomnia's vice housewarden, schedule in hand. "Hey, VanRouge, right? I have the schedule for the next few prefect meetings, can you give them to Malleus for me?"

Lilia looked at Yuu, then at the schedule, then at Hornton, then back at Yuu. He muttered something that sounded suspiciously like *I'm too old for this* and took the paper. "Very well. I'll be sure to deliver this." Lilia looked like he was trying to make up his mind whether to question any of this, but Yuu was already running back toward the mirror before he could decide.

“Bye, Hornton, I have other stuff to do, but we should totally hang out some time! You’re always welcome to lurk outside my dorm if you like, by the way!” Lilia watched the human go, and resolved to ask anyway.

“So, Housewarden…What on Twisted Wonderland was *that* about?”

“I’m still trying to figure that out myself…”

The next day after class, Yuu went straight to the housewarden meeting. Headmage Crowley had initially protested, but as Yuu had pointed out, if he made Yuu the Ramshackle Housewarden By Default in order to foist more work on them, that meant they had a right to attend the meetings with all the other prefects. In the end, he stopped complaining when Yuu turned out to be just as good at forcing people to cooperate in meetings as they were in life-or-death situations, and Crowley had started actively inviting them.

That was how Yuu had got the schedule to give Malleus. They weren’t entirely sure how or why everyone kept “forgetting” to invite him to these things, but it was getting ridiculous and it was going to stop. It would have stopped a lot sooner if they had any idea what the Diasomnia housewarden looked like beyond “tall” and “intimidating.” They hoped that his vice wouldn’t forget, but from what they remembered of him, he seemed responsible enough.

Yuu’s musings were interrupted by footsteps, and a collective sharp intake of breath around them. Malleus must have arrived. They looked up to greet him, and startled when they noticed a familiar face underneath familiar horns. “Hornton!?”

Riddle choked on his tea next to them. “Yuu!? What are you- That’s Malleus Draconia! You can’t just- *Hornton*!???” He stopped, as if deciding he didn’t actually want to know Yuu’s thought process, and took a deep swig of tea. Around them, Yuu noticed the other housewardens reacting with varying levels of shock. Kalim seemed as sunny as ever, and Leona was asleep, but everyone else seemed to be frantically trying to figure out who had invited Malleus, occasionally attempting to be discreet about it. Even the headmaster looked discomfited. *So much for “forgetting.”*

As for Malleus himself, he looked disappointed, in the familiar way where Yuu could tell he was probably as upset for expecting any better as he was for the rude reception. They had been planning to force everyone to sit down and move straight on to the meeting before they could collect themselves, but now they felt bad for subjecting Malleus to this. They remembered similar experiences all too well not to feel the secondhand sting of rejection. Yuu recalled how reluctant he had seemed to divulge his identity, even in the face of the stupidest nickname they could make Grim come up with, and noticed how he avoided their eyes now that all the cards were on the table. They couldn’t fix this entire situation, but they could try to give him an out on the Hornton thing.

“GASP! Hornton never said you were his identical twin brother!”

Riddle choked on his tea again. Ok, so maybe not their best idea. This definitely wasn’t going to-“Uh, yes. You must be the one my…brother…met a few nights ago. I apologize on his behalf. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Huh. So maybe this *could* work.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time; “Hornton” goes wandering around Ramshackle Dorm again, and we get some Malleus POV.
Side note, characters using “Twisted Wonderland” instead of Earth (as in “twisted wonderland to Yuu”) is canon, I saw it in one of the vignettes, I wish I could remember which one.

# Chapter 2: The Contracts

Chapter Summary

Malleus attempts to meet Yuu again.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
At some point during planning, I realized that it would help both the comedy and the eventual feels if neither character is an enigma, and the audience can figure out why everyone keeps making the decisions they do, so here's some establishing Malleus POV

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the meeting had gone…fine, Malleus supposed. It was mostly just checking in with everyone before final exams started, but every time anyone had gotten too off track, especially if it was about Malleus or his house, Yuu had reigned the culprits in. Sometimes with a pointed remark, occasionally with just a glare, and once by texting Shroud's brother to mute his microphone. It had made the whole experience surprisingly bearable. The bigger surprise was after meeting, when Rosehearts had come over to "apologize for his previous negligence," and to invite him to the next week's meeting. Malleus had already received over a month's worth of invitations from Yuu and told Rosehearts as much. He nodded, looking completely unsurprised, and turned back to scold Yuu over some rule involving their tie. That was the last time Malleus had seen them, and it was almost a week ago.

He had tried to visit them the next day, but he just couldn't shake his younger guard, who had glued himself to his side and wouldn't stop yelling about having the honor of escorting the great Lord Malleus. Malleus probably could have tried to see Yuu anyway, but, well–that would mean subjecting them to Sebek, and anyway the invitation had been for "Hornton," not for "Lord Malleus." Then there had been the exams, and after that the inevitable group of freshman who had been taken in by Ashengrotto's promises and now insisted on trying to get him to intervene somehow. Malleus didn't think Yuu had signed anything, if for no other reason than because they had no magic to offer as collateral, but he couldn't help but ask his petitioners if they had seen Yuu at the café anyway. He mostly got responses like "Who?" and "Was you-of course I was at the café! Don't you see the stupid anemone!?" Eventually, though, someone seemed to know who he meant.

"Wait, you mean that unmagical nutcase who fought the Savanaclaw housewarden, don't you? Eek! I-I mean-yes! Uh-no! I've seen them, I don't know if they have a contract!" Once

he amended his question to ask about “that nonmagical freshman from the Spelldrive tournament” almost everyone in the dorm knew who he meant, whether because of their role in saving Diasomnia’s team from the stampede, or for standing their ground against the Overblotted Kingscholar, or just for getting knocked out by a stray disk in the exhibition match. Yuu certainly had a reputation, though Malleus struggled to define it as good or bad. Eventually he managed to gather that no, Yuu didn’t have an anemone, but their cat did, and they seemed ready to fight someone about it. Probably Ashengrotto. Finally, almost two days after the exam, Malleus was able to make time to visit Ramshackle House and talk to Yuu himself.

All the lights were on for some reason. The dorm was busier than he had ever seen it, and for a moment he wondered if Yuu was too busy with whatever this was to humor him, until he heard slow footsteps behind him. “Oh hey, evening, Malleus. Haven’t seen you around!”

“It’s Hornton, actually. Malleus is back at Diasomnia.” The instant the words left his mouth he winced at the obvious lie. He could feel Yuu’s eyes searching his expression for… something–he wasn’t sure what–until they responded.

“Okay… Well, evening Hornton. I would invite you in, but I kinda can’t use the dorm right now, I just came here out of habit. Lucky I ran into you, huh?”

As Yuu launched into an abridged telling of how, exactly, they came to bet their house on being able to rob a museum, Malleus took the opportunity to look Yuu over. He had missed it at first, but they looked exhausted, swaying slightly on their feet. That might have also been due to blood loss, since at some point the gash on their forehead from the exhibition match must have reopened, and now their forehead was covered in dried blood. They were also covered in long white hairs, smelled somewhat like the ocean, and were sporting a new bruise on one cheekbone, just under their left eye. “Did the eels do that too?”

“Which? Oh, no, that was some Savanaclaw douche. Leona made me fight a whole bunch of them before he’d let me crash in his dorm. Shoulda just taken Ace’s floor…” Malleus was struck by a sudden urge to invite Yuu to stay in his dorm instead, but he swallowed the offer before it could pass his lips. Who knew how they would react to something so forward? In any case, it would immediately expose the bizarre lie he had just told about his “twin.” On the other hand, they obviously disliked their current situation, and them sleeping on the floor of Heartslabyul rubbed him the wrong way. He could definitely think of something to maintain the ruse. “So after sunset tomorrow, you’ll need a more permanent residence…” Almost immediately Malleus could see he’d said the wrong thing. Yuu glared up at him, offended into alertness.

“Excuse you! I’m not losing Ramshackle! I just need to think of something!”

They probably could do it, had achieved even more impressive feats not too long ago even, but they would need to think of something clever in less than a day, with very little rest. Malleus was reasonably sure he knew exactly what It’s A Deal’s weakness was, but would just telling Yuu also offend them? He had offended a fair number of dorm mates trying to tell them what they needed to do since becoming housewarden, and this might be no different. He cast about for a more subtle way to alert them, and his gaze fell on Ramshackle House’s

gargoyles. Perfect. “Incidentally, the walls of this dorm sport some impressive looking gargoyles…”

Later, after Yuu had left, Malleus wondered if maybe his analogy had been too subtle. They *were* very sleep and/or blood deprived. He attempted to find them to try again, but he had scarcely approached Savanclaw when he was met by the sound of someone very enthusiastically belting out showtunes. Yuu could figure it out on their own. Probably.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Yuu internally: Do not comment on Malleus’ drainage pipe. Do not comment on Malleus’ drainage pipe. Do not comment on Malleus drainage pipe
Next time; Malleus attends another meeting, but like half the other house wardens are busy with the plot.

# Chapter 3: The Contract (Part Two)

Chapter Summary

Malleus goes to his second housewarden meeting in a row while Yuu fights an octopus.

Chapter Notes

Note from Present Me: Somehow, I never noticed I made contract plural in the last chapter title and then singular in this one

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day was the weekly housewarden meeting. To Malleus' surprise, he was actually anticipating going. Not quite looking forward to it, last week hadn't exactly been enjoyable, but anticipating it nonetheless. However, when he entered the meeting room, only slightly late he might add, it was half-empty. The folding chair that Yuu had apparently dubbed "the Ramshackle seat" was empty, as were the Savanaclaw and Octavinelle seats.

Malleus wasn't the only one disturbed by the absence. Rosehearts barely sniffed at his lateness, too focused on checking his phone for texts and throwing worried looks at Yuu's empty seat. Al-Asim was fidgeting in his own chair, looking far more upset than Malleus had ever seen the sunny princeling. The headmage was rifling through his notes to double check what time he said to arrive, as if he thought maybe Yuu wasn't actually late. Eventually Crowley looked up at Rosehearts. "Mr. Rosehearts, you're friends with Yuu, right? Do you know where they've gone? For that matter where are Mr. Ashengrotto and Mr. Kingscholar?"

Rosehearts glared at the headmage. "Probably in the Coral Sea trying to fix *your* mess before they lose their dorm! Honestly, strong-arming a freshman into doing your job is downright despicable! The Red Queen's Law #356 clearly states-"

"Yes, thank you Mr. Rosehearts, that's very-"

Shroud's mic clicked on. "Oh I don't know about despicable, but it's definitely stupid. I mean, that dumbass thinks Malleus here is actually two people! And you're banking on *them* somehow outwitting *Azul*!? Or do you think they'll just overpower him with all that magic they don't ha-" Shroud's mic clicked off.

Malleus felt himself stiffen. He opened his mouth to refute Shroud, but realized he couldn't think of what to say. Some of what he felt must have shown on his face though, because next

to him Schoenheit looked up, paled visibly, and tried to inch away. Fortunately he was saved from actually having to think of anything by Rosehearts, who had turned bright red in rage, and was tearing Shroud a new one, apparently unaware of the “Audio Muted” message that had just appeared on screen.

Nothing really got done that meeting. Without Yuu there to moderate, things quickly dissolved into the usual mix of arguments, dick measuring, and off-topic discussion. Eventually, Malleus, Rosehearts, and Crowley drifted over to the Hall of Mirrors to wait for Yuu. There was a trail of seawater leading from the center mirror to the Octavinelle dorm. “Ah, there! Yuu has obviously completed the contract and returned to present the photo to Mr. Ashengrotto! I’ll definitely excuse their absence from today’s classes for this, after all I am such a generous educator!” Malleus was about to tell Crowley exactly what he thought of his “generosity” when the Octavinelle mirror pulsed and a whole gaggle of students stumbled through. First was Kingscholar and his sycophant, looking smug and covered in wet sand. One of the other Savanaclaw students followed behind, looking and smelling like wet dog. After him was two Heartslabyul freshmen, trying to lean on each other and walk, with a surprising degree of success. By the time the Leeches stepped through supporting a half-conscious Ashengrotto between them, Malleus was about ready to scream.

Finally, *finally* , Yuu limped through, clutching their ribs with one hand and an ink-stained pocketknife in the other. They were soaked to the bone, their uniform was torn in several places, and they were covered in scrapes and bruises. The cat was sprawled across their shoulders, also soaked, the flames in his ears sputtering weakly in time with his breathing. They caught sight of the headmage, glared, and performed a swaying approximation of a march over to him.

“There. All 255 poor, unfortunate idiots freed. A bunch of others too, Leona wasn’t exactly picky about which contracts he destroyed. Also, Azul overblotted, I think Floyd broke something when he squeezed (squoze?) me, and I am done with this entire week so you can find someone else to solve your next disaster.” Yuu spoke with a slight slur that seemed to be getting stronger, and squinted up at the headmage as if trying to remember what else they wanted to say. Eventually, their gaze landed on Malleus over Crowley’s shoulder, said “Hornt’n! ‘m gonna pass out now, d’you mind catching me…” and promptly fell forward.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time; We return to Yuu’s POV, and they finally have free time to hang out with Hornton! That is, if they can just leave the infirmary.

# Chapter 4: The Aftermath

Chapter Summary

Yuu wakes up in the hospital following their very bad, no good, horrible, awful day.

Chapter Notes

Note from Present Me:
I've edited the following note because it contained a reference to an archive warning I no longer think applies, and I didn't want to confuse anyone.
Note from Past Me:
This chapter starts with descriptions of how Yuu got into the state they were in last chapter. It's not *super* graphic, but if you want to avoid it, skip everything in italics. Once you get to "Consciousness returned to Yuu slowly," there are no more flashbacks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Deuce passed them the photo and they kicked off, trying to get as far as they could. Jack was just ahead, ready for his turn at playing keep-away, but the eels had outpaced them in seconds. Floyd's tail wrapped around them and **squoze**. It was so tight, they could barely breathe, barely keep ahold of the picture. Distantly, they heard a snap, and felt something in their chest give. It was ok. It was going to be ok. Leona would pull through any minute now, they just needed to hold on a little longer…*

They were surrounded by something dry and warm, and moving with a jostling, swaying rhythm. Around them, they thought maybe they could hear sharp, overlapping voices, but they were so, so tired. Unconsciousness pulled them back under before they could even open their eyes.

*They darted around, trying to keep their attention on eight places at once. Everyone was too focused on defending themselves to take down Azul, they needed to watch it all, to bridge that gap in their individual abilities before it was too late. "Deuce! Watch your six!" A cauldron slammed into the ground, pinning a tentacle before it could reach him. "Floyd! Can your shield move with the people you're protecting? Jade, how long do you think he can keep this up?" There was one tentacle still pinned, two, three, four, five, six, seven…where was the eighth? "Jack, he's dominant in every other tentacle and his right hand, look for one that he's actually trying to grab people with to figure out where to focus your magic!" They needed to find tentacle number eight, it was definitely one of the grabby ones, but there was too much else competing for their attention. "Ruggie, do you see when he tries to grab someone-?*

*Yeah, his left side, start preparing Forest Blade. Leona, you're bait. Floyd, shield Ruggie while he casts." Ignoring Leona's growl of protest, they counted off again. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven–"AAGH!"*

There was a mouse in the mirror. It was really important that everyone know about the mouse in the mirror. No, it wasn't the pain meds, the Corporate Mouse that owned all their souls is trying to talk to them through the mirror, someone needs to see what it wants!

*The unaccounted-for tentacle wrapped around their arm. It burned and they screamed, reaching for the knife they were sure they brought with them. There! Azul slammed them into the ground, and their head bounced off the marble floor, but the knife plunged into him with as much force as they could muster. With their free hand, they gripped the small blade, twisting and wrenching it through the rubbery flesh. They ignored the pain lancing up the other arm, ignored the caustic ink that bubbled up instead of blood, ignored the screams of pain and rage, both their's and Azul's, as they tried anything they could to* ***make him let go.***

Consciousness returned to Yuu slowly, like the tide pushing them to shore. Everything was sore, all the way up to their scalp and there was something warm and heavy vibrating on their chest. Cracking one eye open, they saw Grim curled up on top of them and purring up a storm. Yuu tried to shift a little, and he immediately looked up in surprise. "Yuu! Finally! You've been out for *days!* The doc made everyone who wasn't actively helping leave and I am so! bored! Hurry up and get better so I can leave!" Grim stood up on all fours to glare at Yuu better, which was only slightly undercut by how close to tears he looked.

"…You don't have to stick around if you don't want." Yuu rasped. Wow, actual days and it still hurt to talk. They were never gonna sing for that long again.

"Yes, well– You see– That is– Shut up!" Grim kneaded a little harder than strictly necessary before settling back down, purring harder than ever, still glaring.

Yuu took a moment to look around the room. On their nightstand was a vase full of roses that at some point had dripped white paint into large puddles beneath it. There was a card too, but the text was covered up by more stray paint. There was a table in the far corner with more flowers and cards, a solitary cactus, and a bowl of sea anemones. They chose to blame Floyd for the last one. On one wall hung a large mirror that someone had draped a green and black coat over. Yuu almost asked Grim what that was about, but decided they didn't actually care. Instead they asked how Azul was.

"Him? Yeah, you and Ruggie really did a number on him, but he's been taking to the healing magic way faster. Apparently though his tentacle won't grow back while he's in his human form, and the doc had to lock him in an aquarium to stop him from just leaving. Jade said he'll probably get his land privileges back tomorrow morning." Yuu winced. They felt maybe they should apologize, but they weren't exactly sorry. It was him or them, and Yuu wasn't gonna feel bad for picking themself.

Word that Yuu was conscious spread quickly, and almost as soon as they were cleared to go back to Ramshackle House their friends descended upon it. The Leeches had already cleaned up everything from their brief stint as Ramshackle housewardens, which was a relief. Trey and Riddle came bearing a tupperware bin of fresh chocolate chip cookies. Yuu liked to think

they loved all their friends equally, but those cookies were clearly a gift from God, and Trey was His messenger. Jack was a close second right now, since he seemed to be the only one to understand “lots of rest and no excitement,” and was helping keep visits to two people at once and no shouting. He also let them stroke his tail, which was just as soft and fluffy as it looked.

Malleus was one of the last to arrive, even after Leona’s brief stop to tell Yuu that if they tried to deprive him of sleep again they were sand, and Azul’s awkward ”sorry for trying to kill you and steal your dorm” visit. He hovered outside the dorm uncertainly after Jack left, until Grim noticed the ominous shadow by the gate and told Yuu to either invite him in or make him leave. They waved him over from the window, and he teleported straight into their room in a cloud of sparkles. “You know you could just walk up the hill, right?”

”Teleporting is more convenient. How are you doing?”

”Oh you know, sore. Thanks for the hint with the gargoyles by way. I’m assuming that was intended to be a hint?” Malleus nodded. He looked about ready to teleport away now that he had checked on Yuu, but they weren’t quite ready to be alone except for Grim, and cast about for something to make him stay. “Do you like gargoyles a lot?” He nodded again. “…Do you want to talk about gargoyles?”

Malleus did want to talk about gargoyles. Over the course of the next several hours, Yuu learned everything they could possibly want to know about the gargoyles perched all over Ramshackle House, including the years they were carved, the material they were carved from, and the artistic influences on their designs. Unfortunately, he was interrupted in the middle of a fascinating story involving the southeast gargoyle, a drunk vampire, and several feral chickens by a green-haired Diasomnia student that Yuu vaguely recognized from alchemy class.

”Lord Malleus! There you are! We have been looking all over for you!” It was only then that Yuu noticed another student behind him, snoring softly. They also noticed that Malleus had stiffened at the sound of their classmate’s (was it Sybil? Sibuk? Something with an S) voice, and was looking almost as miserable as he had at that housewarden meeting two weeks ago. Yuu scrambled to think of something that would make the intruder (Sebek! That was it!) leave.

”Oh no, this isn’t Malleus, it’s his identical twin brother, isn’t that right, Hornton?”

Malleus barely blinked. “Yes. I am Hornton. I think my brother told me he was in the potion lab?”

“Oh yeah, he totally did! I think he needed to get something from Professor Crewell’s ingredient stores?”

”Indeed. He should still be in there. If you don’t see him at first, just go farther in.”

”Yeah, don’t worry about Crewell’s alarms or anything, I’m sure he’ll understand it’s for Lord Malleus!” Yuu was struggling to hold their face still, but Sebek didn’t seem to notice.

”I see! Silver! Wake up! We need to go to the potions lab to find Lord Malleus!”

Silver startled awake, took a minute to process what Sebek had just said, and looked incredulously at Malleus. “But he’s right there?”

”Don’t be ridiculous! Can’t you recognize his brother!? Thank you for the tip Lord Hornton, we must get moving!”

Silver looked at Sebek’s retreating form, and then back at Malleus. “Whatever. I’m going back to Diasomnia House. Father said to tell you dinner’s gonna be in an hour.”

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time; Of course it never snows until school’s already out.

Additional notes:
-Cats don’t just purr when they’re happy! They also do it as a soothing behavior, and it promotes healing
-The cactus is from Jack, he has one in the vignettes (Also, preorders for his nenderoid opened today, and one of his accessories is a cactus)
-Silver calls Lilia “Father” in Jade’s labcoat vignette. He only ever calls Malleus “Malleus-sama” though.
-This has no relevance to anything, but I need you all to know that Malleus canonically owns a tamagotchi. Read his labcoat vignette.

# Chapter 5: Snow Day

Chapter Summary

It’s the first day of Winter Break and almost everyone is snowed in.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
I’m aware that book 4 takes place over winter break, but since I haven’t read it, it’s not happening yet. Assume that all the snow is delaying the plot until after the fic ends (or until the book releases in English, whichever happens first)

Note from Present Me:
As it turned out, book 4 released in en first, lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The morning came with crisp, cool air that told Yuu it had snowed even before they looked out the window saw the thick, white blanket covering campus. Wrapping a thick comforter around them, they pulled themself out of bed and trudged downstairs to find some tuna and bribe Grim to melt a path down the hill. Unfortunately, what looked like every can in the dorm had been emptied and was lying in a pile on the kitchen floor. Grim was sleeping off his crimes next to the radiator, snoring happily. Yuu decided to make him clean up later. First was breakfast. A cursory inspection revealed that Grim hadn’t touched anything but the tuna, leaving their stockpile of novelty flavored cereals and other non perishables unmolested. They poured a bowl of s’mores-ohs and started scrolling through their texts while they ate.

First, Ace and Deuce had added the twins and Azul to the group chat so they could arrange a trip to the museum to return the photo they stole. Ace wanted to wait until Yuu was finished recovering so he could show them some exhibits the guards recommended. Azul wanted to wait so he had time to remove himself from the picture. The twins wanted to go as soon as possible so that Azul wouldn’t have enough time to doctor the photo. Deuce had foisted his tie-breaker responsibilities onto Yuu. They thought for a moment, contemplated returning to the Coral Sea, even for just a day trip, and sent their response. “The sooner we get that photo returned the better, don’t bother waiting for me. Just make sure to send lots of pics, ok?” The rest of the chat started planning the trip for once the snow around the Hall of Mirrors was cleared, so Yuu muted them and looked through their other messages.

Riddle had also texted, saying that he was currently busy organizing Heartslabyul's excavation from the snow, but he would be sure to send Cater and some freshmen to help dig Ramshackle out since Yuu was probably still too sore to shovel. It would likely take a few hours to get there however, since the Hall was also buried.

Yuu tried messaging Jack to see if he wanted to chat a bit, but got back his automatic response, "I'm at Spelldrive practice, I'll text back later" Either the Spelldrive team didn't believe in winter break, or they were busy trying to dig out the Hall of Mirrors like everyone else.

Whelp, that was everyone in their contacts accounted for. Yuu regretted not getting Malleus' number. He could probably just teleport in, mirrors be damned, but past experience led them to believe he wouldn't do so unless specifically asked. Maybe if they started a fire on the roof, they could get some smoke signals going, and one of the people shoveling could relay their invite to Diasomnia? …Or, instead of burning the dorm down, they could just wake up Grim already. "Hey, Grim! Up and at 'em!"

"MROW!? What are you-the tuna? Pff, how can you accuse me like that! I'll have you know it was…an eagle! An enormous eagle burst in here and ate all the tuna! I tried to fight it off, but it was just too strong and-you're not buying any of this, are you?"

"Nope. We're snowed in and I'm bored. Can you do us both a solid and melt a path down to campus?"

"Oh yeah? How's this benefit me?"

"Well for starters, since a "giant eagle" ate all the tuna in the dorm, you can't have any more until I buy some from the campus store."

Grim looked like he hadn't considered the prospect of a tuna scarcity until it was pointed out to him. "No tuna!? All right, out of the way human, and let the Great Grim show you how it's done!" Once he got to work, Yuu went back inside to make some hot chocolate. Then they remembered they had stuck a child proof lock on the cocoa and left it on the top shelf so Grim couldn't get it. Would Grim even get sick from chocolate? He looked like a cat, but kept insisting he wasn't one, and he ate those weird black gems from the Overblotted students just fine. They weren't going to test that until they could get him to a vet, and they weren't gonna have any cocoa until they could raise their arms above their head without pain. They made tea instead.

Warm drink in hand, Yuu went outside to watch Grim work. He was a cat-weasel-whatever on a mission, breathing out spurts of fire until the entire section of path was uncovered and then spreading salt so it wouldn't freeze over again later. Yuu made sure to text Riddle so he'd know they didn't need the help anymore, and then started tossing salt.

On the way down, Grim started talking. "Hey so what's the deal with Hornton anyway? I heard some of the housewardens talking and you can't possibly believe any of that stuff about identical twins, right? Like, you're a dumb human, but you're not *that* dumb."

”Gee, thanks for the vote of confidence, Grim. And yes, I definitely actually believe that Malleus has an identical twin that no has ever heard of despite supposedly being at the school for three years, and they just happen to never be in the same place at the same time.”

”Wait, WHAT!?”

”It’s a joke, Grim! I needed to defuse an awkward situation, said something stupid, and now “Hornton Draconia” is a thing! And honestly, I can see why Malleus wanted to stay incognito when we first met, if he has to deal with Sebek full time.”

”Do you think everyone else knows you’re joking?”

”Yes? Like you said, I’m not that dumb, and it’s patently ridiculous!”

Eventually, they made it all the way to campus, just in time for lunch. Shovelers were still bustling around the Hall of Mirrors, but steady progress had been made on that front as well. Grim had offered to help out after lunch, but oddly enough no one wanted him wanted him belching fire near all the incredibly powerful magic mirrors. For all his complaining earlier, Grim seemed disappointed that there was nothing left for him to do, but he brightened up considerably when Yuu told him he could buy as much tuna as he could carry back to Ramshackle House provided all the empty cans from earlier were thrown out before they got back.

With that out of the way, Yuu started looking around for somewhere to eat. Most of the hall was empty, the majority of the students having returned home for break yesterday, or still trapped in their dorms. Yuu wondered if having all the dorm mirrors in the same building was a good idea if a single bad storm was enough to cut that building, and thus all the students, off from the rest of campus. Out of the corner of their eye they caught Sebek, taking a break from shoveling and complaining about Professor Crewell’s punishment for breaking into the storeroom, which had apparently kept him on campus overnight during the storm. Yuu winced slightly in sympathy.

The greenhouse seemed to be a popular place to eat lunch today, both because of how warm it was and because Leona was on the other side of the mirrors and couldn’t guard his territory. In the back corner of the subtropical zone was a familiar horned figure sitting with his own lunch. “Hornton! Teleported out of the Hall, I guess?”

”Yuu? And yes. Lilia promised to get Diasomnia shoveled while I freed the Hall of Mirrors. I’ve been shoveling all morning and the faculty said I should take a break. How did you get here? I saw Ramshackle from the distance and the gate looked completely buried”

”Oh, I had Grim melt the snow down. Riddle promised to get us dug out eventually, but I was so bored, you know?”

”I see. I was planning to do something similar here, but the mirrors are fragile and I can’t do ‘delicate’ very well.”

”Well that explains everyone’s faces when Grim wanted to try the same thing. Did you see Sebek earlier? It sounds like he really went to Crewell’s ingredient storeroom and now I

almost feel bad. Do you think we should apologize?" Malleus pulled a face. "Wow, you really don't like him, huh?"

"He's very…enthusiastic. I'm aware he means well, and just wants to protect me-er-my brother, but it can be a bit much."

"You can just say he's a stalker who won't give you or your 'brother' a moment's rest."

"Perhaps. My brother does find him very irritating on occasion."

Wow, Malleus was really committed to the bit. Yuu couldn't help but try to push it a little. "By the way Hornton, you've never told me your actual name! I can't just keep calling you by some nickname Grim thought up, you know?"

"Grim came up with Hornton? I thought it was your invention." Oh no, he actually looked disappointed. Yuu wasn't sure why it even mattered who came up with the nickname, but now they wanted to sink into a hole. Just bury them here in the greenhouse, they'll make great fertilizer.

"Um, yes? I told him I met this guy with horns who wouldn't say his name, and Grim suggested Hornton, and it kind of stuck you know? I cannot think of names for the life of me, you know I used to just reuse the same name for all my pet fish. Interesting fact about beta fish, they-" Yuu was saved from further embarrassment by Professor Vargas announcing that the shovelers' break was over, and Malleus stood up.

"I should get back to it. Don't worry about the name. I'll tell you mine tomorrow? After both the Hall and Diasomnia is shoveled at least." He followed the other students out into the snow, and Yuu finished their lunch still wondering what all that had even been about.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time; Lilia is still too old for this. (Might be Lilia POV, still deciding)

Note from Present Me:
It is, in fact, Lilia POV

# Chapter 6: The Name

Chapter Summary

> It’s not easy being a teenage vampire dad. Especially when your coparent is busy pretending to be his own twin brother in order to hang out with the most brilliant and/or gullible student on campus.

Chapter Notes

> Note from Present Me:
> As indicated in the summary, when I wrote this I thought Diasomnia's deal was that Malleus and Lilia were coparenting Silver together. This gives their interactions a somewhat different tone that pretty much everything else I ever wrote about them, including later in this same fic series. It's not wrong enough for me to have ever bothered rewriting it, it's just something to note if you're reading the entire series at once.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A scant few decades ago, Lilia had no idea what humans meant when they said their offspring would always be their babies. He might not have been great at guessing human’s ages, but even he could tell the difference between a teenager and an infant! This morning, however, he had spent an hour trying to find Silver’s favorite lunchbox with the little cartoon dragons on it only for Malleus to remind him that their ward had tried to destroy it when he was twelve, so it was hidden away in an attic back home. Silver just seemed so much like the little kid who idolized his parents, no matter how high he now towered over Lilia. He was even starting to be interested in boys now, if the way he followed Sebek around was any indication. Lilia wasn’t entirely sure what he saw in his loudmouthed fellow guard, but Silver insisted he didn’t always talk about the greatness of Malleus or the inferiority of humans. Maybe being pulled toward loud, confusing humans ran in the family.

Speaking of Malleus, Lilia had had to promise him to get Diasomnia shoveled before he finally stopped dithering about visiting that new human friend of his, but it was lunchtime and there was still so. Much. Snow. Lilia had made the promise counting on Sebek’s endless enthusiasm to help “Lord Malleus,” but apparently the freshman had been on the wrong side of the mirror when the storm hit. The other underclassmen and the bats were doing their best, but they just couldn’t make up the loss. At this rate, Lilia might actually have to pick up a shovel. He wondered if Malleus was having a good time with that human at least, but

knowing the housewarden he was probably just going to shovel all day and wait for them to make the first move.

Fortunately, Lilia had managed to get all the shoveling done before dinner without having to personally do any work. The bats had definitely earned their beauty sleep, and they were cashing in. A few minutes later, Malleus stepped through, looking slightly more frazzled than one would expect from shoveling. He must have visited the Ramshackle House after all. Or the Ramshackle House visited him.

“Lilia! I told Yuu that I’d tell them my actual name. Hornton’s actual name, sorry, not mine. But I can’t think of anything and they’re going to realize that Hornton doesn’t even exist and then they’ll be upset that I lied and scared of me like everyone else and they’ll uninvite me from appreciating their gargoyles and what do I do!?”

“Ok. Take a deep breath and run that by me again. First off, why would they think Honton is real? Wasn’t your secret twin their idea first?” Malleus repeated the whole story, going back to his second visit to Ramshackle House. While he spoke, Lilia recalled the sharp eyed freshman who had read the Savanaclaw housewarden like an open book, directing his defeat with only three other freshmen, a talking cat, and no magic of their own. He tried to resolve this Yuu with the complete *idiot* that Malleus was describing and gave up. Not to mention, they had apparently outschemed *Azul* on almost no sleep, and they supposedly believed that Malleus had a twin!? Although, the sleep deprivation could actually account for things. Lilia, meanwhile, was going to milk this whole situation for all it was worth. “If you can’t think of anything, just go with Hornton. From the sound of it, its really stuck, and I guarantee that Yuu’s exactly as likely to buy that your legal name is Hornton Draconia as they are to believe that you have a twin.” This was going to be hilarious.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time; more Yuu and Malleus meet ups.
It might take a while though, Daylights Savings always kicks my ass.

# Chapter 7: Homework

Chapter Summary

Yuu attempts to tackle their winter homework.
(Or, the author is ADHD and that probably definitely reflects on Yuu's study habits)

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
I return! Future chapters will probably continue to be a few days apart. The first few chapters were all written in quick succession because I knew exactly what was going to happen and in what order, and now I need to plan ahead a bit more.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day the paths were clear, the sun was shining, and Yuu was so bored. With most if their friends at the Atlantica Memorial Museum, Yuu had decided to tackle some of their winter break homework. The alchemy homework was just about identifying ingredients and what they did, no labwork required (though Yuu planned to request some lab time later, to check their answers), but they had to keep stopping the history reading to look up random names and places that "everyone knew," and magical theory was not exactly their strong suit. They were just taking a walk outside the dorm (They'd been staring at a blank page for 30 minutes! They earned this break!) when they noticed the telltale sparkles of Malleus paying a visit.

"Morning, Hornton, any progress on that name?"

"It's Hornton. I was surprised Grim came up with it because my name is actually Hornton."

Yuu stopped walking to look at Malleus. Was this his way of apologizing because he was just as bad at naming things as they were? "…Sure, Hornton Draconia it is, then. Want to come inside? I'm just doing my winter break homework though, nothing too exciting."

"Very well." Malleus followed them up the hill and into their dorm, for once actually walking the whole way.

Yuu shifted a little under Malleus' gaze as he looked over the blank document on their laptop and the million open tabs. "Yeah, it's, uh, slow going. It turns out googling sources when you

don’t know literally anything sucks. For all I know, this crap about the unicorns going extinct from overhunting by lions is true!”

“If you need help with history, I could ask Lilia. He… happens to own a lot of primary sources”

”Lilia? Oh that’s your vice housewarden, right? The vampire?” Yuu ignored Malleus’ surprised cough, “I mean, you can ask if you think he won’t mind, it’s not like I’m getting anywhere with this paper right now. How about the other one, magical theory. You got any tips?”

“It depends. What are you specifically struggling with?”

”I understand what the elements are, and how they interact, but all this stuff about energy flow and how the crystals work is flying right over my head. I mean, Grim got a better score than me on the final! Grim! It’s just all too abstract for me to deal with! The textbook has examples, but they’re all like “Cast such-and-such spell. Concentrate on how that feels,” and so on, and I just! Can’t! Do it!”

Malleus waited for them to calm down a little. “Can you sense other’s magic? You might be able to figure it out that way.” At Yuu’s shrug, he continued, “I happen to know a spot where I can practice my magic without disturbing people, however we’ll need to take the main mirror if you want to go.”

”Why can’t we try this here?”

”I mentioned before that I’m not good at delicacy. The truth is that I cannot perform minor magic at all. If I try to copy the exercises in your book I will likely destroy your dorm, which I would rather not risk. The place I am thinking of is suitably far from any towns that might be destroyed in columns of flame.”

Yuu swallowed audibly at the thought, “Well, I’d love to see that, but the Mirror Room is so far away! I’m still recovering you know, and to walk that whole distance, in the snow…” Malleus snorted and rolled his eyes, holding out an arm. As soon as Yuu took it, they were in a picturesque forest clearing. “Wait! I need a coat!” They were back in Ramshackle House. They ran up the stairs, grabbed the mystery coat from the infirmary that they had never figured out how to return, and dashed back downstairs. It was only once they were pulling it on that they noticed Malleus’ stare, and that he was wearing a damn near identical one under his weird cape thing. They thought they saw his throat bob a bit before he took their arm, and they were both back in the forest again.

”So, like, how are we doing this? You throw fireballs around and I watch?”

”More or less. I’m going to wait between preparing the spell and casting so you have time to try and sense what I’m doing. Just watch the first few times, then start trying to guess.”

Malleus stepped away from Yuu, wand held in his outstretched arm. The magestone at the tip sparked brightly, and started to glow. They tried to focus on the wand, to feel whatever it was mages felt, but Malleus just looked like a guy pointing a glowing pen at a tree. Then he

flicked the wand, and they had to shield their eyes from the sudden burst of heat and light as the tree burst into flames. They lowered their hand and stared at the pillar of fire, so entranced by the flickering, popping flame that they didn't notice Malleus shifting position or the clouds gathering overhead until a sudden downpour extinguished the entire thing in an instant, splashing at the two of them. At least the coat they grabbed (Malleus' coat??) was waterproof. Malleus turned back toward Yuu, took in their slightly manic grin, and resumed the demonstration.

The next few attempts were pretty much the same. Yuu kept trying to focus on different parts of Malleus, his stance, how he held his wand, but they just couldn't detect anything particularly magical until he cast the spell and pulled a mountain from the earth, or flooded a new river, or just vaporized another section of forest. It was beautiful, and they could watch him rewrite the landscape all day, but they really weren't getting anywhere with this.

"You might as well stop, I can't sense anything. Guessing based on how you hold your wand would be more reliable than this."

Malleus turned from where he was just finishing a new valley to look at Yuu. "Wait, can you actually tell from the wand position?"

"Yeah, like when you're about to summon lightning, you point it more up, or you shift your grip closer to the end of the handle for fire. Actually, pretty much everyone here does something similar, even if you don't all use the same gestures. I think it has to do with how you visualize the spell?"

"Huh, I never noticed I did that." Malleus looked at his wand and saw how he really had started to shift his grip for the next spell. "That's incredible!"

"But I can't sense anything at all! That's not magic, that's just reading people! I barely even get it right more than half the time!"

"That's 50% more accurate than I would be if I couldn't just sense magic. I didn't even know I had any physical tells! What are some other ones?"

"Hm. Well, start preparing more magic, I'll guess what it is, and then tell you what gave it away, ok?"

In the end, not much homework got done, but Yuu did get to watch Malleus burn more stuff down, which was a win in their book.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
I spent. So long trying to figure out who does and doesn't know that Lilia is a vampire. Obviously Malleus and Silver know, and Sebek *probably* knows, but everyone else seems unaware. But it's not like Lilia's actively trying to hide anything, he's constantly

talking like a vampire, and everyone outside Diasomnia just shrugs it off! Trey gets all confused when Lilia talks like he's personally experienced events from centuries ago in one of the uniform vignettes, even though he is also classmates with a known fae! Malleus' study dialogue says there are pictures of Lilia in their history book and no one else seems to notice! Is it a secret? Is everyone just stupid? Who knows!?
Eventually I decided this was too much mental work for a joke that basically boiled down to "How did you know!?" "Wdym it's obvious??" So I cut it. You're welcome.

# Chapter 8: Apologies

Chapter Summary

We get some more Malleus POV, and then Yuu talks to Azul in person for the first time since The Incident

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
Ok, so I really wanted the Malleus perspective, and I wanted to finish resolving the whole book 3 plotline, but neither section was really long enough to be a whole chapter. Eventually I decided to just combine them.
POV switches at the linebreak.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At some point, Yuu had gotten bored of just saying “fire spell” or “flora spell” and had started giving them all unique names like “1000 Petals of Destruction.” Malleus, in turn, started working larger, more complicated magic, both for the increasingly ridiculous titles, and the sheer delight on their face at each new spell. He had worried at first that they would be scared, and understandably so, so he had done his best to restrain himself and perform the weakest spells he possibly could. However, after the first round, he had turned to check on them, and they were grinning ear to ear, and immediately demanded he continue. It was so simple to just let loose after that, and their mood had only dampened when it sank in that they really couldn’t sense a thing. It hadn’t been entirely unexpected, detecting another mage’s spells before they’re cast was usually very difficult, but from what Lilia had described of the fight at the Spelldrive tournament, they had to be predicting Kingscholar’s moves *somehow* , and Malleus had thought, just maybe… Lilia would probably say that the real explanation, that they were reading body language and physical tells, was much more sensible, but Malleus still thought it was incredible. Even now, seemingly more focused on coming up with the longest spell name possible, and having told Malleus most of his own tells, Yuu was still guessing what he would do more often than not! Sometimes they would append an explanation of how they would try to counter it, depending on who would hypothetically be helping them fight him, before immediately apologizing. Malleus shrugged it off the first couple times, and then had tried coming up with ways to counter their counters. He was starting to suspect that they could come at him with just their pocketknife and still come out on top, or at least come out alive.

Eventually, as the setting sun was just starting to tint the sky, and the cold was really setting in, Malleus decided to call it a day and return to campus. Yuu must have been just as tired as he was, since they barely complained before taking his arm for the teleport back to Ramshackle house. They immediately shucked off the damp, snow covered Diasomnia coat Malleus vaguely remembered having covered a mirror with and tossed it onto a coat stand near the door. He wondered if he should ask for it back. He hadn't planned to leave it with them, but something about that mirror had seemed to unnerve them, and he'd had to leave before they were properly lucid. Maybe he shouldn't, they probably assumed it was a gift. He had other coats. Like the one he was wearing. Leaving this one here was fine, and not just because of how well the colors complemented them. Or how they had snuggled into the warm fabric when the chill of the forest set in. Or how- "Hey do you need anything? I'm gonna go change into something dry, but you can stick around and we'll have dinner in a bit?"

"What? Oh, no, sorry, but I do need to return to Diasomnia. Another time?"

"Sure, Azul said something about inviting me and the gang over tomorrow as an apology, but maybe the day after?"

"That will probably work, I'll text-I should probably give you my number."

Yuu opened their contacts and tossed the phone to him "Just type it in, I'll text you so you have mine" Sure enough, as soon as he handed back their phone, they tapped a bit and he felt his pocket buzz. They headed up the stairs as Malleus pulled out his phone to see the smiley face they sent.

---

By the time Yuu finished and returned downstairs, Malleus was gone. They tried to set aside the disappointment, he *had* said he needed to leave. But they were cold, and sore, and now it was just them and the ghosts until Grimm returned from the museum, and the even ghosts seemed to be busy with something. At least the fresh clothes helped with the first problem. They flicked through their texts, briefly noting that Malleus had named himself "Hornton" when he had entered his contact. There were a lot of missed messages from Ace. He must have taken their request for pictures seriously, because he had sent them everything from a photo of a fork next to a plaque that insisted it was a "dinglehopper" to a shaky video of Deuce gushing over an enormous cauldron. Azul had also messaged them, first a short confirmation that the photograph was returned, and then a slightly longer message asking if they would be free tomorrow for lunch at the Octavinelle café. They answered yes, and were just debating taking another crack at the homework today's adventure had supposedly been for, when there was a scratching on the door. It was Grimm, looking thoroughly annoyed with the doorknob just above his reach.

"Human! Why do you all insist on building doors so tall!? Even if I could hold the key with my paws the lock is way up there!"

"I think keeping monsters out is the point of a door. Sorry, I'll ask the headmaster about getting a catdoor installed. How was the museum?"

“Eh, it was super boring. Just a whole lot of quietly looking at stuff”

“That’s pretty standard for museums, you know.”

“Well, you didn’t miss anything!“ Grimm stopped, and turned back toward Yuu, “By the way, Azul said you agreed to go to the café tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I might not be cleared to swim but I can definitely go to a restaurant, and we should really make sure to talk things out so there’s no hard feelings sooner rather than later, you know? Besides, he promised free coffee!”

That was how, the next day, Yuu found themself in the most awkward staring contest they had ever been in. They had hoped bringing Jack, Ace, and Deuce would prevent this, if for no other reason than because the latter two would fill any silence with chatter and bickering no matter what, but all three of them and Grimm had decided to help wait tables, and the Leeches had gone to direct them, so now it was just Yuu and Azul, and the silence. He shifted, clearly enjoying this even less than they were, before clearing his throat.

“Well, first of all, I wanted to apologize for trying to kill you. And for trying to steal your friends powers. And for-“

“I think I get it. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry for nearly cutting off your tentacle.”

“What? But that was self defense! Because I was trying to kill you!”

“After you Overblotted. I’m the one who told Leona to destroy all your contracts. I knew that with how much magic maintaining your unique spell must take, and how many new deals you’d just made, you must’ve been close to the threshold. I might not have specifically planned for you to Overblot, but I knew it was a strong possibility, and then I went into battle on three hours of sleep and multiple preexisting injuries.”

“But-!”

“Listen. How about, I accept your apology, and you accept mine, and then you can consider us even?”

Azul stopped, and nodded, “Fine. I guess I can see where you’re coming from. Do you always insist on making nice with people who try to kill you?”

“Not *everyone* , I wasn’t exactly on great terms with Leona even before threatening his sleep, you know? That said, 2/3 is starting to indicate a trend…” Yuu glanced over to see how everyone else was doing. Was Grimm trying to juggle loaded dishes? They decided they didn’t actually want to know. “That said, I do want an apology from Floyd, though I’m not getting my hopes up …”

“Yeah, good luck with that. I tried to apologize to him and Jade for how I conducted myself and he said he was already bored with the whole subject. I doubt that’ll be any different if he’s supposed to be the one apologizing.”

Yuu laughed, and the next silence was not nearly as uncomfortable. Eventually the rest of the group returned, and the chatter picked up again. They returned to Ramshackle that evening feeling worn out from socializing, but happier for the experience.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Rejected dialogue;
Azul: “I asked Floyd if there was any way to make up for what I’d done, and he said he wanted to eat me!”
Yuu: “Wait, literally or was he coming on to you?”
Azul: *“I don’t know!”*

# Chapter 9: The Cold

Chapter Summary

> It turns out spending an entire day in the snow and then staying up late socializing with people the next day when you're still technically in recovery has consequences.

Chapter Notes

> Note from Past Me:
> You know what this fic needs? More Riddle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was two days after exchanging numbers with Yuu that Malleus finally worked up the nerve to text them. It was a simple " *Hello. How are you?* " but it somehow took an hour to compose. Fortunately it didn't take quite that long for Yuu to respond.

" *Eh. Mighta caught a cold :-/* "

Malleus frowned. Was this because of the other day? He vaguely remembered Lilia once saying something about how colds weren't directly caused by the cold, but standing around in the the snow all day still can't have been good for them. Either way, he should probably do something. Broth was good for colds. He definitely remembered Lilia making some kind of broth when Silver got sick as a child. Maybe he could help him make some for them.

It was a few hours later and armed with a large tupperware container full of broth that he arrived in front of Ramshackle House. He hadn't actually been invited, so he decided to knock instead of just teleporting inside. The door creaked open, but instead of Yuu or Grimm, it was one of the ghosts that greeted him.

"Hello! Another friend of Yuu's? Their room is that way. They're starting to get a bit cranky, though. Not much for sitting still, that one."

Another? Malleus tried to ask if someone else was already visiting Yuu, but the ghost disappeared before he could get a word in. He glanced at the dining room and saw Grim eating lunch. He didn't say a word to Malleus, just waved a paw at him. He waved back before turning to the stairs up to Yuu's room.

There was, in fact, someone else visiting. Malleus could hear raised voices as he approached their door, opening it to see Yuu bundled into what looked like five different quilts on their bed, and Rosehearts standing over them. Neither seemed to notice his entrance, too distracted by whatever they were arguing about.

“You need to rest! Pushing yourself like this is how you got sick in the first place!”

“It’s just a cold! Besides, if spending a little time outside was gonna make me sick, surely it would’ve happened after I spent the other day in the Briar Wood!”

“And then you stayed up late yesterday while your immune system was still weak, and now here we are. Rest.”

Yuu curled into the pile of quilts on top of them and groaned, “Auuuugh, why do you have to make so much sense…”

Malleus cleared his throat, “I do have to agree with Rosehearts here, though I do apologize for any role I played in your illness.”

The arguing pair turned to look at Malleus, Rosehearts blanching in shock, and Yuu struggling not to grin around an exaggerated pout. “Eh, don’t worry about it, I’ve always been prone to colds anyway-“

“-Gee, I wonder why.”

“Like you’re any better, Riddle. Anyway, thanks for coming over, both of you.” Yuu smiled, and then noticed the container in Malleus’ hands, “Ooh, and you brought food?”

Malleus held up the plastic box, “I didn’t know if you had enough to eat here without walking to the cafeteria, and Lilia said chicken broth was good for colds, so…”

“Aw, thanks Hornton!” Yuu grinned, and he felt his stomach flip. He barely noticed them taking the tupperware from his hands to examine until they spoke again. “Uh, do people in this world normally make broth with pineapple slices?”

Riddle leaned in to see what Yuu was talking about, “Not to my knowledge?”

Malleus stomach flipped in a decidedly less pleasant manner this time. “I don’t know how to make broth, and Lilia couldn’t recall the recipe, so we experimented a little. Is that bad?”

“I mean, it’s unique, but we won’t know it’s bad until we try it! Besides, I hear citrus is good for colds.”

“That’s an…optimistic take,” Rosehearts eyed the broth dubiously. “Yuu, can I ask something? Privately?”

“Sure? Hornton, can you heat a couple bowls of this up for us to try? The microwave’s next to the fridge, by the sink.”

Malleus nodded, and took the broth back from Yuu. He considered asking what a “microwave” was, but whatever Rosehearts was concerned about seemed urgent, and Grimm could probably explain it, if he was still downstairs.

Not only was Grimm downstairs, but he agreed to help without any fuss, except for grumbling something about how much trouble it would be if he let him burn down the house. The microwave turned out to be a large plastic and metal box with a lid on the front to put food in. Apparently it was an entirely nonmagical device, like his keepsake from Lilia. Grimm told Malleus how to set it, as apparently his paws were too big to push the buttons himself. After a few minutes it started beeping loudly, which Grimm said meant it was finished. Malleus poured some of the reheated broth into two bowls to carry back upstairs. He offered some to Grimm, but the cat just wrinkled his nose at the pineapples. That did not bode well for Yuu’s reaction, but there was no point turning back now. Instead, he took both bowls and decided to teleport straight outside Yuu’s door rather than risk spilling any of the broth on the stairs. Then, he readjusted his grip in order to knock before pushing the door open with his elbow.

Rosehearts still looked uncomfortable with Malleus’ presence, but he seemed to be attempting to hide it for some reason. He could only assume it had to do with whatever he and Yuu had spoken about. “Right. I’ve delayed this long enough, but I really need to get back home before Mother does. Trey said the Scarabia students have elected to stay over break, so the kitchens should still be running, but the ghosts are on vacation. Can you please promise to take it easy at least until your cold passes?”

Yuu nodded immediately. “I-yes, of course, don’t worry about me, okay?” None of their earlier protest was in their voice.

“Thank you, I’ll see you after break, assuming you don’t get in trouble again.” Riddle smiled at Yuu  and avoided Malleus’ gaze as he left, and Malleus wondered if maybe he should have taken the long route back up to Yuu’s room after all. Yuu waved goodbye to Riddle, and then reached to accept a bowl from him. They poked at a floating piece of pineapple with their spoon with a slightly apprehensive expression.

“Aight, if I’m trying this, you have to too. On the count of three?”

He nodded and sat in the chair by their desk, before readying his own spoon. “Three, two, one, one and a half, sorry Hornton, zero!” Yuu shoved the spoon into their mouth before they could think any better of it, while Malleus took a cautious sip. It was awful. The tangy sweetness of the pineapples did not go with chicken broth at all, and that was before you considered its texture. Yuu seemed to agree, based on their grimace as they put the bowl down on their nightstand. “Well, I was right, it’s definitely unique. I’m not actually hungry right now though, but I’ll definitely save it for-“

“You don’t have to lie.” They looked up at him with a slightly guilty expression and he continued. “It’s awful. You know it, I know it, you don’t have to pretend it’s not.”

“Ah, well, it’s definitely not *good* , but I wouldn’t go so far as say it’s *that* bad. I mean, it’d be a waste to throw it away, and you worked so hard on it…”

They continued, a steady stream of awkward reassurances spilling out, and Malleus felt thrown. He was used to people trying to avoid offending him, but this felt different somehow. Less like they were afraid of him hurting them, and more like they were afraid of hurting him. It was almost laughable, the idea that a human thought they could hurt Lord Malleus Draconia, except that he really did feel better about the terrible broth listening to them ramble. There was the niggling thought that they didn't think they had hurt Lord Malleus, but instead the fictitious Hornton, but he pushed it down. Yuu was starting to lose the initial topic and wander into the weeds of thanking him for the thought, and the attempted magic theory help, and for listening to them even when they were being stupid, except that last one didn't make sense, because they were never stupid. He opened his mouth to say so, but never got the chance.

"Lord Malleus! Finally!"

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time; pain
The climax of the story is approaching! I was originally planning to put in some more chapters of just Yuu and Malleus hanging out, build out both of their insecurities a bit more, but I kinda wrote myself into a corner with setting this literally right before book 3, and I tend to prefer writing faster paced plots anyway. I might publish some deleted scenes after this is finished, including from an alternate plot outline where the story actually spilled into book 4 (which I scrapped because it would require reading all of book four and I still want to wait on the official english release)

Note from Present Me:
I never did this. Well, some of the scrapped outline made it into the sequel, but I never wrote up any deleted scenes.

# Chapter 10: The Silent Answer

Chapter Summary

Riddle asks Yuu some questions, and then we get to the end of last chapter and the angst tags become relevant.

Chapter Notes

Note from Present Me:
Yeah, I didn't include the angst tags (except for a new chatty tag) because I no longer think about 3 chapters of a mostly fluffy fic qualifies as angst.
Note from Past Me:
Why do I do all my best writing at midnight. TvT; At least I don't have anything too important tomorrow

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Malleus stepped out of the room, tupperware in hand, and Yuu turned back to Riddle. "Something up?"

"You tell me! What's with the Hornton thing? Half the school thinks you've lost your mind!"

"That's not exactly new, they've thought that since I got here."

"Well, yes, but this whole "secret twin" nonsense is still-!"

"It was a joke! I was trying to diffuse the tension and panicked! It's not like I'm going around trying to trick people!" Well, except for that one time with Sebek. Riddle probably didn't need to know about that.

"That's not the point! It's completely inappropriate! This is *Malleus Draconia* !"

"And Malleus likes the Hornton thing."

"But everyone thinks you're-! I mean, I can shut this kind of talk down in my own dorm, but-"

"Listen. I appreciate that you're looking out for me, but it's ok. I don't care what a bunch of strangers think about me! Well, no that's a lie, but I care about what my friends think way more! You, and Hornton, and Ace and Deuce, and Jack, and everyone else! Some jerks who

think I'm a presumptuous idiot or whatever don't matter nearly as much my friend, who wants to be treated like a *person* and not like the terrifying Lord Draconia who doesn't even get invited to mandatory housewarden meetings!"

"Wait, so when you invited him, you already knew?"

"I didn't know Malleus was Hornton before he showed up, but I knew that everyone "forgetting" him every week was ridiculous, and when he showed up, and everyone freaked out, I realized why he might want a chance to just be some nameless guy occasionally. Except now I knew who he was. I guess I just wanted him to have that chance back…"

Riddle sighed, "Alright, I see your point. That was incredibly rude of us, and I promise to make sure he gets an invite to all future meetings. But," he smiled, "you're definitely going to tell me how this all even happened sometime."

Malleus returned with the broth, but Riddle had to leave quickly if he wanted make it back before his mother noticed he was ever gone. Yuu still felt like he was overreacting a little, but when he asked them to take it easy, they didn't hesitate to agree. Not if the alternative was Riddle worrying about them for the rest of the break.

That just left the two of them and the broth. Yuu poked a pineapple with their spoon. They could do this. They already said they would try it. They had made their bed and now they were gonna lie in it. And also drag Malleus into it.

"Aight, if I'm trying this, you have to too. On the count of three?" Malleus nodded and sat at their desk with the other bowl. "Three, two, one, one half," Malleus raised an eyebrow at them, "Sorry, Hornton, zero!"

It was awful. The texture of the pineapple had gone all soft and mushy from sitting in the broth, and that was before you considered the taste. They looked back at Malleus as they hastily put the bowl down. He clearly didn't like it either, and he was watching them back with something like resigned apprehension. Well now they couldn't just say his cooking sucked! He had worked so hard on it! Well, Lilia had too apparently, but he wasn't the one looking at Yuu with that heart-tugging expression. Unfortunately, Malleus had seen right through their excuses. But as they kept trying to salvage the situation his expression changed to, not a smile per se, but something warmer and softer that made them want to keep going, to make sure he knew how much they appreciated him and his company. Of course that was when Sebek showed up, with Silver in tow.

"Lord Malleus! Finally! We've been looking all over campus!"

"He's fine. It's like Lilia said, he didn't need us to-"

"Of course he needs us! It is our solemn duty as his personal guard to be by Lord Malleus' side at all times! You really need to take this all more seriously, and-"

This was going nowhere fast. The "Hornton thing" definitely wasn't going to work twice, but surely they could think of something. Yuu cleared their throat. Unfortunately, they didn't get a chance to say anything before Sebek rounded on them in indignation.

“And as for you! Who do you think you are!? You’re just some human, and you get to take up all Lord Malleus’ time with your stupid human problems and illnesses!” Malleus cleared his throat dangerously, but Sebek plowed forward, undeterred. “Except you’re not even some normal human, you’re also so gullible that you’d actually think that Lord Malleus has a twin!” *Wow, projecting much?* “Yeah, that’s right, “Hornton” is a hoax! A ruse! And you fell for it, hook line and sinker!” Sebek kept going. He seemed to have a lot more to say on the topic, and worse he seemed to be completely serious about all of it. Yuu considered their options, and then decided to slap him. He shut up immediately, and they took the opportunity to grab his collar and drag him down toward them, so he was forced to make eye contact without them getting up.

“I’m not gonna bother defending my intelligence, explaining what the deal with Hornton is, or even establishing who tricked who, because I know you don’t actually care. And I don’t care about trying to get through to people who don’t listen. However, I’m going to make one thing clear. Ramshackle House is off limits to you. You are not going to barge into my dorm and breach my privacy. Or Malleus’, while he’s here. And if you think you don’t have to listen to me because I don’t have magic, think again, because you haven’t pulled your wand yet and I already have my knife.” They held up the pocketknife they had pulled from the nightstand drawer while Sebek was too distracted by their monologue to notice, and released his collar. He straightened up, whirling toward the desk.

“Lord Malleus! You’re not really going to let them- Lord Malleus?”

Silver spoke up from where he leaned against the door frame. “He teleported out while you were busy “exposing the truth” to Yuu.” *Smart thinking, Malleus.*

“Oh great, now we’ve got to track him down again! This isn’t over, you know!” He ran out, but Silver lingered behind a little.

“Unfortunately, he will have no one to back him up on you threatening him, since I appear to have slept through the whole thing. Next time, I will not.” And then he also left.

Well, Malleus had made a clean getaway, but Yuu figured they’d text him, just to make sure he didn’t feel too upset about leaving them to deal with Sebek. It wasn’t that big a deal, especially since they got to point a knife at him, but it seemed like the sort of thing Malleus would worry about. At the same time they sent a quick *“U OK?”* he sent *“I need to apologize.”* Yuu could see the typing bubble appear, disappear and reappear a few times, so they waited.

*“I never meant to deceive you.”*

What?

*“I really enjoyed getting to know you, and I was afraid you would be too intimidated if you knew who I really was. But that doesn’t make my behavior any more acceptable.”*

Was he serious? He couldn’t be, right?

*“I should have been the one to tell you, not Sebek, and definitely not like that. But now that he has, I won’t pretend he wasn’t telling the truth. I really was Malleus the entire time.”*

No.

*“Please say jk”*

*“It’s not a joke. I lied to you.”*

*“Not about that!*

*Does no one remember I was the one to come up with the twin thing!?”*

*“You might have reached that conclusion on your own, but I encouraged it.*

*Wait.*

*What do you mean “not about that?”*

*What else would I be joking about?”*

*“Of course I know you’re actually Malleus! The twin thing was a*

*Whats it called*

*A polite fiction!*

*Please tell me you don’t actually think I’m stupid enough to believe you and Hornton are separate people”*

Malleus didn’t answer.

He didn’t have to.

Yuu already knew.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
I’ve had some variation of that last line planned for what feels like an entire month. The upside is I had plenty of time to think of ways to make it hurt more while writing the previous chapters.

# Chapter 11: Board Game Night

Chapter Summary

Azul receives an unusual text from Yuu.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Azul was trying to decide what to have for dinner when Yuu texted him.

“ *Hey how much do you know about the whole Hornton thing?* ”

Azul tried to remember what they were talking about. They had been talking a lot about a new friend called Hornton at the Mostro Lounge the previous night, but why were they bringing him up now? A memory from the last housewarden meeting he had attended before exams tickled the back of his mind.

“ *The weird joke you made about Malleus Draconia having a twin? What’s that have to do with anything?* ”

“ *Let’s just say I’ve had a Day.*

*Btw, one of the ghosts found an old board game from when he was a student here*

*Bring pizza and you can play* ”

Azul agreed, and set about prepping one of the Lounge’s signature seafood pies to bring. When he arrived at Ramshackle House, Yuu answered the door, looking at him with red, watery eyes. They said something about having just got over a cold as they waved him toward the dining room and went to grab some plates, and Azul elected not to comment on the tear tracks running down their cheeks. He took a look at the instructions for the game, which Yuu had already set up on the dining table, while he waited. It seemed to be a war game where one player played a magitech automata called an ORC and the other played the human military trying to stop it. He was in the middle of the section on the different units’ movement rules when Yuu returned with the plates, soda and cups, and a freshly washed face. “I don’t know what you like, but I’ve got root beer, cola, and this weird lemony thing I don’t know why I bought. Flip you for the ORC?” Azul won the coin toss and poured himself some Spite while Yuu sorted through the cardboard unit tokens, picking which ones to put in their army.

Yuu had evidently mastered the delicate art of Not Getting Too Much Pizza Grease On The Board. It was something Azul had struggled with since coming to the surface, since all the games he played as a child were necessarily waterproofed, and could be easily cleaned afterwards. He generally dealt with the problem by keeping his food as far away from the board as he could manage, and using lots of napkins. He had initially assumed Idia's habit of balancing a slice in one hand while he took his turn was just him, but he was staring to think it was endemic to land-dwelling gamers, and the decades old grease stains on the board only proved this theory.

Azul won the first round, but it was a difficult battle, and Yuu made him fight for every single unit he destroyed up until the last infantryman. They still seemed upset about something, presumably whatever had happened with Malleus, and he got the uncomfortable impression that had they been fully focused on the game he would have been crushed. The next several rounds they played, trading turns with the ORC, seemed to bear this out, as the more they got into game and the playful trash talk, the more Azul lost. Despite the obvious glee they took in crushing things with the ORC, they seemed to play much better with the army, winning in fewer turns and losing in far more. The game was relatively fast-paced, but the hours passed the same, and eventually Yuu decided they were staying up too late for someone who had promised to take things easy, and started packing things up. While scooping cardboard tokens into a plastic bag, something bright green caught Azul's eye, and he turned to see a heavy looking Diasomnia jacket on a coat rack by the front door. It was angled so when he came in he only saw the dark outer layer, and then he'd had his back to it the entire game, but from this angle the lime colored lining couldn't help but grab his attention. It pushed the question he had debated asking back to the forefront of his mind, and he made up his mind, "Listen, something's obviously bothering you, and maybe you don't want me asking, but do you want to explain whatever the Hornton thing you texted me about was?"

Yuu took a breath, "Yeah, that was, uh, this is gonna take a while. Give me a minute to figure out where to start…" They finished folding up the board, and then started to explain while wrapping the leftover pizza in tinfoil. In broad strokes it was what Azul had suspected, Yuu had made friends with the Diasomnia housewarden, who later (albeit unintentionally) broke their heart. Yuu objected to that phrasing because "We weren't actually dating or anything!" but Azul thought that whether or not any romantic feelings were involved, they had obviously taken things hard.

"So, does this mean you aren't inviting him to any more housewarden meetings?"

Yuu shot an offended glare at him and shut the fridge door a little too forcefully, "Of course not! Excluding someone from a group activity that he's *required to attend* just because it'd be awkward would be beyond immature and petty! I'd like to think I have more professionalism than that!" Azul winced at the pointedness, but couldn't disagree. "It's just, I really thought he was different, you know? Like, the way he looked at me, like he really thought I could do anything, that I was special, and that I wasn't stupid just because I don't know anything about this world. But this whole time, he was just-!" Yuu let out an inarticulate noise of frustration as they put the last item away, before walking Azul to the door. Just before he left, they stopped him and started rifling through their

pockets. “Wait a sec, there was something I wanted to-here!” They held up one of the Free Wish cards he had given them at the Lounge, and handed it to him.

“What are you-?”

“Thanks. For spending time with me, and listening to my problems even though I didn’t ask you to. Consider this wish granted, or fulfilled, or whatever the term is…”

“But this is just- I can’t possibly-!”

“Look I really don’t like having people owe me stuff, so just accept the card, ok?”

Azul accepted the card. Yuu smiled, and they said their goodbyes, and he left for his own dorm, reflecting on what he knew about Malleus. Maybe he should invite him over to Mostro Lounge. Just for a nice, civilized chat with Floyd.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
The opening of this chapter went through like three different iterations before I settled on board game night. There was a version where instead they watched a crappy romcom with a weirdly relevant plot, and multiple versions where the twins came along to offer terrible relationship advice.
Also, ORC is based on the real-life game OGRE by Steve Jackson Games. It’s considered to be fairly easy to learn (at least by war game standards), and tends to be pretty fast paced, unless you’re doing some weird custom scenario, or are Yuu, who enjoys playing out bloody wars of attrition.

# Chapter 12: Conversation

Chapter Summary

Malleus is sulking.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Malleus was not sulking. Nor was he moping, angsting, brooding, or whatever Lilia had said when he didn't attend dinner. He was merely *contemplating* . He had been turning the last text from Yuu over in his head all day now, but he wasn't really accomplishing much besides feeling awful. Maybe he really was brooding. Whatever it was he was doing was interrupted by a soft knock on his door, and Lilia asking to be invited in.

"Sebek finally told me what happened. Well, most of it anyway. He and Silver are being oddly reticent about something or other, but that's probably unrelated." He sat down next to Malleus on the bed and continued, "I don't want to turn this into an 'I told you so,' but we both know that they were going to figure it out sooner or later, what matters going forward is-"

"They already knew."

Lilia raised an eyebrow, "Well then, I really did tell you so. What's actually wrong, then?"

"I was trying so hard not to scare them away, or be too much, to be *Hornton* and this whole time it was completely unnecessary because they already liked *Malleus*! Worse than unnecessary, because now they think that I think they're unintelligent, because why else would anyone take that farce seriously!?" Malleus fell backwards onto his pillows, pointedly ignoring how Lilia scoffed fondly at the dramatics. "And now they probably hate me."

"Come on, you're not stupid, just straightforward. They said they believed something, and you took them at their word. It's not like they had anything to gain from pretending, after all. That said, you should have cleared the air rather than try to further the misunderstanding. Personally, I hope you both learn a valuable lesson about communication from this. Have you thought of how you're going to apologize?"

Malleus sighed, "More or less. I'm just not sure they'll want to hear it. They haven't texted since this afternoon."

"…Malleus please tell me you're not waiting to be invited to make a apology."

Malleus avoided his unimpressed stare, “Not as such, no. I just don’t want to intrude if they don’t want to hear from me.”

Lilia huffed something like *teenagers* , shifting to face Malleus. “I understand, but I seriously doubt Yuu will want to reach out first. And not because they’re going to hate you forever or anything, but because they probably think if you *didn’t* mean to insult them like that, you wouldn’t need to be prompted to apologize! You’re going to have to go to them, and be the one to invite them to listen.“

Malleus started to get up, “You’re right, I should go-“

“Not now! It’s late, they’re probably already asleep! Go tomorrow, but don’t delay any longer than that.” Lilia got up, smoothing the blanket under him. “Now, I’m going to make sure Silver got to bed before he fell asleep. Good night, and good luck.”

The next day, when Malleus finished planning what he was going to say and left his room, Lilia had already left. When asked, Silver shrugged and said that Sebek had wanted knife training for some reason, and resumed his lunch. He had planned to talk to Lilia before he left, but as he finished his own lunch without any sign of either him or Sebek, Malleus could feel his resolve to go at all start to falter, so he prepared to teleport to campus before he lost the nerve entirely. He considered arriving just outside the Ramshackle gates as he usually did, but Yuu might not welcome that. Instead he chose to appear closer to campus, so they could see his approach out the window and decide whether to drive him off.

It was just his luck that this led to him being intercepted by Ashengrotto and one of the Leeches. They were walking toward the Hall of Mirrors, and when the eel-Malleus wasn’t sure which he was-saw him he poked Ashengrotto’s shoulder and pointed. The two marched straight toward him, and he noticed the twin was carrying a shovel. Ashengrotto spoke first, “What luck, we were just about to try to find you! You know, for someone who supposedly went home for break, you always seem to be on campus somewhere, teleportation must be so convenient.”

Malleus looked down at him. From his posture and expression, he seemed to be trying to be intimidating, but the image was spoiled by the sweat beading against his brow. “Can this wait? I have a very urgent matter to attend to.”

The twin balanced the shovel across his shoulders. He did not seem particularly nervous, but he wasn’t any more intimidating than Ashengrotto, and the gardening implement wasn’t helping either. “Yeah and so’s this! We wanna talk to you about Li’l Shrimpie.”

“He means Yuu,” supplied Ashengrotto.

So they had heard, or Yuu had told them, or this was a weird coincidence. “My matter concerns Yuu as well. I have an apology I would rather not delay any longer. *Can this wait* ?”

For a moment, Ashengrotto seemed to overcome his obvious terror with sheer surprise, “Wait, you’re already about to apologize? We-uh-we don’t need this talk after all, sorry for stopping you! Come along Floyd!”

Floyd lowered the shovel, disappointedly, and followed Azul. After a few steps he stopped and turned back, “By the way, you’re going the wrong way to find Shrimpie, they went to the kitchens. Said they wanted to have something other than leftover pizza or Crimes Against Broth for lunch.” Malleus winced, thanked Floyd, and turned back toward the main school building.

As he approached the kitchens, he could hear a whole crowd of people, talking and preparing food. Malleus considered his approach. He would check if Yuu was still there, and then he would ask to speak with them. Privately, since he doubted either of them wanted to have this conversation in front of what sounded like an entire dorm if people. If Yuu said no, he would- he would *ask* if they meant “not now” or “not ever” *before* he ran away, supplied a part of his brain that sounded suspiciously like Lilia. He was just outside the kitchen door, and he could hear Yuu raising their voice.

“Seriously Jamil, I’m not-“ they caught him out of the corner of their eye, and turned. Malleus watched surprise and anxiety flicker across their face before they settled on irritation.

No backing out.

“I apologize for the interruption. Can we talk?”

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Almost at the end! I’ve updated the chapter count, since I forgot to when I posted the last chapter. This story’s been a lot of fun to write, and it feels so weird to so close to finished. Well, not *finished* finished, since I already have a couple ideas for sequels/other fics with my version of Yuu. I’ll probably be taking a break between finishing this story and starting another one though.

# Chapter 13: Reconciliation

Chapter Summary

Conversation is had.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
This chapter is the only one to be beta-read, so everyone thank cupckeshrk8D for that

Yuu was having a Day. It was already off to a bad start when they slept in too late and woke up groggy, and then Floyd showed up, asking if they knew where he could find gardening tools. They did actually remember where the tool shed was from their brief stint as groundskeeper, but the place was a mess, and it took all morning to dig out the shovel (which Floyd still refused to explain the purpose of, by the way). By the time they finished up they were definitely ready for lunch. And then Grim decided he wasn't in the mood for reheated pizza, and no one wanted pineapple-chicken broth. Fortunately Floyd happened to know that the Scarabia students were also staying over break and cooking all their meals in the school kitchen, so they could probably score some lunch if they helped out with meal prep. And that was how they got here, trying to tell Jamil that they really didn't want to visit his dorm today.

Under normal circumstances, sure, they'd be all about that. Based on the muttering of the other Scarabia students, something was definitely going on, and who even was Yuu if not a meddler? However, they had promised Riddle that they'd take it easy until they had completely recovered, and based on the headache starting to build as they locked eyes with Jamil, they definitely hadn't yet.

"Seriously Jamil, I'm not-" Something moved in the corner of their vision and they turned to see Malleus hovering just outside the doorway. Next to them, Jamil's eyes widened, and he slipped his magic pen back into his pocket. When had he taken it out?

"I apologize for the interruption. Can we talk?" Malleus' posture was stiff, and his expression looked nervous. Whatever he was here for was probably best handled away from the crowded kitchen.

Yuu helped Grim down from their shoulders and onto the countertop, and turned to Jamil. "Look, I'm getting over a cold right now, but I'll definitely come over when I'm better. Give Grim your number so I can text you in advance, ok?" Jamil nodded mutely, still staring at

Malleus, and they marched out of the kitchen, following him down the hall until they were reasonably sure that they were out of earshot.

“Aight, start talking. Am I right that this is about yesterday?”

He nodded, “I wanted to apologize properly this time. It was never my intention to insult your intelligence. I just-you never seemed to fear me, you actively seek my presence out- No one does that, outside my and Lilia’s little family, and the only reason I could think of that you wouldn’t treat me like the terrifying Prince of the Fae was that you just didn’t know. I didn’t want you to find out because of that, but my actions and assumptions hurt you, even if not in the way I thought they would. This wouldn’t have happened if I had just asked you about it, and I’m sorry.”

Malleus stopped and took a deep breath. That was a lot. He was staring at a fixed point just above Yuu’s head, as if scared to meet their eyes. It hit them, all of a sudden, that Malleus had been just as, if not more nervous about their new friendship than them. They had noticed that he seemed uneasy, especially at first, but had been to wrapped up in their own awkwardness around names and homework troubles to really see it. But in this context, it made sense that he had assumed they would inevitably fear him, in the same way they had assumed the worst of him.

Yuu’s anger drained. For all it seemed to be their first response these days, it was exhausting to hold onto, and they didn’t like feeling that way. They cleared their throat, and Malleus’ gaze met theirs.

“Malleus, I like you because you’re fun, and sweet, and get really excited about gargoyles, and a bunch of other reasons that I won’t go into right now because I don’t wanna get distracted from my point here. Which is, I was never scared of you because I know you, or at least I know enough of you to know I want to know you better. You’re right that you should have talked to me sooner, and you have to promise that if something like this comes up again, you’ll talk to me, and I promise to do the same, ok?” He nodded, and his nervous expression melted into relief. “Cool, apology accepted.” They grinned up at him, “Let’s go back and grab Grim, I’m sure he’s driven Jamil halfway up the wall by now.”

Oddly, Grim was actually quiet when they got back to the kitchen, just climbing back up their arm and curling around their shoulders. Jamil chalked it up to him wearing himself out earlier, which Yuu was inclined to believe based on how frazzled Jamil seemed packing some extra stew for them to take back to Ramshackle. He also reiterated his invitation for dinner before they left with Malleus.

“…And I haven’t been able to look at porcelain the same way since!”

“Truly, a harrowing experience.”

They were walking toward Ramshackle, close enough that Yuu’s shoulder kept bumping Malleus’ side(and he would probably be doing the same if his shoulder wasn’t fully above their head). They pointed to one of the ornamental grotesques on the gates. “So, what can you tell me about that gargoyle?”

“First off, that is not a gargoyle! That is-“

THE END

End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Whew, my first multi-chapter fic is complete! I have some ideas for a sequel wherein Yuu and Sebek are forced to tolerate each other while nosing into investigating the Scarabia dorm. I want to take some time to outline it properly/iron out the kinks, so idk when I'll start actually writing it. In the meantime, I have a tumblr! gloriousbookwyrm.tumblr.com Occasionally I post fanart there

Note from Present Me:
I post significantly less art on tumblr these days, lol. I am still active there though.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!