I used to Dream of Butterflies, now I Dream of Bunnycats

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by Untitled5

Summary

A new game starts in the city of Mitakihara, will Humanity's potential prevail over the machinations of the Crawling Chaos or will it fall? And what exactly are these Witches and Magical Girls?

OR

What happens when someone self inserts into Persona, but somethings just aren't right, especially with those Magical Girls.

Chapter 1

I groaned as I got off from the long train ride that I just had. In the main train station building I saw my uncle along with my cousin waving at me.

"It has been a long time since we last saw you, Naoki," my uncle said with a small smile, "are you doing alright?"

He was most likely referring to that psychotic breakdown incident which killed my mom; this was the reason for why I'll be staying with my uncle's family, the Kanames, for the next 2 years or so.

I tried not to let guilt eat at me as I anwsered with a simple, "Yes."

I knew logically that that there was no way for me to know that Akechi would target that train on that particular day, but I still felt I could've done something.

My uncle didn't look entirely convinced, but he didn't comment on what he was thinking about. He the directed us to follow him to a bus stop.

There my my cousin, Madoka, started to fidget as said to me, "Uhm, Naoki..."

My eyes turned to her, she had definitely grown some since the last time we were together, but she still looked really cute, and then she handed a manga over to me, which she had been holding the entire time. I looked at the manga curiously and with a confused expression.

She must have noticed my confusion as she started to explain, "Ah...the last time we met you told me that you wanted to read this manga..."

The last time we met, was around 2 years ago, our parents got into some sort of fight, I didn't really what the fight was about, but my mom cut all contacts from uncle Tomohisa, this was also back before I even realized that I was reborn in a fictional world.

I to this day still cannot believe that it took me that long to figure it out, well no matter now I'll just have to tell Madoka that I already bought this around 2 years ago.

"Thanks Madoka, but I already own this..." I muttered softly

"Oh..." she looked at ground with a downcast expression.

I can't just allow her to look so sad! Quickly brain, think of something!

"Well, I guess I'll have to sell or give away my old copy..." I muttered loud enough for her to hear.

Madoka turned to look at with a suprised and confused look on her.

"Madoka, have you ever heard of the saying 'it's the thought that counts', I am glad that you thought about me enough to get me something like this."

Madoka flushed at what I said, and uncle Tomohisa let out a small laugh behind us.

"I am glad to see that you two are getting along this well," he said to us with a smile.

I laughed along as we made our way to a bus stop. "Of course, there's no way I wouldn't get along well with Mado-chan."

I intentionally used my old nickname for her to see what kind of reaction she had. At first she appeared to be okay with its use, but then she must have imagined some embarrassing things because her face started to turn even redder.

Then an idea came to her mind and she smiled slyly at me. "Nao-chan and I would always get along."

I mentally cringed and groaned at my old cutesy nickname of her for me, *I feel like I have started a war with her.*

We shared eye contact for a few seconds before we both decided not to call each other by our childhood names.

The bus soon arrived; it took 12 minutes with it to arrive at their house.

"Ah you're back," said an unfamiliar voice to my right when Uncle Tomohisa unlocked the door.

I slowly turned to see a boy around Madoka's age with the sane pink hair as her, in fact he looked nearly identical. His expression on the other was nothing like Madoka's, it was filled with boredom and indifference.

What the hell...?

Madoka turned to look at the boy with a confused look on her face.

Meanwhile Uncle Tomohisa stopped in his track as he muttered, "Who..."

But then his expression changed and he said to the boy, "Minato, are you feeling better?"

The boy nodded. "Yeah, everything's fine dad."

Dad!? What the fuck does he mean by dad!? The hell is going on here!?

I quickly turned to look at my uncle. "Uncle, who is he?"

Uncle Tomohisa turned to me with a frown. "What do you mean? He is Minato, your cousin, Madoka's twin brother...I know that the two of you don't really get along, but please don't pretend like you don't know him."

Minato merely smirked at me as if to challenge me.

*What in the name of Igor is going on here?! Where did **HE** come from?!*

Suddenly a voice cried out intterupting my train of thought, "Mado...Mado..."

And in waddled little Tatsuya. He stared at both Minato and I in confusion before another familiar face walked in, aunt Junko.

She looked about the same as last time I saw her, but this time she didn't have as much thinly concealed hostility towards my mom.

Mom and her never really got along for some reason, and it got even worse around two years ago. When the whole fight with them happened.

"Naoki, you're here and...huh?" she muttered as she gazed confusedly at Minato, then as if switch had gone of in her brain the confusion disappeared, "Ah Minato are you feeling better?"

Alright, it's now obvious that this 'Minato' is obviously not supposed to be here. But, then what is he?

The "boy" in question turned to look at me, and continued to smirk at me, something about that smirk really disturbing to me, so I looked away.

Why am even I feeling disturbed? It's just Minato, true I don't really well with him, but that doesn't mean I should be scared of him.

...what?...What the fuck? No...no! I know where this is going, I'm not gonna be—

My cousin was still smirking for some reason, and soon enough it was time for dinner, I sat close to Madoka while Minato sat opposite to me.

We then had a pretty awkward dinner before Madoka decided to show me my room. Thankfully I wouldn't have to share it with Minato, so that was a plus.

I flopped down onto the bed as I reflected on the events of me ending up here.

Why couldn't I have warned her about the Mental Shutdowns, why couldn't I...no I can't think like that even if were to kmow and I were to inform someone why would they listen to me, why would they listen to a bastard.

Tears flowed from my eyes and I entertained more what ifs in my head.

Fat chance mom would have listened to you...she never did, and it's not like I know every Mental Shutdown that ever happened, were what the rational part of my mind argued.

I tossed and turned in the staring up at the ceiling. I waited a few minutes to calm down.

Alright, enough with fighting myself and walloping in my grief, I'll get a Persona just to fuck over both Shido's and Akechi's plans.

I started by going to one of the four corners of my room, and I started to walk to the adjacent corner, and while I was doing that I kept muttering, "Persona, Persona, come to me."

I was doing a scuffed version of the Persona Game, which I hoped might work even if I was the only one doing it.

It would be real hilarious if I got a message saying that this service has been discontinued, it'd be real fucking hilarious even.

I soon finished with walking around the corners of the room and looked around searching for a golden butterfly, but nothing happened.

"Well, this is a bust. I guess I'll try the other methods then..." I muttered to myself as I sat down on the bed.

Then suddenly a bright flash surrounded me, and for second I saw a black outline of a butterfly, and I soon found myself in the tower structure of Philemon in the Sea of Souls.

And in the middle of it stood good ol' Phil.

He for some reason, had his Persona 1 outfit and with full face covering butterfly mask.

"Welcome, it's a pleasure to meet you. I am Philemon, a dweller between consciousness and unconsciousness. Now there's a simple task, can you state your name?" asked Philmont.

My eyes widened as I tried to get my name out...

My name...what is it?

What is it?!

What is it!?

It's...it's...it's...

" / / / / / /" I finally shouted out my real name.

Philemon hummed as he looked at me. "I suppose that would count as well.

"Very well, I must congratulate you, not many of you, humans, can remember their names while in this domain. It seems like you pass this test, I think that the rest needs to no introduction to you, correct?"

"Yes, I figured that I could you some things to..."

Before I could even finish my sentence, Philemon spoke and interrupted me, "Unfortunately your questions will have to wait, out time is rather limited at the present moment.

"I'll grant you the power of Persona in order to rise against the status quo of the world and against the chains that bind you, your family, and your friends. Should you have any further questions, please come to the shrine near your new school."

Everything started to darken around me; the yellow towers turned orange, and then I found myself awake in my bed.

I got up to look around, and it was already dark outside, plus my phone showed that it was around 2 AM.

I groaned as I flopped down on the bed and started to think about everything with Philemon. Something didn't feel quite right...

Alright what the fuck was that? Philemon felt way to pushy, was he limited in what he could say by Nyarlathotep? It was almost like he didn't want to interact with me, but then why did he transport me to the Sea of Souls?

I closed my eyes as I tried to get back to sleep, tomorrow, after all, will be a busy day.

"...I hope we get along well." I said as I finished my introduction my new class.

Unfortunately, it appeared that I wasn't in the same class as Madoka, which I didn't really like, but there was nothing I could really do about it, so I just went along with it.

I also kinda overslept and barely made it for my introduction, but that was neither here nor there.

My new teacher smiled as she directed me to a seat at the corner of the room, where a short black haired girl sat.

" 'Sup. I'm Toudou Alice, but you can just call me Alice." the girl, Alice, greeted me as I sat down next to her.

"Uh...I've already introduced myself, but you can also just call me Naoki." I said, somewhat fumbling my introduction because her family name caught me off guard.

Alice threw a quick glance over at the teacher as if to make sure the coast was clear before she asked, "So, how are finding Mitakihara, and this school so far?"

"It's certainly...unique, the school far more than the city itself."

I took a look around and almost physically recoiled from how awful the "walls" if this classroom where.

I mean who the fuck thought that this is a good idea. It looks so atrocious, why the fuck are the classrooms surrounded by glass? And isn't this dangerous as well, I mean if someone accidentally breaks it, it would cause more than just minor bleeding.

Alice seemed to have grasped what I was thinking, and she grinned at me. "I had the same thoughts when I transferred here.

"Hey, since you are new around here, why don't I show you around the city?"

I shrugged as I answered, "Sure...but I already promised my cousin that she could show me around here, so..."

Alice looked pensive for a moment before she brightened up. "Then, how 'bout I accompany you? Would your cousin mind that? I could show you all sorts of fun things to do 'round here. Like the Arcades, hey have you heard about that new game that is coming out soon, it will have...."

I turned her out as she started to gush about some new Arcade game, in any case I didn't see any reason why Madoka would not agree to this, so I nooded to her question.

"Great, so you agree!" she said in a loud voice. I am not sure what I actually agreed to, but it couldn't be that bad, so I didn't ask.

Once class was over, Alice rushed over to another boy in the front of the class and made us introduced ourselves to each other.

The boy, whose name is Takashi said to me, "So, Alice got a new 'friend', huh? Anyway, my name is Kido Takashi, nice to meet you..."

Huh...something about that name seem real familiar....

I shook my head to clear my thoughts. "Kaname Naoki."

Alice to the side had a small grin as we introduced ourselves to each other.

We then went to meet up with Madoka and soon enough we met up with her and her friend, Sayaka.

"Naoki!" waved Madoka with her hand.

We walked up to her while she waved.

"Eh, Naoki you already made friends?" asked Madoka as she turned to Alice and Takashi, "well I'm glad, my name is Kaname Madoka and this is..."

She indicated to Sayaka who quickly got the message. "You can call me Sayaka."

Now it was Alice's and Takashi's turns to introduce themselves, which they did, and they if they could accompany us.

Madoka smiled softly as she responded, "Of course, right Sayaka-Chan?"

She nudged the blue haired girl who quickly nodded to her question.

We then wandered around the city before we made our way to the mall.

While walking towards there, Sayaka grinned at me and asked, "So, how are you doing with your dream job, Mr. Detective?"

"Eh..."—I shrugged—"...going well, but could be better; I doubt that I'll ever match up to the great Hercule Poirot though."

Reading Detective stories, in particular Agatha Christie ones, was a hobby that I carried over to this life form my previous one. I read them so often when I was still young that Sayaka started to refer to me as 'Mr. Detective'.

And to be fair to her, it's not completely a lie, I had started to 'investigate' the Mental Shutdowns and Psychotic Breakdowns ever since mom died, and by investigating I am talking trying to find any evidence that may link those cases to Shido.

In that regard, I had some small success with uncovering some small cases at the beginning which directly linked to Shido, however, it seems like someone in Shido's inner circle had enough of brain to realize that they should not use Akechi like that.

So, unfortunately for me, all the recent Mental Shutdowns and Psychotic Breakdown appeared to have no connections to Shido.

We arrived at our destination and walked around the mall a bit.

Sayaka then told us that she was going to buy so music DVDs for a friend of hers and she looked at Madoka.

Madoka looked between us unsure of what to do.

I told Madoka that she can go with Sayaka if she wants to, which she, after a bit of consideration, did.

So, we went our separate ways, with Takashi and Alice showing me around the city.

We ventured into a small park and sat down on one of the benches...or at least we would've if the world didn't start to blur around us.

"What the..." exclaimed Alice, as the world around us started to change.

What the fuck? This is far more trippy than these usually places are.

I started to sense something in the depth of whatever his place is. I wasn't sure if it meant that my Persona was awakened, or if it was the gift that Philemon referred to.

Alice insisted that venture further into the dungeon, and despite my and Takashi's protests; she was quite insistent on it.

"I mean just look at how awesome this is; a paranormal world we just ventured into, mom would be freaking out, and I want to document it!"

I shared a concerned look with Takashi who just shrugged.

I let out a defeated sigh as I ventured with them further and further into this Shadow world.

In the center was some sort of weird glowing object, which I couldn't make out. Whatever it was I didn't like it, then it shattered and out came a...

What the actual fuck? No genuinely this Shadow looks someone came up with, while they were high on something.

The Shadow resembled no SMT demon that I was aware of and it was no blob with a mask on it. The Shadow was some sort of weird black/grey horse with what looked like a person made up of all colors on its back.

It roared as smaller Shadows started to appear. It soon noticed us and let out another roar as it charged at us; with the smaller Shadows following close behind it.

I instinctively took step infront of Alice.

Call me forth.

A tarot card appeared in my hand. And I instinctively went to crush it.

Blue light erupted from around me and my Persona appeared behind me. It wore all yellow hood which hid its appearance.

I am thou, thou art I.

From the sea of souls, I cometh.

I am Hastur, the King in Yellow.

It took me a few seconds to mentally process everything about my Person. But, I needed something to deal with this Shadow, so I went to the first spell that came to my mind.

"Freila!" I shouted as I unleashed the medium nuclear attack against the Shadow.

It looked like I got lucky and nuclear was its weaknesses as it fell to ground, the smaller shadows started to surround it as if to protect it.

"Hastur! Mafrei!" all of its minions appeared to have the same weakness as that spell vaporized almost all of the smaller shadows

My eyes widened when I went to strike at the larger Shadow only to find that it vanished from where it was hiding.

I barely had enough time to summon my Persona infront of me to block, as the Shadow appeared infront of me and knocked me to the side.

My sight got blurry and I coughed up some blood from the impact. The Shadow's minions advanced towards me as I tried to unleash another AOE nuclear spell against them.

However, it looked like blocking an attack with my Persona took a lot more out of me, as Hastur didn't respond to me attempting to use another nuclear spell.

Then I heard a shout of, "No!" and I could barely make out blue light which surrounded either Alice or Takashi.

"Victoria! Wipe that big monster away with a Bufula!" this time I was certain I knew who was the one who shouted it was; Alice.

I saw the ice spell that went to strike the large Shadow, however, a few of the smaller ones jumped infront of the attack and took the damage for themselves.

The larger Shadow went to strike at Alice so fast that she looked like she will be unable to doge, however, thankfully, Takashi managed to push her to the ground.

They were barely roll off the ground as the large Shadow went to strike at them at them again.

This time, though, a card appeared in Takashi's hand, and crushed it instantly.

"Persona! Megido!" he shouted and the Shadow disintegrated when the almighty spell struck it, and with it went the Shadow World and all the other smaller shadows.

I tried to stand up, but I my les gave out from under me as I tumbled to the ground, thankfully, Takashi was next to me, and was able to catch before I fell face first into the ground.

"Kaname-san, are you alright?" asked Takashi with a worried voice.

I tried to anwser him, but I ended up coughing up some blood.

This caused Alice to shout, "Naoki!" as she rushed up to me.

Then I could make out a card manifest in her left hand, and she crushed it as she muttered, "Dia."

I could feel myself getting better from just that one spell, and after a few seconds, I was able to stand up again.

"I'm fine now, thanks to Alice..." I muttered as I still felt somewhat weak.

Alice was still sending me a concerned look, nonetheless, I straightened myself up as I turned towards Takashi.

"So...can either of you tell me what the hell that was?" he asked us after I was healed.

I hesitated for a moment on what to tell them before I decided to tell them the truth. "What we encountered was a Shadow. To make it simple, Shadows are the suppressed thoughts and emotions of Humanity.

"They reside in Shadow worlds like the one we were in. Though most of the time those worlds are less..."—I hesitated for a moment on what word to use—"...trippy than the world we were in."

He gave me a suprised look. Likely suprised that I knew this much about what we encountered.

I sighed as I continued. "There is someone who can explain this in more details. I could lead you to him, if you want me to."

Takashi hesitated, but Alice grinned as she nooded along. This caused Takashi to acquiesce to come along with us, as he evidently didn't want to leave Alice alone.

So, I lead them to the shrine, which I had searched up this morning, and while traveling there, I started to test my Persona's sensing ability, I could detect these smaller Shadow worlds around me in 2KM radius, which I appreciated.

Once we entered the shrine, we were engulfed in a bright light. The three of us soon found ourselves with Philemon. "Well done in awakening your Persona," he then turned his attention towards Takashi and Alice, "I welcome you back, my name is Philemon, have you forgotten?"

Alice stared at him entranced. "I...I remember this...

"Me and Takashi...we tried this game called Persona..."

This caused Takashi's eyes to widen as he also seemed to remember it. "We heard about it from our Parents when we were young..."

Philemon merely nooded along. "Indeed, it was far more prevalent in the time of your parents.

"Now, is there something else you require of me, Kaname Naoki?"

Philemon turned his attention to me, and I decided my two most important questions, "First of all, can you tell me how we can get to the main Shadow world, and—"

I was cut of by Philemon, "I am afraid to say, that there is no main Shadow world."

Alright, so, this is more like Persona 2 than all the other ones, though the fact that it is even remotely similar to P2...is concerning to say the least, and it leads my next question... I

thought with an tired sigh.

"...Okay, my next question is: Can you tell me what your counterpart, Nyarlathotep, is planning to do?"

My companions turned to look at me at the question. However, my whole focus was on Philemon.

Philemon let out a humm as he anwsered the question, "I am afraid to say that once again I can be of no assistance to you in answering that question.

"I cannot reveal what the Crawling Chaos is planning, that was a rule we agreed upon."

I grunted at that, *Tatsuya should definitely have punched him harder in the face.*

"Were those all of your questions?" he asked me as I pictured myself punching him in the face like how Tatsuya did.

I hesitated for a moment before I asked my next question, "How would we go about Fusion?"

"I will take that over due to the Velvet Room currently being indisposed."

I nooded along with this and I turned to Alice and Takashi. "If you have any questions, you can ask him now."

Takashi was the first to ask him something, "Uh...yeah, can you tell us why these...Shadows appeared in Mitakihara?"

"Play the game, and you will find out."

Uhha...well thanks Phil for that wonderful answer.

Alice huffed while glared at him then she asked her question, "And what is this game even about?"

Philemon glanced to the side and nooded to something and before we knew it, we were back in the temple.

"Oh, wow, so helpful..." muttered Alice while she turned to look at me.

"Sorry about that," I muttered, "normally he's more...helpful."

I wasn't whether that quite the right word; Philemon was quite helpful in Persona 1, less so in the Persona 2 duology—but even there he wasn't as unhelpful as he was here.

Takashi sighed. "Well, it can't be helped, Naoki-san, you know more about these Shadows, would you be able to anwser a few of my questions?"

"Eh...yeah sure."

"Can Shadows interact with the real world?" was his first question.

I scratched the back of my head. "Yes, however, this usually happens under very specific circumstances, more common is the fact that people end up in Shadow worlds."

Takashi frowned. "In that case, could the mysterious dissappearances around Mitakihara have something to do with the Shadows?"

"Mysterious dissappearances?" I muttered as I looked at both of them.

Alice perked up at that. "Yeah, there have been an increase of mysterious dissappearances in Mitakihara and the surrounding areas. People dissappear, but no bodies of them are ever found."

I hummed at that, it sounded like a pretty typical death due to a Shadow, but something was quite right, the no body part, in Persona 3 and 4 even after a Shadow killed the human's psyche—the body would still find its way back to the human world.

I was not quite sure how with demons killing people in Persona 1 and 2, but that still left with a somewhat anxious feeling.

"Shadows killing people is not unheard of...that being said, people who are killed by them usually leave a body behind, that body could either be dead, or have its psyche destroyed making them basically a walking corpse which cannot think for itself, in other words victims Apathy Syndrome."

Alice had a reserved look on her face. "So, does that mean that these dissappearances aren't the work of these Shadows?"

I sighed as I paced back and forth. "I can't say that 100% say that the Shadows aren't behind these cases; Shadows vary wildly in different places and events, so I am nor ruling out these Shadows as the cause."

"Well in that case, I propose that we investigate these Shadows to see whether they are the cause of the mysterious dissappearances," said Alice with a grin.

I threw a look at Takashi, who quickly responded, "I actually agree with Alice on this, we should see if they are behind it, and if the Shadows are, then we must do something about them."

"In which case who am I to refuse. I'll also agree with Alice, we need to investigate these Shadows," I let out a small laugh.

Alice then held out her hand, I looked at her confused not quite sure what she wanted from us.

"C'mon, place your hands on mine like on those TV shows, it will signify the beginning of our investigation!"

Takashi and I both chuckled at that; we them place our hands onto hers, and after a quick "1, 2, 3," from Alice we raised them up in unison.

Chapter 2

Madoka was getting used to weird dreams, first that weird dream with the long black haired girl and now this.

She was tied down on a table with red strings holding her down. She struggled against, but they didn't seem to budge.

"Hahah, useless!" rang out a voice.

Madoka could barely turn her head to look at who spoke, and when she managed to; she was shocked at what she saw.

The person that spoke looked exactly like her, except for the fact that she wore some sort of dark magical girl dress.

"W-who are you?" Madoka asked in a somewhat timid voice.

The doppelganger merely laughed at her. "Can't you see? I am you, the real you!"

Madoka looked confused, but then she remembered in what situation she is in, so she asked her lookalike, "I don't get this...can you free me?"

The doppelganger sneered at her. "Typical. You can't do anything by yourself, that's why you have to rely on Homura to save you!"

"I-I-I don't understand..." she trailed off.

"Kaname Madoka, you are a coward, who watches her friends die while doing nothing to help them, you are useless...less than useless! You are sick!

"Should you, yourself not change, everything will be lost, and you will further hurt poor Homura-chan. This is my warning to you!"

Madoka awoke from her sleep with a gasp; she continued to gasp for air till she calmed down.

"Madoka? Are you okay?" asked Naoki with worry.

Her eyes widened at the fact that Naoki was in her room, and she squeaked as she threw a plushy at him...which did nothing.

"W-why are you here?"

Naoki sighed as he anwsered her question with another question, "Madoka, have you seen what hour it is?"

Her eyes went to clock in her room, and they widened at seeing how late it was, she quickly scrambled out of the bed and Naoki left the room to let her dress quickly.

She went to the bathroom and cleaned her teeth and brushed her hair a bit; said good morning to her dad and quickly left the house with Naoki.

"Uhmm...did you help Tatsuya with waking up mom?"

"Minato and Tatsuya have already woken her up just as I woke."

Something about that didn't sound right; it's weird ever since Naoki moved everything around the felt weird, thought Madoka to herself as they quickly walked to school.

While walking there Madoka said to him, "Thank you for waking me up, Naoki."

"No problem, I kinda overslept as well." he muttered the last part in low voice mostly to himself.

Hitomi and Sayaka were not present at their usual meeting place before school, so they most likely were already in class.

She rushed towards her classroom and just barely made it in time when the lesson started.

"...I wonder why you were so late to school today, Madoka?" asked Sayaka with a sly grin as her and Hitomi sat down next on the rooftop, "I heard some rumors that you were accompanied by a boy."

Madoka's face twisted into that of a disgusted look. "No, well yes, I was accompanied by a boy, but that was Naoki."

She had told them about a week ago about Naoki moving in with her family.

"So widdle old Nao-chan will be staying with you from today, huh?" asked Sayaka after Madoka told her and Hitomi about

"Sayaka-chan, you shouldn't talk about him like that," Madoka chided her friend, "besides, do you want him to reveal all our embarrassing stories?"

Hitomi tilted her head. "What embarrassing stories would he have?"

Sayaka let out a small nervous laugh. "Nothing...not a thing..."

Hitomi had curious look on her face but didn't comment anything on that. "In any case, I will unfortunately not be able to meet him today; I have to do my Tea ceremony lesson today."

Madoka waved her goodbye as she and Sayaka waited for Naoki infront of school, where he soon joined with two other people.

Madoka asked Naoki if he already made some friends as stared at the brown haired girl and tall boy for a few.

Madoka and Sayaka then introduced themselves, and Naoki's friends did the same.

They then decided to show Naoki around town, with Sayaka chatting a bit with Naoki, and with Madoka talking with Alice and Takashi.

Alice kind of reminded Madoka of Sayaka, if Sayaka were more occult obsessed and not music obsessed.

While Takashi was a bit harder for Madoka to categorize, he appeared to be somewhat of a straight serious boy, with him being exacerbated by Alice most of the time they were talking.

And soon, they arrived at the mall, where Sayaka wanted to go buy something for Kyosuke.

Madoka frowned at that and turned towards Naoki, who just said that she can go with Sayaka if she wants to.

Madoka felt a bit relived hearing this, and after waving goodbye to him, Alice and Takashi. She joined Sayaka in search for a good song for Kyosuke.

While she was listening one of those songs in the store, a strange voice rang out, "Kaname Madoka, Kaname Madoka, I require your help!"

She put the headphone down and started to follow where the voice came from. "Hello...hello?"

She didn't even notice that she wandered into an abandoned part of the mall till she was in the middle of that part.

Nonetheless, she still followed the voice that continued to ring out. That was until she felt a hand on her shoulder.

Madoka's eyes widened as she finally realized where she was and stumbled back as she gazed at the person who grabbed her.

Who, it turned out, was Sayaka.

"Madoka, are you alright? You were just walking towards here like a zombie," murmured Sayaka.

"I-I am nor sure...I just felt like someone was calling out for me from here, but...now I am not hearing anything..." muttered Madoka weakly as she looked around.

Sayaka frowned. "Anyway, we should not be here...we should just walk away from here..."

As they went to do just that something started to happen. Weird black butterflies started to surround them.

Then everything around them started to change.

"What the...?" muttered Sayaka as weird black butterflies surrounded them and they found weird almost art like world.

Then suddenly the same voice that she from store rang out behind them, "Kaname Madoka."

Madoka and Sayaka turned around to see someone who looked exactly like Madoka. Expect she had yellow eyes.

It's...it's just like in that dream...

They both took a step back as the figure advanced towards them. "I see you have not heeded my advice, in any case, I am very lucky to have this opportunity provided to me by the Crawling Chaos.

"Kaname Madoka! This is the end for you, to the stupid useless girl who fails in everything."

Sayaka, while she was scared, couldn't just let insults like that against her friend slide, so she shouted at the yellow eyed Madoka, "Don't call her useless!"

The figure eyes turned to Sayaka's; it let out a loud laugh, and started started to advance towards Sayaka.

Sayaka tried to punch it, but it grabbed her wrist, and pinned her against the wall with one hand.

"Sayaka-chan, Sayaka-chan..." tsked the doppelganger, "weren't you ever taught that you should not hurt your friends?"

Sayaka struggled against her hold as fear spread on her face. In response, the doppelganger tightened her hold on her.

That was till a gunshot rang out. The yellow eyed Madoka turned to look at where the bullet hit her; her right leg, then she turned around to the person who fired at her, in doing so she dropped Sayaka to the ground who quickly scrambled away from her.

Sayaka ran to the real Madoka who also turned to where the gunshot came from.

It was a blonde haired girl, who looked a little bit older than her, with ringlets as a hairstyle, which somewhat baffled on how she'd be able to make that style work.

"Oh, if it isn't our favorite Veteran Magical Girl, Mami, would you like to be friends with me, Mami-senpai? After all you don't have any, nor will you have any in the future."

The girl, Mami, flinched back a bit before her expression darkened as she raised a musket at the doppelganger.

She soon fired a gun at it, and when the bullet hit its shoulder, Madoka started to cough up some blood.

The pink haired girl stared at the blood in her hands. Sayaka held her upright as she felt wobbly.

"*I would advise against that, Mami, if you hurt it more, then Kaname Madoka will also suffer.*" said a low almost emotionless voice.

"Kyubey?" muttered the girl, Mami as she lowered the musket with wide eyes while she looked at the ground.

Madoka followed her gaze to the ground and saw some sort of weird cat/bunny like creature.

The doppelganger also followed the sound of the voice and she growled when she saw the creature.

"*I would now advise you all to run from this Shadow,*" said the creature as it got closer to them, "*Mami can distract it while you two escape.*"

The doppelganger growled before turning to look at Kyubey. "That won't be necessary. I can see that my objective cannot be met at the current time, so I'll leave for now. But," it shouted as it turned to stare at Madoka, "heed my warnings, should you continue like this there will not be a future for you, nor for your friends and family!"

It then vanished into yellow mist, however, the weird structure remained. Mami looked about herself with a frown at the unchanging world.

Then the girl turned towards. "The best for you two would be to accompany me, while I deal with this."

Sayaka was too exhausted to argue against their savior, so she followed along with Madoka leaning on her for support.

In the center of the weird world was some sort of monster which Mami quickly went to deal with, with her muskets.

Sayaka gasped as she sank to the ground, with the world changing back to normal, while she processed everything that happened. "That...what the hell...was...all...that?"

Mami frowned as she looked down on her small companion before she turned back towards them.

"We can explain this all to you, right Kyubey?"

"*Correct.*"

The blonde haired girl then lead them to her apartment where they reluctantly followed her to.

On the way there, she introduced herself as Tomoe Mami, a Magical Girl.

"A Magical Girl?" muttered Sayaka as they made their way to her front door.

"Yes, a Magical Girl," replied Mami while she unlocked the door.

She then proceeded to lay down some slices of cake infront of them along with three cups of tea.

Madoka ate some of the cake and sipped some of the tea while Mami explained what Magical Girls were, what the fought (Witches), and how Kyubey could grant their wishes.

Sayaka, however, had another question. "In that case, what was that weird Madoka doppelganger? Was it also some sort of Witch?"

Mami frowned at that question. "I am afraid that I, personally, don't know what that thing was, but I an quite sure that it wasn't a Witch.

"Kyubey, do you know what that clone of Kaname-san was?"

Kyubey took a bite from a piece of cake that Sayaka was offering. "*It was Kaname Madoka's Shadow.*"

"Shadow? Are they like Witches?"

"*The Shadow represents the evil thoughts and malevolent feelings that exist within a person. In short it was all of Kaname Madoka's negative thoughts. Though, in most cases the Shadow is not able to act like a Witch as they dwell in another dimension which humans under normal circumstances cannot access, ans humans cannot be dragged in there. The fact that Shadow appeared in a labyrinth is concerning.*"

Madoka shifted uncomfortably when she heard that. Sayaka quickly noticed this and hugged her.

"Hey, I am sure that having those means nothing bad, right?" asked Sayaka as she hugged Madoka closer to herself.

Kyubey nooded to her question. "*Having a Shadow is, indeed, normal."*

"Kyubey, the Shadow only represent the evil side of a person no matter how small that side may be, correct?" asked Mami as she stared at Kyubey.

"That is it. Shadows are a part of every single person on earth, Kaname Madoka, is no exception. However, it's very unusual for a Shadow to have enough power to drag people into

its world let alone appear in a labyrinth. If I were to make an educated prediction, it would be because how much potential she has."

Mami nooded along. "That seems to check out. I have never saw someone with more potential than you Kaname-san.

"Kyubey, is there anything that could be done to help Kaname-san?"

"*Forging a contract with me significantly reduces the chance of a Shadow ever appearing. Alternatively, you can try to forge a contract with your Shadow.*"

"Why would anyone want to do that?" asked Sayaka in a disgusted voice.

"You underestimate Human's lust for power." said Kyubey forebodingly.

Sayaka stayed silent for around before she remembered something that the Shadow said. "Not sure if you know anything, but the Shadow Madoka mentioned something called the Crawling Chaos, do you know anything about it?"

Kyubey tilted his head. "*I have heard about it before; this 'Crawling Chaos' is supposedly the originator of all Shadows, however, I have not been able to verify its existence, that being said, the fact that Kaname Madoka's Shadow referenced it is concerning.*"

Sayaka frowned at that response, but didn't say anything.

Mami, too, appeared to be concerned with this Crawling Chaos, however, she put on a brave in front of her juniors. "Well in that case we'll just have to deal with that as well should it prove to be real."

Kyubey stared at her silently before he turned his gaze towards Sayaka and Madoka.

"*Now, do the two of you wish to be Magical Girls and fight against Witches and this 'Crawling Chaos', I'll grant whatever wish you might have.*"

Sayaka frowned at that wording. "Does that mean that the wish doesn't have to be about me?"

Madoka tilted her head to look at Sayaka. *She must be worried about Kyosuke-kun, Madoka remembered that just last week when they went to visit him, he broke down crying about his chances of recovery decreasing.*

"It doesn't have to be, however, I would advise against making the wish fully selfless, otherwise you may end up regretting your decision," answered Mami in Kyubey's stead with a serious tone

Sayaka looked to the ground with a defeated expression.

"Sayaka-chan, why don't you make your wish a bit more selfish then?" asked Madoka.

"Huh?"

Madoka leaned in and whispered into Sayaka's ears; Sayaka's eyes lit up at that and she grinned before she turned to Kyubey and announced.

"I wish to have the power to heal anything, no matter how small or large that thing may be."

Kyubey stared at her for a moment before he and Sayaka began to glow, and with his ears he reached out towards Sayaka.

The girl in question let out a scream and feel to the ground; Madoka swiftly rushed to her side as she looked at Mami with a panicked look.

The girl soothed her panic. "It's okay. This happens everytime Kyubey grants a wish, the pain quickly goes away."

"W-why is she in pain in the first place?" asked Madoka with a bit of a stammer.

Mami looked towards Kyubey who went to anwser her question, "*It is a part of wish process, when I grant a wish, I take the girl's Karmic potential, and I use that to fulfill the wish. This is a bit painful—but it doesn't leave any permanent damages on the girl who makes the wish.*"

Sayaka soon, shakily, stood up with her Soul Gem in her hand and a proud look on her face.

They, then decided to go home, with Kyubey accompanying Madoka, and they promised to meet up with Mami tomorrow, so that she can show Sayaka how to be a Magical Girl.

"Madoka what's that thing?" asked Minato as soon as she arrived home.

Naoki stared at Kyubey. "Nice plushy, though, what sort of animal it supposed to be, I can't really tell. It looks like a bunny and cat fused into one, so I guess I could call it a bunnycat."

Madoka began to giggle a bit nervously as she rushed to explain, "Eh, it's...I actually don't know it myself...I just thought that it's cute..."

Minato went close to inspect it further. "Eh, I suppose it looks kinda cute, but something about it screams nefarious."

He smirked at Kyubey as his face got closer to him before pulling away.

Madoka shifted awkwardly. *Originally I was going to ask Mama this, but I don't see a reason why I shouldn't ask them...*

"Have the two of you ever thought about what you would do if you had a genie, who would grant any wish you'd like?"

Naoki tilted his head in confusion. "Not really, why?"

Similarly, Minato turned to look at her with a confused look. "Nope, that being said, if were to be approached by a genie, then I would turn it down."

"Huh? Why?" wondered Madoka.

"Because there is no such thing as a free lunch. This genie would want something from you, like your soul, so even if the genie were to grant the wish, it would come at a terrible price, and the wish might not even go the way you intended it to, like a monkey's paw."

Madoka let's out a nervous laugh. "A-and...what about you, Naoki, do...do you agree with that?"

Naoki shrugged at that. "Yeah, sure." And he went to play with Tatsuya.

Madoka, meanwhile, quickly went to her room, where Kyubey jumped onto the bed.

"Kyubey, I thought you said that most people would not be able to see you?"

He merely scratched the back of his head while he replied, "*True. Normally only a select few people would be able to observe me; it looks like your brother and cousin belong to this small group.*"

"Does that mean that they would be able to make a contract with you, wait, can you even make contracts with boys?"

Kyubey tilted his head. "*While I do not typically contract with boys, there are some exceptions. That being said, something about your brother's Karmic potential also seems to be weird.*"

"What's weird about it?"

"*It's almost seems like something is hiding away his potential, I have never encountered anything like this before.*"

Madoka slowly nodded along, not really understanding what he was saying; she then went to her bed and sat down.

"*Now Kaname Madoka, have you decided on your wish?*"

"No, I have a few questions before I decide on a wish." she said nervously.

Kyubey silently gazed at her with his eyes not moving at all away from her and nodded.

"So, was what Minato saying true? Would you take something from us as a payment for the wish?"

Kyubey shook his head. "*He is right is some way, but wrong in others. We don't take anything from you, all we ask of you is to fight Witches. We don't take your soul, it stays near you after we grant the wish, and we also don't do monkey's paws, my wishes are decided more by the*

thoughts and feelings of the person who made the wish, rather than the strict wording of what the person may have said."

She nooded slowly, and then went to sleep as today had really exhausted her.

She awoke with a gasp as she started to hear music and felt cold air hit her. However, instead of being in her bed she was tied up.

She was stuck in some sort of weird blue clock, with herself as the hand of the clock. She was tied down with red strings.

The music was quite calming, so she wasn't freaking out as much as she probably should be.

Then she heard deep laugh. "You are truly a prisoner of fate."

She looked down and at the base of the clock was a desk. It was some sort of weird long limbed man with pointy ears, bloodshot eyes, and a huge Pinocchio like nose.

He was sitting cross legged at a desk—and he also wore and expensive look suit, with white gloves on his hands.

Next to him stood two girl on either side of him. Both of them were dressed in blue warden outfits and they each wore an eyepatch.

"Trickster, welcome. My name is Igor. I am the master here, you should remember it well," the man said in a deep ominous voice.

She looked around frantically. "Where am I? Is this a...labyrinth?"

The man, Igor let out a small chuckle. "This place is my Velvet Room, it exits between dream and reality, mind and matter. It's a room that only those who are bound by a contract can enter."

"Do you lie a lot?" Madoka blurted out without even thinking about what saying. She quickly got mortified at what she said.

Igor stopped dead in his tracks—staring Madoka in the eyes.

She faltered as she tried speak, "I-I mean...you...have a large nose..."

One of the little girls got angry at her and shouted, "How dare you! Know your place!"

Igor stared at her for a couple of more seconds till he continued.

"Now, I have question for you; you are a slave, do you wish for freedom from your chains?" he asked as he extended his hand towards her.

Before she could even say anything a black butterfly flew by her head.

The man, in the chair stopped dead in his tracks; his eyes following the butterfly.

"Master?" asked the girl to his left; the one who didn't shout at her.

Suddenly the single black butterfly exploded into hundreds of thousands of them, which began to form into a person. The person formed by them, grabbed the weird man up by his neck and lifted him up.

The two girls jumped into action, however, they were easily blasted away by a blast of black butterflies.

The man in the air started to choke as the figure tightened its grip on his throat. Madoka cried out as black butterflies surrounded her and for a moment she felt nothing but fear, anger, hatred and then...

"Ugh...ugh!" she gasped labored breaths as she woke up.

She looked around her room noting that it was still dark outside.

"*Is something wrong, Kaname Madoka?*"

She then looked towards where the voice came from, and saw Kyubey at foot of her bed.

"It's...nothing. Just another weird dream..." muttered Madoka in a tired voice as she returned to sleep.

Chapter 3

Homura was feeling tired, more than tired. Ever since Loop 87, Madoka had started to become colder towards her.

Madoka...

Madoka...

She tried not to have tears come to her eyes as she reflected back on the past 20 loops.

Her once best friend didn't even stand up for her, as Sayaka and Mami tried to kill her in the last loop. Kyoko, her once fairly reliable ally, too, started to be more hostile to her as the loops progressed.

Whereas once she would have been able to convince her with just stating Walpurgisnacht would come Mitakihara, now she needed to buy her alliance with food, and that only worked 3 times out of 10.

She had long since given up on convincing Sayaka and Mami, but it still hurt to see her former friend and former mentor hate her so much that they try to kill her.

No, I can't think like that! Miki Sayaka and Tomoe Mami are now my enemies, no matter what they were to me once upon a time, she put on her mask as she went to rewound time once more.

The shield opened up and the clock twisted backwards. And she soon found herself back in the past.

"Welcome my dear guest, it's a pleasure to meet you," she heard a soft almost melancholic voice, and her eyes instantly widened as she tried to get out of her hospital bed.

But she stumbled to the ground as she somehow was standing in some sort of strange platforms with blue pillars around her. She turned to look towards the voice and she cringed back when she saw whom it came from.

In the middle of the platform stood an old long and thin "man" who had a outrageously long nose, pointed ears, and bulging, bloodshot eyes.

He also wore and expensive look suit, and he wore white gloves on his hands. Something about the room also unsettled her, it felt like there was supposed to be some sound, but all there was, was eerie silence.

"Who are you?! Where am I?!" she asked as she took up a defensive position and tried to stop time.

However, nothing seemed to have happened; the man then simply took one step towards her before he responded, "My Velvet Room is a place that exists between dream and reality, mind and matter. It is a room that only those who are bound by a contract can enter. You may call me Igor, I am the master of the Velvet Room."

Her mind instantly focused on one single thing in what he said. "Contract? I signed no contract with you!"

Also between mind and matter? Is this some sort of labyrinth? But, I don't sense a Witch here... Homura thought to herself.

He regarded her with an indifferent expression. "Not all contacts are penned on paper, some are forged in hearts of man."

She took a step back as she tried to process what he just said. "So, what does this contract of yours entail? And what do you get out of this?"

"The contract simply states that you choose your fate of your own free will, as for my role...we'll get to that later.

"But, now I have a test for you, can you state your name?"

What? Why wouldn't I be able to do that? My name is...is....

My name...What is it...?

It's...it's...

Suddenly a memory flashes in her mind, it was that of a certain familiar pink haired girl. "Homura, that's a really exciting and cool name."

This snapped her back to the present and she turned towards Igor. "Akemi Homura, that's my name."

"Well done, not many can remember their identities, while in this domain. I'll grant you a gift for having such a strong will. The power to call upon the different selves that exist within you.

"Now, I have wasted quite a bit of your time already, so I'll return you back to your sleep."

Sleep began to overtake her, and she tried to yell and ask a question from Igor, but she soon found herself where all her time loops start from: her bed the Hospital.

She shook her head, dismissing the whole thing as weird dream, and soon got to work. After all, she had no time to spare, Madoka still needed to be saved.

She checked out of the hospital and went to do her usual stuff: Checking on Madoka, killing Witches around the area, and stealing guns, ammo, and high class explosives from the Yakuza and JDF, also dealing with the Incubator.

The first thing on her list lead to quite a suprise as when she went to Kaname house.

So, this is a Naoki timeline, she thought to herself as saw Naoki playing with Tatsuya on the ground in the house.

Naoki living with Madoka and her family was pretty rare thing. The last time she saw him was on Loop 62, if she remembered correctly. But, even before that she only ever encountered him four times.

In the past loops where he was present, he turned out to be one of her biggest allies in not letting Madoka contract with the Incubator.

Homura hoped that he would still be as reliable as he was back then. She went to leave to deal with a Witch which drew Madoka into its labyrinth a few times in past loops.

She kept a keen eye on the house for a few more minutes and to he shock she found something even more shocking that Naoki.

She found...

...

...

...

...

...

Homura rubbed her head. *What am I still doing here?* she had no time to waste, she needed to deal with a few Witches.

So, she went to a nearby labyrinth, once she entered it something felt different, not wrong, but very different. But, she had no time to dwel on that, so she went straight to the Witch; focused on dealing with it first before she investigated what made her feel different.

As she was fighting the Witch, she was not fast enough to pause time, as the Witch managed to knock her gun out of her hand.

Homura grimaced at that and went to retrieve another gun from her shields storage space, however, before her hand could even go to the shield, a card appeared in the palm of her hand.

I am thou...thou art I...

The time has come. Open thine eyes and call forth what is whitin!

It was like massive bomb had exploded inside her head. Her hand flew up to her head from the pain of the headache.

She was barely able to dodge the Witch's attack. She stared at the card in her hand, and felt for some reason that she needed to crush it.

"Per...so...na!"

A massive figured erupted behind in a bright blue glow. The light blasted away the Witch for a moment allowing Homura to steal a glance at the figure behind her.

It had the appearance of a Nutcracker. Except it was female and wore all purple. Its blocky appearance contrasted heavily with even the labyrinth around it.

From the sea of thy soul, I cometh.

I am Clara, henceforth, we shall be bound in our quest to save thy love.

Homura didn't have enough to process thsi as the Witch once again tried to knock her to the side.

She felt some sort of compulsion to direct the weird Nutcracker, "Zionga!" she shouted and electricity erupted from the figure behind, it soon struck the Witch, and the Witch and it fell to the ground.

Homura quickly stopped time, and laid down a few bombs around the Witch. After that she ignited them, and watched as the Witch died to them.

She took a few deep breaths as the labyrinth disappeared around her. She glanced down at her soul gem, expecting to be quite dark form all of that new magic she used.

But to her suprise it looked like it barely darkened, *Could this be...my final trump card against Walpurgisnacht? With this could I actually kill it?*

Homura went to bed, after a very full day of stealing from the Yakuza, dealing with other Witches and killing the bodies of the Incubator.

She found herself once again in the same platform where this Loop began. Homura was now certain this that was no strange dream.

Igor was also still standing there in the middle of the platform. She took a step towards him as she asked, "You're the one who granted me that power?!"

"The ability to the tane one's Shadow exists within the hearts of all man," was his strange reply to her straightforward question.

Homura's face twisted into a sneer as clenched fists, and stared him in his eyes. She was feeling he was not going to give any good answers to her questions.

"That being said, you would be correct that I granted you the ability to summon multiple Personas," said Igor.

"And that is the thing that I summoned I assume ?"

"Correct. The Persona is the side of you that shows itself when you face the world. Think of it as the self suffused with divine love, or the self capable of demonic cruelty. People live their lives by wearing different masks. You, though, have a different power as well due to my gift, the power of the Wild Card, with it you will be able to wield multiple Personas; you will have the ability to summon the various selves that exist within you."

She reluctantly nooded along to this. *Okay, that is a far better anwser than his previous one. Still, this power...why should I have it? It ought to belong to someone like Madoka.*

"And what do you get out of this? I don't expect you to just help me out of the goodness of your heart..."

Igor's expression didn't change as he anwsered, "My role is to help my guests to reach the end of their journeys. The satisfaction of seeing my guests overcome their hurdles is more than enough for me."

There was still some suspicious in Homura's eyes, but she sighed as she reluctantly asked, "And how will you help me exactly?"

"By helping you give birth to new Personas. In short, I will fuse together two or more Personas to create a stronger one."

"And how would I be able to obtain more Personas, because at the moment I only have one."

Igor's crossed his arms over his chest. "Once you defeat an enemy with your Persona, the cards of possibility will appear before you."

He must have noticed her confused expression as he clarified, "It will be easier to understand once you personally experience it.

"Now, I mustn't keep you here any longer, next time we meet you will come here of your own accord."

It didn't take long for Homura to notice that the Witch population of Mitakihara was declining very swiftly.

Mami was not consistent over the loops on which Witch she'd go after, but the amount of Witches that were killed far exceeded the amount that she'd normally manage.

So, she wasn't that suprised when she saw a group of three people leave from a where Witch's labyrinth once was with one of the group's members holding a grief seed.

What her, though, was the fact that two of the group's members were boys, and not girls. Furthermore, the fact that Naoki was the one who was leading the group was her biggest suprise.

The one girl in the group not being a Magical Girl was also a pretty big one. Nevertheless, she did notice something about them, with her Persona she was able to sense them from far away, even from the other side of the town she could still sense them after just seeing them that one leave that labyrinth.

She then rushed to make sure that Amy didn't get by a car. On the way there she noticed that Naoki was also in the area; she didn't dwell much in it as she reasoned she was not going to run into him any case.

However, when arrived to the spot, she was meet with a sight; Naoki was there holding the kitten up in the air.

He must have noticed how fast she ran to the cat, because he turned towards her and asked, "Is this kitty yours?"

She stiffened as he addressed her. "No...it's a pet to a friend of mine's."

"Well, that's great. My cousin quite fond of him, and it'd make her happy to know that she has an owner."

Once again she stiffened at what he said. Something in her screamed to say something, so she finally did, "Akemi Homura..."—he looked at her curiously—"...that is my name, I am looking after her for my friend, however, some time ago she got out of my house, and I have been searching all over the city for her; your cousin, if she's as fond of her as you think she is, then she she can come and see her..."

All of this was not technically a lie, Madoka at some point asked her to look after Amy, however, it felt wrong to say that.

"I'll relay that message to her, in was nice meeting you Akemi-san," he said as he handed her Amy, "my name's, Kaname Naoki."

"You can just call me Homura, Kaname-san."

"In that case, you can also just call me Naoki," he said back to her.

It has been a week since she ran into Naoki, during that time she transferred into Mitakihara Middle School, did her normal routine there, and she did everything else she did normally in

previous loops, though she kept a close eye on the little group of Naoki and his friends.

She also figured out what Igor meant with the cards of possibility, and has been using his fusion services ever since, even with her suspicious about him, she couldn't that he for certain created stronger Personas.

However, even with all that her next Witch hunt didn't as she planned, as ran into a familiar group while she was hunting a Witch.

"Akemi-san?" muttered a confused Naoki in the labyrinth.

The tall boy who was with Naoki looked between him and her. "You know this girl, Naoki?"

Naoki glanced back at him, "Eh...we met yesterday near the central park, I think...I am not really familiar with the area."

The brown haired girl's eyes lit up as she asked, "Hey, Akemi-san, you're a Persona user, right? Would you like to join us?"

"Alice! Don't just ask her without first introducing yourself," the tall boy said in a loud voice

"I would like to think this all over, if you don't mind?" Homura said nonpulsed.

"No worries, right guys?" Naoki asked the other who nodded along.

She frowned, while she replied, "Then, would one of you lend me your phone number, so that I'll be able to contact you, if I want to join?"

Naoki fumbled with his phone a bit before he listed out his number.

Alice looked around the labyrinth. "Hey, so, why don't you watch us fight the boss Shadow? That way you can see how we operate."

"Is that fine with the two of you?"

Naoki nodded and Takashi followed along.

In there they proceeded to engage the Witch, somehow, Naoki knew the Witch's weaknesses, and they were able to target that weakness with their Personas.

That ability would be quite helpful, at the moment I am basically relying on random chance of my attacks being effective against the Witches, but with that I would have far better chance against even Walpurgisnacht.

Soon the Witch was dead with the Grief Seed dropping to the ground. Naoki went to pick it up and pocketed it.

"Man, I am still trying to wrap my head around this whole supernatural business, now I am not saying that I don't find it fun, but it still a bit confusing." said Toudou with a grin on her face while the labyrinth disappeared.

"I mean it's kinda good that the supernatural world is built like this; I once played a game called called 'Innocent Sin Online' and in there Rumors shaped reality, in comparison this is far more manageable," said Kido in serious tone.

"Yeah, just imagine, if rumors somehow had an affect on reality; Bielefeld would exist then!" exclaimed Naoki.

The three other people in group looked a little confused. "What on earth is Bielefeld?" asked a puzzled Toudou.

This Naoki is far more expressive than the others were, noted Homura in her head as she made her way to her apartment.

Two days later she sent them a message asking for a meeting at a Café where she and Madoka often met.

A half an hour later they showed up with a suprise addition to their roster, a familiar sight to her, Mitakihara Middle School's student council President.

She raised an eyebrow at him before she turned to look at the others.

"I see you picked up someone else as well." murmured Homura as they sat down next to her in the Café.

The boy in question then proceeded to introduce himself to her, Homura, however, wasn't paying that much attention to him; she didn't need to as she knew quite a lot already about him.

Nonetheless, she politely introduced herself to him and went to talk about her joining them, "I came here to discuss our alliance. If you wish to form an alliance with me, I'd require something of you."

Naoki asked what she wanted.

"Those black egg like jewelry, I would require that you give them to me," she discovered this not lonh ago, but Grief Seeds were no longer required by her; her Soul Gems now automatically cleansed itself, most likely from her Persona—but she hadn't asked Igor about that yet.

That being said, even if she herself had no longer had any uses for them, that doesn't invalidate them from being used to form alliances with Kyoko or Mami.

The tall boy, Kido-san, inquired into if she knew what they were.

She in turn replied with a simple, "I know what they can be used for."

They then started to ask her all sorts of questions in relations to the Grief Seeds, thankfully she managed to evade most of them with technically correct answers and non answers.

They also started to ask about Persona related things which she anwsered with things about Igor and what he told her as well telling them how she fused her Personas.

After a few minutes Naoki sighed. "Alright, it's clear that you are not that trusting of us, that being said, we are willing to overlook this if you promise to tell us this in the future and if you promise to join us wherever we go."

The others, in particular, Kido shot him a questioning look, but he paid no mind to them.

Homura looked him dead in the eyes as she evaluated what to do, eventually she responded, "Very well, I promise that I will tell you what they are in the future and that I'll accompany your group to fight Shadows."

"Well then, are we in agreement with allowing Akemi Homura to join our group?" asked Naoki the others.

Kido frowned and the boy besides him looked somewhat concerned as well. Thankfully Toudou and Naoki were somehow able to convince them to allow her in.

She then bid them goodbye as she promised to show up tomorrow to this place for their next Witch hunt.

Chapter 4

I just remembered why the name Takashi Kido seemed familiar as I stared at Takashi's father, Reiji Kido.

Takashi invited me to his place to discuss our plan to investigate and deal with the Shadows.

So, I was just bit suprised when I went to ring the door instead of Takashi answering, it was his dad, I was even more surprised that I actually recognized him.

Alice quickly appeared behind him and led me to Takashi's room, she apparently needed no invitation as apparently she was staying with them while her parents were away, in the room we started to discuss what to do with the Shadow.

"I think we are doing our best in regards to these Shadows..." muttered Takashi, "but I still have a weird feeling that we are messing with things we don't fully understand."

I was tempted to agree with him. These Shadows in Mitakihara were definitely far weirder than maybe even the Demons in P1 and P2. There's also the problem of Nyarlathotep being involved, which I also wasn't a fan of, but there was little I could do in that regard, if Philemon wanted us to be his pieces, then there was little we could do to get out.

Alice, though, was far more enthusiastic about this whole thing. "C'mon, I'm sure we can deal with it, right Naoki?"

I reluctantly nodded. Even with all my doubts, I was sure that we could manage it, and if we need some help, it would not be far from us.

So we agreed to go hunt some Shadows tomorrow.

"Great. Now, how about we take some time to play relax," said a grinning Alice as she went to the shelf in the room to get out an old Wii game—or I guess the Wii is not that old here—it was Mario Kart Wii.

And after playing some video games, I made my way home.

Well now I know that Alice's and Takashi's parents are Persona users, that could come in handy in the future depending on, of course, where we end up. That's a plus at least.

A week has passed since then, we ran into another Persona user during that time, but other than that barely anything of importance happened.

We continued to deal with Shadows around the area, and so far everything was working out well.

Ahhh, I am sure the next Shadow world will also be just as easy the previous ones were.

...

...

...

I skid back from the shadows attack. Behind me, Alice and Takashi were gasping for air, and I was less exhausted than them, mostly because I navigated for the most part.

That being said I couldn't really do anything against this Shadow. For some reason almost all of the shadows we encountered so far were weak to Light element. That would be great news for us, if there was someone in our small party whose Persona specialized in that, or if we gained a Persona which had that element.

Unfortunately, for some reason, non Personas of ours had that, not even ones we fused into our current Personas had that skill. I was kind of tempted to blame Nyarlathotep for that.

So far we made due with secondary weaknesses of the shadows which were much easier to exploit. But this one was different. It's only weakness was light and it was immune to all other elements.

I mean what the genuine fuck is this? We really should start looking into weapons, but I doubt that an old weapon smith just lives in Mitakihara, and that he would even sell us his weapons...

Takashi hit it with some Megido hoping that that would bring it down, but this Shadow was way too durable, and soon enough Takashi got exhausted from casting so much all mighty spells.

Which caused us to use our Personas physical moves against it, this, in return, caused us to become very exhausted as the Shadow just withstood all of them.

The smaller shadows came at me, and I was easily able to dispatch them, however, wity the boss shadow I had more problems as I was barely able to dodge its attacks.

"Okay! We're retreating!" I shouted at my two teammates who were barely able to stand. "You two start running, I'll hold it off for a few seconds then I'll retreat as well."

Alice nooded weakly. "Got it..."

I concentrated and soon enough a card appeared in the palm of my hand with a different Persona.

"Fuck..." muttered Alice from behind me as the small Shadows blocked her path, "why couldn't we just get a Persona with Light skill."

Then I heard someone running in the labyrinth, and I wondered, Homura, it could only be her, right?

"Kala-Nemi! Hamaon!" shouted a voice from behind us, and I heard the familiar glass breaking sound.

The light magic struck all the Shadow and they all soon disintegrated with the boss leaving behind only that weird egg like thing.

Takashi turned to look at our savior. "...Senpai?"

I slowly turned around, and sure enough there stood a familiar face to me, Ken Amada. I...wasn't expecting to see any modern 'Persona characters' here in Mitakihara.

Naoya, Elly, and Reiji living here was already quiet surprising, but having a P3 character here was even more surprising for some reason.

Not to mention the fact that apparently he was a student in our school, as Takashi called him 'Senpai' and he wore our school uniform.

Ken looked at us in concern. "Are you three alright?"

I took a deep breath to anwser him. "Relatively fine..."

"Could be better, but it could be worse, thankfully we're not dead..." said Takashi as he nearly fell over.

Alice winced. "Eh, by the way, how did you know we were here and how did upu get here, Senpai?"

"A blue butterfly lead me here, I wasn't sure why I followed it, but I felt like I needed to...and so I am here." anwsered Ken.

Well...thanks Phil you really saved us this time.

Ken then straightened up. "Ah...I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Amada Ken."

We then introduced ourselves to him. And he decided to invite us to his place, which we agreed to after Takashi and Alice were able to stand up without falling over.

And so we made our way to his apartment, where as soon as he opened was greeted by a familiar shiba who jumped up at Ken and licked his face.

Koromaru then turned his attention towards us before he relaxed. Ken got up from the ground with a smile, and seeing Koromaru relaxed also did the same.

"This is Koromaru. He's my best friend."

"Aw, ain't you the cutest little thing!" Alice said as she knelt on the ground to pet the dog.

Koromaru accepted the pets with grace and he nuzzled up to her.

Ken then sat down and made some coffee for us. It wasn't the best coffee that I ever had, but it was decent enough.

"Right, to start I would like to know what you were doing in a Shadow Nest?" he asked us while we sat down.

"Mostly just investigating them, we were thinking that they were the cause of all the strange disappearances around town, and we'll were searching for clues to support our theory, which we found when we saw a normal person in the world two days ago."

Ken eyed me with guarded look before he started to relax. "Okay. In that case I feel comfortable enough to reveal this info, Koro-chan and I are a part of a secret government agency meant to deal with incidents like this. We have been investigating the dissappearances, but we couldn't find an entrance into the Shadow Nest. Thanks to tou three, we might be able to put and end to this Shadow Nest."

Alice's eyes lit up as she asked excitedly, "Oh! Oh! What's the agency called? What do you do? Can we become memebers? Can we meet other members?"

Ken chuckled at her enthusiasm. "You're certainly excited. As for your questions, it is called the Shadow Operatives, and as the name suggests we deal with Shadow related incidents, as for my part, I am reserve member, so the only incidents that I get called in are the real dire ones.

"As for becoming a member; only those who are over 18 can become a full member, while those under can only be reserve. And for meeting other members, three should soon show up here."

Alice looked like she could jump out a window with her level of excitement. Takashi, on the other hand, didn't seem to be that enthused about this whole thing.

"Right, before they arrive can you tell me what you know about the Shadow Nest of this area? Fuuka-san, a Shadow Operatives and our primary navigator, was barely able to detect any activity around the area even when she was physically here," he asked us with some concern in his voice.

"It's not really a single nest, it's more like multiple small ones, with what we call boss shadows in each of them. Those shadows also for some reason drop these..." as I said this I extended my hand in his direction to show him the weird egg like thing that almost every shadow boss had dropped so far, "We don't know what these are, or what they are used for. So far I had been keeping them with me."

Ken nooded along as he took the weird egg thing from my hand and examined it. "Could I have this? I would like for the Shadow Operatives to have a look at it."

I shrugged at his request. "Sure, there's nothing that we can do with them, and so you'll be doing us a favor by taking them off of me as I am far more comfortable having these handled

by professionals."

"Then, I have another question. Would the three of you be fine with talking with the leader of the Shadow Operatives?"

Alice shot out of her seat with excitement, wincing a little. "Yeah I'd love to!"

I had no problems with this arrangement so I shrugged in acceptance. In fact it would be great to have some backup, and I know that I could trust them. Now the only question that remained: Should I tell them about Alice's parents and Takashi's dad being Persona users?

I mean only Takashi's dad is around at the moment, and not to talk down Reiji, but he's not that strong plus I don't he would approve his son getting involved in Persona business.

Ken frowned as he glanced down at his phone.

Something didn't feel quite right to me either, so I decided to ask him, "Is something wrong, Ken-senpai?"

Ken laughed a little as he waved his hands in a dismissive way. "Oh…it's nothing,"—he threw a glance at the door—"I just thought that my guardians should be back by now—"

Suddenly his phone started to ring, he looked at the number and let out a sigh as he glanced at us and he went to pick it up.

"Minako-san? Is something wrong?"

Minako? Huh…well…that's something, I wonder if this is a twin AU or a Minako survived AU, OR maybe a both AU.

"…"

"Huh? What do you mean you can't enter Mitakihara?"

"…"

Whatever she said made Ken more agitated as he grimaced.

"Actually…I just discovered a small Shadow Nest. I also encountered three new Persona users…" he trailed off as he mentioned us.

"…"

"She will?…Ok."

He hung up, turned towards us and said, "There's a small…problem…for some reason they couldn't get back inside Mitakihara when they left to investigate a small Shadow Nest they detected. There seems to be some sort of barrier which keeps Persona users out."

"Wait what?" I asked astonished at that.

I don't think such a barrier ever existed in any Persona games, sure in Persona 1 the entire city had a barrier around it, but that worked on all people not just Persona users. Was this something that the Crawling Chaos set up?

"In any case, the leader of the Shadow Operatives would like to talk with the three of you now," Ken said as he went to close to the large TV in the room.

"Is that fine with you?" he asked us as he was doing something to TV.

"Ugh...yeah sure," I said with a pause.

And soon enough the TV flickered and a familiar red haired woman appeared on the screen.

"Testing. Amada, can you hear and see me?" asked Mitsuru Kirijo.

"Yeah, Mitsuru-san, we can see and hear you." Ken told her.

The red haired woman nodded and glanced at us; just with her gaze she looked like she could freeze us.

"Hello, I am Kirijo Mitsuru, the leader of the Shadow Operatives among other things. I am here to talk to you three about this local Shadow Nest in Mitakihara.

"This conversation is being recorded. Are you fine with that?" her tone indicated that saying 'no' was not an anwser.

I cast a look over to Takashi and Alice, who obviously were feeling somewhat reluctant. Nevertheless, having the Shadow Operatives on our side would be a plus, so I said, "Yes, that would be fine."

Mitsuru nodded. "Very well, could you introduce yourselves?"

"My name is Kaname Naoki, I am 14 years old, and student at Mitakihara Middle School."

Alice and Takashi glanced at each other before they started to say their names as well.

"Toudou Alice, classmate of Naoki and also 14 years old.", "Kido Takashi, second year, classmate of these two and also 14 years old."

"Just, what were you three doing in a Shadow Nest?" asked Mitsuru.

Alice straightened up as she answered, "We were investigating whether the Shadows had anything to do with disappearances around Mitakihara. After all they are the cause of the Apathy syndrome, so we thought that they might be behind the dissappearances as well."

A small smile appeared on Mitsuru's face before it soon vanished; being replaced by a professional look.

"You three seem to know quite a bit about Shadows, if don't mind revealing it, can you tell me who told you all this information?"

I shifted awkwardly. "It was me."

Her eyes swept to mine. "How exactly did you know those things, Kaname-san?"

This was going to be awkward. Well this was going to get even *more* awkward. "I played a game called Persona."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Ken from the side.

Alice replied to his question, "We all played a game called Persona, and we all gained our Personas from that game."

Mitsuru raised her eyebrows. "Is that so?

"In any case, to our next question do these Shadows drop anything say: money, swords, drink, etc.?"

I pulled out the weird like which I picked up. "The boss Shadows almost always drop these, but the smaller ones never drop anything."

"Boss Shadows?" she inquired.

"The strongest Shadows inside individual Shadow worlds."

Her attention turned back to weird black egg and she squinted at it. "I am unfamiliar with this object, Amada, does it look familiar to you?"

Ken took a closer look at it before he replied, "No, Mitsuru-san, I don't know what it could be."

I choose at that moment to say, "Before you ask us, we also have no idea what these, or what they can be used for either."

"Is there truly nothing that you could tell us about it?" asked Mitsuru.

"I am not that great in the whole...uh scanning things thing, but I could tell that something is not right with whatever it is," muttered Takashi as he looked the egg like thing in my hand.

The woman on the screen hummed in response as she looked over what was presented to her before she turned her attention back to Takashi. "I suppose then, that you are this little group's preliminary navigator?"

"Uh...N-no that's all of us, but Naoki is probably little better at it than me or Alice is. He gets the weaknesses of Shadows faster than either of us do." replied Takashi

Mitsuru raised her eyebrows at that. "You're saying that all three of you could function as navigators?"

"Y-yes, is that not normal?" he as asked.

Ken shifted awkwardly at the side as he anwsered, "It's...not common, in our group there were two people who could function as navigators, Mitsuru-san was one of them."

Mitsuru cleared her throat and we all turned back to her. "To get back on topic, with all three of you being Navigators, are you able to detect these Shadows Nests?"

Alice, Takashi and I nodded. Mitsuru let out a small hum to that.

"Weird, that our most powerful navigator was barely able to sense these small Shadow Nests..." she muttered.

"Is it truly weird that we all can sense them?" asked Alice.

"Persona abilities are certainly unique, so having someone be better at something than someone else is not surprising, but having three people at the same time be able to navigate and be able to track those Shadow Nests suggests something quite suspicious to me."

Alice shifted awkwardly to the side as she looked at ground.

Mitsuru sighed as she glanced at each of us. "I am not saying that there's anything suspicious about you, what I am saying is that there is something suspicious about your circumstances."

There was awkward silence for a few seconds after that statement.

"Can you further tell us how you gained your Personas? We would like for you to tell us more about this Persona game."

"We got them from a...man?...named Philemon, he appeared before after we played the game, and he granted them to us for passing his test, which was to remember our names." anwsered Takashi.

Misturu raised her eyebrows as we told her how we got our Personas. "This Philemon, what did he call himself?"

Alice scratched the back of her head. "I can't really remember that, it was so long ago..."

"He called himself a being between consciousness and unconsciousness." I told her.

Misturu looked to the side at someone. "Another Cognitive Being then."

Takashi then asked, "Is that concerning?"

"We can't tell, but it might be. He may become dangerous to you in the near future, but now to our next question: can any one of you summon multiple Personas?"

Takashi hesitated a bit. "I-is that something rare as well? We all can do that."

At that statement, Misturu's eyes widened. "What?! Can you explain it more thoroughly, what exactly do you mean that you can all do that?" she said this with more forceful tone.

"T-that's just it...we defeat those Shadows and these cards appear before us, and—"

"We're aware of how that mechanism works. It was just...surprising to hear that all three of you are Wildcards, that is the ability to use multiple Personas..."

Ken looked to be deep in thought as he said to Mitsuru, "We know that cognitive beings can grant the power of the Wildcard to people, as happened with Narukami-san.

"So this is not something totally implausible, however, it's still quite weird how there are so many Wildcards..." he trailed off towards the end.

"In any case, would you be willing to tell us if you know any other Persona users?" asked Mitsuru as she went back on topic.

"Well...there's that Homura girl..." trailed off Alice.

"Hmm?" proded us Misturu.

"Akemi Homura, I met her when I was going home after we finished dealing with a Shadow and Takashi and Alice met her two days ago when went into a Shadow world." I told her.

"Akemi Homura, you say?" asked Ken from the side.

Mitsuru turned her eyes towards Ken. "You know the girl?"

Ken shook his head. "Not personally, but the Vice-Principle told me that we were getting a new transfer student next week, and she happens to be called Akemi Homura."

"Are you normally told about transfer students? The only ones I can remember being told about were the twins, but that was because they were to stay in our dorm." Misturu asked with a small smile.

Huh, so it is a twin AU...now the question is if both survived or just one?

Ken hesitated on whether to continue, before he ultimately decided to do so. "No, I am not normally, our school is quite large, so I am only told when there there's reason for me to be told. However, there were some circumstances in regards to her, which I'd not like to talk about, that made me be in the know."

Alice looked up at him with a grin and asked, "So, was Homura a special case 'cause she had some sort of athletic sponsorship or something, I mean just yesterday I saw her do that 100 meter sprint faster than anyone in the entire school."

Ken looked conflicted before he sighed out loud and said, "Please don't tell anyone else this; the only reason I am even sharing because she has a Persona.

"She has a weak heart and suffered from a heart attack; I was told this to make sure that she wasn't bullied by other students because of it."

"Ahh..." winced Alice on the side, her grin falling.

I blinked as I processed that. "Wait a second, if she has heart problems, then how is she doing those athletic stunts around school?"

Ken frowned at that question. "I am not sure, maybe she healed when she got her Persona Mitsuru, do you know if anything similar to this ever happen?"

The woman on the screen hummed. "Not that I know; Personas do enhance the strength of their users. However, that enhancement doesn't just automatically heal issues like that."

I frowned, something wasn't adding up, no matter how I looked at it, Homura was way too suspicious of a person.

Suddenly I looked down on my phone as I got a message.

"Well now she wants to talk to us in a nearby Café about joining us; you can accompany us, Senpai, if you want to," I said to them as I showed them the message.

"Joining you?" asked Ken.

"Eh, yeah, we offered he a spot on our team when we met her in the Shadow world."

Ken glanced at Mitsuru who nodded. "I have already asked every question that I wanted to, and in my opinion they are a trustworthy group."

We are? I mean yeah compared to Strega it'd be night and day, but we are still a group about whom he barely knows anything about. Well I guess he got good vibes from us or something...

Ken then went to disconnect Mitsuru and we then existed; unfortunately, without Koromaru as I didn't think the Café would allow him in.

Ken did promise to buy him something; he did perk up at that.

While we made our way to the Café which Homura selected, Ken asked us a few more questions.

Mainly about us all being able to use multiple Personas. He further got confused when we brought up that we need the Persona to align to our arcana or close to it, in order to get the Personas.

This confounded him even further, as he struggled to wrap his mind around the fact that none of us had the Fool Arcana.

"I see you picked up someone else as well." murmured Homura as we sat down next to her in the Café.

"Amada Ken, third year student at Mitakihara Middle School, it's nice to meet you Akemi-san," Ken introduced himself to her with a small bow.

Homura narrowed her eyes at him before she let out a sigh. "Nice to meet you, Amada-san.

"As for now, I came here to discuss our alliance. If you wish to form an alliance with me, I'd require something of you."

"And that'd be...?" I prompted her.

"Those black egg like jewelry, I would require that you give them to me."

"You know what they are then?" asked Takashi with raised eyebrows.

"I know what they can be used for."

"You're not denying that you know what they are." pressed Takashi on.

"I am not."

I sighed aloud. This whole thing wasn't going anywhere.

We proceeded to aks her a few more questions in relations to those weird agg like things, which she anwsered with vaguer and edgier anwsers as the time went on.

I mean just what kind of anwser is, "...longer than you have known..." to the question, "How long ago did these Shadows start to drop them?"

"So, say Akemi-san, can you also use multiple Personas?" asked Ken.

He was most likely digging for more information for the Shadow Operatives about whatever was going on here with multiple people being able to use more than 1 Persona.

Homura merely nodded.

"In that case how exactly do you fuse Personas?" asked Ken as he switched to a topic, which hopefully, Homura was less reluctant to anwser.

Homura held her hand up to her chin, it looked she wasn't going to anwser, but then she spoke, "A man named Igor fuses my Personas in a place called the Velvet Room."

I frowned at that. Something was not quite right with that statement—she wasn't lying or anything—but something just was not right with Igor helping her, and I didn't know why I felt that. Ever since I came here to Mitakihara, my memories were quite foggy on some detail for some reason...

Meanwhile, on the side I noticed that Ken eyes shot Homura a wide look, which he quickly covered up before she could notice it.

I let out a loud sigh. "Alright, it's clear that you are not that trusting of us, that being said, we are willing to overlook this if you promise to tell us this in the future and if you promise to join us wherever we go."

Takashi shot me a look, which I responded with a look of my own promising to explain my reasoning.

Homura looked me dead in the eyes. "Very well, I promise that I will tell you what they are in the future and that I'll accompany your group to fight Shadows."

"Well then, are we in agreement with allowing Akemi Homura to join our group?" I asked the others.

Takashi frowned and Ken looked somewhat concerned as well. So, Alice and I had quite a bit of work to convince them to allow Homura to join.

Thankfully, Ken wasn't really a member of the team, so I didn't really need to convince him, I just said that we will deal with any problems that may arise from this deal, and that seemed to satisfy him enough.

Takashi on the other, required a full frontal Alice assault; Alice begged him till he was fine with allowing her to join.

I let out a breath of relief when he agreed, and soon after Homura said her goodbye to us as she left the Café.

"Oh, thank God, that that went really well," I muttered as we also went to leave and head home.

"By the way, Ken-senpai," I called out to the boy who stopped and turned when he heard me calling out his name, "would you be interested in joining us? We could use someone of you talent, and you, yourself, said that you are currently the only Shadow Operative in Mitakihara, so you can guide us in all of this."

Alice and Takashi also stopped as soon as they heard my question.

"I...I will talk to Mitsuru-san, but I am not opposed to it, and I doubt she would be either. It would be more beneficial for the Shadow Operatives if I joined with Homura being a..." he trailed off. "I'll just talk with Mitsuru-san and Minako."

Alice shot a curious look at him, no doubt thinking what Homura could be that got Ken this interested in her.

But we soon parted ways, with me being hopeful that with both Ken and Homura we would be able to change whatever was going on in Mitakihara, and to hopefully put an end to whatever Nyarlathotep was planning.

Chapter 5

A week has passed since recruited both Ken and Homura. During this time we did our normal routine. We defeated Shadows, we helped the people who were controlled by them, we talked with Mitsuru more, and we introduced Homura to Mitsuru and explained to her what the Shadow Operatives did.

To say that last part did not go well, would be an understatement. If she was guarded around us the first time, then when she was talking to Mitsuru she more like a knight fully on the defensive.

She never said anything unless she was asked, even then she only said a few words, she was also quite evasive when some awkward in regards to her health were asked.

All in all, it wasn't that great. Thankfully, we soon were able to get away from that time bomb.

We then went to Shadow hunting, or we would if we could have located a single one.

"I am not sensing any Shadows at the moment. Do you want to do something else or..." I trailed off.

This caused Alice to get excited for some reason.

"I think—we need to spend some time relaxing." announced an excited Alice, who looked she would jump all over the place.

I shot a curious look at her.

Takashi, meanwhile, cleared his throat as he asked, "You want to, 'cause that new game came out in the Arcades which you want to see, right?"

She sputtered at that remark and threw a glare at Takashi. "I'll have you know I wasn't thinking anything of that sort, I just wished to get to know our two newest teammates, the fact that you think so lowly of me already shows how you…"

He showed her a message from her.

I tilted my head to get a good look at it, it was a message just day before my my transfer.

Alice: hey next week theres gonna be a new game me and youre gonna come with me thats an order btw

Homura, who just finished reading it, threw an unimpressed look at her, which the girl quickly noticed.

"C'mon, all work and no play makes Homura a dull girl."

Homura's unimpressed stare deepened.

"I am not sure about this…" trailed off Ken uncertainly.

Alice deflated a bit at that, then she quickly knelt down to the ground to Koromaru. "You would like to go to the Arcades, right Koro-chan?"

Koromaru let out a bark and Alice began to gently pet him. "Yeah, you do. Who's a good boy."

"I don't think Arcades that accept dogs exist in Mitakihara," countered Ken as Koromaru trotted over to him.

"Naw, they do."

I cast a quick look at her. I was quite sure that those did, in fact, exist, but definitely not in Mitakihara.

But, seeing as Alice being outnumbered was a bit unfair, I decided to side with her on this. "I actually agree with Alice on this. We should relax as a team sometimes."

Alice grinned at me and turned back to Takashi. "See? Naoki gets it," she started to drag Takashi and me along. "Now, off we go to the Arcades."

"You two are literally outnumbered in this..." muttered Takashi, but he allowed Alice to drag him along.

I let myself be dragged along as well while Ken reluctantly started to follow us. Alice quickly noticed that someone wasn't coming with us, and she turned around to see Homura walking away.

"You promised us that you'll take part in team building. Well this is just that." I said; Homura narrowed her eyes as she grit her teeth and glared at me.

"This is going to be a waste of time."

All things considered, this whole trip ended up being a lot more fun, than I thought it'd be; even Ken started to play some racing game with Takashi.

And somehow we found an arcade which allowed animals in—I didn't think they existed here—so Koromaru wasn't left outside. Still he just relaxed near the entrance as he didn't have anything to do.

What further shocked me was the fact that Homura, in spite of her constant objections, was also playing the Dance Dance Revolution game.

So, I made my way to the DDR machine, where Homura was playing.

"For someone who said that this would be a waste of time, you are certainly enjoying yourself," I remarked at her.

Once Homura was finished playing she turned around and stared at me dead in the eyes with a deadpan look. "I consider this to be less waste than the other games."

I turned to see her score and noticed something interesting; she had played here before, and her scores were among the best, with only on other person coming near her scores.

"You have something against this Kyoko girl?" I asked as I looked over the leader board.

"Yes, I do."

I raised my eyebrows hoping that she reveals more, unfortunately, she didn't say anything further.

Then Alice appeared by our side. "Hey, Naoki, do you wanna play a game against me. I'll promise I'll go easy on you."

"Sure," I shrugged as I went with her to one arcade machine; Homura was not far behind us.

I, then proceeded to get absolutely demolished in the shooting game which she picked, with my score being three times less than hers.

Going easy on me my ass.

She was literally preening and smirking as she showed me her score, that being Nr. 1 in this game.

This girl is truly...unique...

Homura them straightened up. "Toudou Alice—", "Just call me Alice.", "—you wouldn’t mind if I played against you, right?"

Alice scratched the back of her head. "Naw. But I doubt that you'll even come closer to topping my score."

She then handed Homura that toy gun, which we used to play the game; Homura stared at the gun for a couple of seconds, then the game began.

Homura looked like she was having a bit of fun with the shooter game. She was quite literally killing it.

My eyes went to Alice and I noticed her staring at Homura's score in terror as her score was surpassed in real time.

Once the game was finished Homura had a small smirk on her face. This was one of the few times she has shown emotions during the time I knew her.

"H-how…how are you so good at this?!" shouted Alice after she finished processing everything that happened to her 1st place.

Even Ken was impressed by her reaction time. "That was really good Akemi-san."

"I can't allow this! I must defend my Nr. 1 spot!" yelled Alice as she took the toy gun from Homura.

She put up a good fight, beating her previous score, but in the end she wasn't able to overcome Homura.

The girl flopped to the ground in defeat. "How? How?"

Takashi petted her back as she let out obvious Crocodile tears. "There, there."

"Well, anyway, I am done here, do you guys have anything else you wanna do 'round here?" asked Alice as she got up, no longer doing those fake crocodile tears.

I shrugged. "Eh, no, not really."

Koromaru walked up to us and whined, he was starting to get bored most likely. "I think Koromaru, also doesn't want to stay here anymore," said Ken.

"Well then, do we anything else we may want to do? My dad has been kinda worried about the time I spend outside, due to the dissappearances," said Takashi as he looked around after we left.

"Eh...we can check in on with Philemon," I said when I saw the shrine in the distance.

Ken was curious about meeting Philemon, so we decided to go there. Homura, too, was feeling curious and accompanied us to the temple.

When we entered the shrine, the weird masks littered the room, and we waited for the butterfly to appear.

Then, all of a sudden we found ourselves in Philemon's realm.

"How are you all?" asked Philemon as we were transported to his domain.

I looked around and noted that neither Ken nor Homura appeared with us.

"We would like to ask a question..." I said as I pulled out one of those egg like things. "Could you tell us what these are?"

Philemon threw side glance at it. "The rules of this game don't allow me to." He paused, then I felt something change, it was almost like he was draining the energy of it. "That being said, I would be more than happy to take this off you."

He sounds way to eager to do that...

"Eh...we'll just hold on it and have a Shadow Operative deal with them..." I said as I pulled the egg back into my pocket.

"If that's what you want, then so be it," he said in neutral tone, but I could tell that he was somewhat judging my choice.

I scratched the back of my head. "I have another question. Can you tell us about the barrier that surrounds Mitakihara?"

He gazed me for around 10 seconds before he replied, "Those were set up, so that the game would not be disturbed by outside Persona users and/or other factors."

Okay...thanks Phil... I thought sarcastically, *that's so considerate of you, just like that time you stopped Nanjo from assisting Maya and the others.*

"And how long will it last?" asked Takashi, "just how long will the barrier be up?"

Philemon turned to look at him. "For the duration of the game."

Alice huffed. "How long is that exactly?"

Instead of answering, we found ourselves back again in the shrine. I get the distinct impression that Philemon doesn't like Takashi and especially Alice.

Ken and Homura were watching us with worried looks, surprisingly Homura moreso than Ken.

I guess this is normal for him, with the twins using the Velvet Room in Tartarus.

Ken was the first to ask us something, "So, how did your talk with this Philemon go?"

"About as well as our last, which is to say—" I was about to continue to say that we barley had any talk with him, but Alice cut me off, "Terribly. He didn't anwser any of our questions."

"Yeah, that..." I finished trailing off.

Ken frowned. "Minako told me that Igor would mostly provide vague anwsers as well. Does this Philemon do something similar?"

Takashi took a deep breath. "Not really, he doesn't provide any answers most of the time unless it's Naoki asking the question, and even the he barely says anything that we could use. The only thing he really talks about is this 'game', but he never elaborate on what it even is."

Huh...I thought that I explained what the game was when we first talked with Phil, did I not? Well...anyway, I don't think they need to know that this barrier will stay up for almost an entire year, besides what the worst that could happen from not telling them? Knowing all that makes me look suspicious.

We wandered around some more till I felt something weird, which Alice and Takashi also felt.

Homura, Ken, and Koromaru seemed to not be able to sense whatever we were sensing, which was quite natural for Ken and Koromaru, but Homura not being able to was definitely weird.

Nevertheless, they all agreed with us to track this weird anomaly we were sensing. And we soon found ourselves at the entrance to Mitakihara's Central Hospital.

In the entrance I spotted something glowing with darkness. As I moved closer I recognized it for what it was.

It was one of those weird egg like things which these Shadows drop for some reason.

It was pulsing and without even sensing I could tell that this was bad news.

"Uhhh? What do we with it?" asked Alice as she took a small step towards it.

Homura stared at the egg with guarded expression, but by how she was clenching her fists I could tell that she also didn't like this.

"Well, I am not sure what it's doing, so we should..." I racked my brain on what to do till an idea came to me. "How about we take it with us to the city limits where we give it over to a Shadow Operative agent with no Persona, and they take it outside the city, where the Shadow Operatives take it and examine it."

Homura frowned at my plan, while Ken nodded and went to call Minako.

However, before he could even unlock his phone the world around us started to change and we soon found ourselves in a Shadow world.

I looked around somewhat frantically. "Alright this is...concerning on a few levels."

"You don't say..." muttered Takashi sarcastically, "Homura did you know that this could happen with those eggs?"

We really should come up with a name for them...

Homura shrugged. "I did."

I shifted around to get a better look at her now, and she was still wearing that apathetic mask. *Homura, this whole thing is making real suspicious...*

We then proceeded to venture into the Shadow World till we encountered the Shadow. However, something wasn't right—we found no Shadows, not even the smaller ones—that is till we found something in the center of the world.

That was until we found that weird looking egg again, it was still glowing then it started to glow.

Huh...now that I am thinking about it, didn't something similar happen with the first Shadow we encountered? It definitely emerged from the egg.

Then darkness erupted and in the eggs place was something else.

Well this certainly is different, we stared at the puppet looking Shadow. It was looking really harmless, but I had some trouble sensing it.

"Be careful, it's deadlier than it looks," said Homura as she stared at the puppet.

Takashi stepped forwards. "Alright, I'll just end it then, here goes. Persona, Megido." The almighty spell struck the puppet and normally would have been quite an overkill. However, a giant worm like thing emerged from the puppet after being struck.

It crossed the distance between us in a matter of second and then it was in front of Takashi, who froze with fear, with its jaws opening up as if to take a bite.

"Kala-nemi!" shouted Ken as his Persona the Shadow away from Takashi who fell to the ground from shock.

"It's weak to ice!" I yelled as I was finally able to scan it.

"Got it,"—grinned Alice as the card appeared in her hand—"Victoria! Bufula!"

The attack was super effective against it, and it weaved around the air; trying to get away from the ice attacks. However, Alice wasn't letting up.

Just as it was looking like it had shaken of Alice; Homura appeared in its way.

"Jack Frost," said Homura as she summoned the Jack cutting of the Shadow's escape attempt.

Alice and Homura continued to blast it with ice attacks till it couldn't take it anymore, it started to shrink smaller and smaller.

And when it died, it dropped the same egg, which spawned this whole thing around and the Shadow.

"I think I saw my life flash before my eyes…" muttered Takashi somewhat shakily as the world around us went back to normal.

I frowned. "Are you okay?"

He took a few deep breaths while he stood up. "I…am fine…just in a bit of a shock."

I frowned as I glanced at the weird egg like thing before turning Homura. "I think now is time for you to tell what you know about these things."

She grimaced before she muttered, "I suppose so..."

We all sat down at a table in Ken's apartment.

Homura took a deep breath. "These Shadows draw their energy from grief of humans, when enough grief gathers in that Grief Seed—that is the name for those things—then emerges and it starts to eat people in order to gain more energy and to spawn those smaller shadows in order to protect themselves."

Takashi narrowed his eyes. "Why were you even hiding stuff like this?"

"There is a reason. I wasn't sure whether I could trust you or not."

"Hmm?" Ken hummed as he prodded her to continue.

"I was once a part of a team who hunted these Shadows, however, I was almost killed when I revealed this along with something else."

I was conflicted, I didn't think she was lying, but she was definitely not telling the whole truth either, I was sure on that. In short, she was most likely doing an Obi-Wan aka telling the truth from a certain point of view.

"Well, in that case, would you be able to tell us more about that team?" asked Ken, as he wrote it down on a notepad.

Homura shifted from one side to another. "I'd...rather not..."

Ken looked at her critically. "In which case, how about...you have a talk with someone I know who is similar to you? Minako was hoping to talk with you, and I think now us the best time to have that talk."

Homura was informed by Ken what being a Wild Card meant, and that there are others like her. But she had never talked with either Minako, Aigis, or even Yu, whom the rest of the group other than Ken and I knew very little about.

Homura threw a glance at the projector, then she turned back to Ken. "I believe that would be for the best, but I'd prefer if it was a private talk, would that be fine with you?"

Ken frowned, he didn't look especially pleased with that, but he, eventually, relented. "That's...fine, I'll set up the projector, but I do think it would be better for you if you, eventually, told us your secret when you trust us..."

"Am I the only one who doesn't like where everything about Akemi is going?" asked Takashi as we exited the apartment after Ken set everything up.

We agreed for Homura and Minako to have a roughly a half an hour talk.

"I don't think she was lying about what she said, that being said, I also don't believe that she was telling the whole truth either," I said as we made our way to a nearby park. "I believe that we should give her some time..."

Takashi groaned. "I get that, but it's just...she's still way too suspicious..."

Alice, who was playing Koromaru then turned to us and said, "I am sure that Homura has reasons for being so secretive, I don't think she wishes any harm on us."

Ken shrugged at her. "I think that we'll just have to trust her for the time being."

Soon Ken got message from Homura saying that her talk with Minako was done, so we made our way back.

"Homura-chan, it was good to have this talk," said Minako in a friendly voice, "however, there is still quite a we need to talk about in this group, so thanks for calling them back."

"We do?" asked Ken in suprise.

Minako twirled a finger in her hair. "Yeah, mostly about this 'Philemon' character. First, can the three of you—and by that I mean, Kaname Naoki, Kido Takashi, and Toudou Alice—tell me more about him that you know?"

"Sure, but if you don't mind me asking what got you this curious about him?" I agreed and asked my question as well.

She frowned then thought about something deeply before she anwsered, "I asked an old friend of mine called Theodore who knows a lot more about the Collective Unconscious and its various deities, and he was very tight lipped about this 'Philemon' this got me more curious about him."

I, then, again, explained what I knew about him—that I learned in this life—with occasional comments from both Alice and Takashi.

We also told her about our recent visit to him, and his "answer" to our questions.

"So, he claims that that barrier to keep experienced Persona users out from this 'game'?" muttered Minako in a dark tone as soon I finished telling her what he said in regards to the barrier around Mitakihara.

Minako let out a loud sigh. "Did he tell you how long this 'game' of his would last?"

"Zilch, nada, zero!" said Alice in a loud voice, "He pretty much told us nothing!"

"And what about those 'other Forces' he mentioned?"

Alice, Takashi, and I shared eye contact for a couple seconds till Takashi said to her hesitantly, "We...actually didn't ask him anything in regards to that."

Minako just waved it off. "He's most likely referring to other Cognitive Beings/Deities, but you can ask him the next time you three see him.

"In any case, I'll just ask around some more. Marie might know something about Philemon, and if she doesn't, then I guess I'll have to go find Elizabeth, she'll most likely tell me what I want to know...well I should also mention this that the Shadow Operatives are treating this case with special care.

"So, tomorrow you will gain access to weapons, and fund for healing and other items. Ken will instruct you on how you'll use your weapons, and..."—she let out a hum as she looked over me and Homura—"...Homura-chan will be placed in charge of securing healing items, while Kaname-kun will be in charge securing other items, is this fine you all?"

Alice tilted her head. "That means I'll not have to do anything other than listen to Ken-senpai's instructions, right? In that case I'm in."

Takashi nodded slowly with a frown on his face. And Ken soon followed, leaving only me and Homura who haven't said anything in regards to Minako.

She most likely choose me to get those other items was due to my stronger familiarity with how Personas and Shadows work. Though, I am not sure just how I'll get things like the Ring of Darkness, but I am sure it will work out just fine.

"It's okay with me..." I muttered.

"I am fine with it as well," said Homura.

Minako smiled. "Well then, I suppose this would be a bye from me, Ken I will contact you later to arrange everything—but for now you can hang out with your friends."

She then disconnected and there was a moment of silence till **someone** decided to ask, "Hey, can we wanna go back to the arcade?"

All of us quickly voiced our opinions on that, even Koro-chan joining us in being against it.

The **person** who suggested it deflated and let out a small "Agghh..."

Chapter 6

All things considered, everything was going fairly well for Akemi Homura in this loop. With the new powers, and new teammates, she might be able to save Madoka this time.

And of not, at least she will gain a new ability which could help her in the future along with knowledge about these Shadow Operatives and Amada Ken.

Now that she was thinking about it, Madoka will need to be constantly watched in the coming two weeks in order to ensure that she didn't contract.

This will leave Homura with no time to engage in her hobby of making bombs, but she was willing to let that hobby be neglected if it meant saving Madoka. Maybe she could even enlist the team's help with this endeavor of keeping an eye on Madoka, although at this point it will probably not be the most wise choice given how much Takashi, and even the other to a certain extent are suspicious of her.

And she will have to be careful with Sayaka already being contracted, which she found out on yesterday in school. That, in and of itself, was no big shock to her—Sayaka sometimes contracted very early on some timelines—but it will further complicate things for her.

She shook her head, regardless, she will deal with that later, and so she went around to the back of her house and entered the blue door to the Velvet Room.

"Welcome back my guest," said Igor, "do you require my services?"

Homura shook her head. "Not at the moment. I wanted to ask you a few things."

Igor's grin never left his face. "Of course, what would those questions be?"

"Recently I talked with a previous guest of yours, Aragaki Mianko, and she told me that there used to be assistants for Wildcards, if that's the case why don't I have one?"

Igor tilted his head to the side. "Ah yes, young Minako, she was truly a remarkable guest along with her brother, unfortunately, I couldn't prepare an assistant for this game."

Homura looked at him with an intense stare. "I have another question."

He beckoned her to ask it.

"Having a Persona automatically cleanses a Soul Gem, correct?" asked Homura.

"That is indeed, correct."

"In which case, would you be able to grant other magical girls in the city Personas?"

He hummed. "I would not be against it; however, I only grant those Personas who have a strong will. And, unfortunately, the rules of the game don't allow me to fulfill that role

currently for anyone else other than you."

She raised her eyebrows at that and sighed aloud. "I have one final question. What do you know about this 'Philemon' person?"

He let out a loud hum at her question as he tapped his fingers together. "I would advise against trusting him. During this game he may appear to be genuinely helpful, but that's only because the rules of the game force him to be."

Homura looked at him critically, then she pulled a Grief Seed out of her shield. "And would you be able to take of these for me? Naoki said that Philemon offered to do that for him and Kido Takashi, and Toudou Alice."

"Yes, it's one of the rules that was agreed upon, I would be glad to take off you, and in exchange I'll give you something as well," he said as he extended his long hand towards her.

Homura looked somewhat suspiciously at the hand. "And what will you do with then?"

"The souls held within them will return to the Sea of Souls, and you will no longer have to worry about them turning into Witches."

"So you know about that as well. I would bet that you know all about Magical Girls, right, Igor?"

His grin got wider as he replied, "Indeed, and so does that 'Philemon' being."

Homura looked down on the Grief Seed. *If I agree I would make it so it does not fall into the hands of Incubator, that being said, I am not 100% trusting him on this, but I don't have much to lose on this in any case.*

So she reluctantly handed the Grief Seed to him. Igor then stared at it for a couple of seconds before he crushed it in his hands. "There, I returned the soul back to the Sea. And also here's..."

He handed her some cards.

"What are these used for?"

"They are called Skill Cards, with them you can impart a specific skill on a Persona of yours that normally can't learn them. If you need some help with them, I'll gladly assist you."

Homura's eyes widened at that. *These Skill Cards are incredibly useful! With these I could...*

Suddenly she felt conflicted. On the one hand handing over the Grief Seeds that she accumulated thus far was looking quite enticing, but, on the other hand, they can still be useful in negotiating with Magical Girls, like Kyoko.

"Now, do you have anymore questions, my dear guest?" he asked.

Homura shook her head. *In any case, I will decide what to do with them in the future.*

"Then, I will bid you adieu."

It was just a week and a few days since Sayaka made her contract, during this time she helped out Mami deal with Witches, healed Kyosuke's body, and did a lot more Magical Girl business.

She, so far, was really enjoying everything they did, with how they helped so many people, and fought back against the evil Witches.

But one day as they entered Mami's home, they soon discovered something quite shocking.

"*There seems to be a group of Shadow users who decided to make Mitakihara their base of operations,*" reported Kyubey.

Sayaka clenched her fists as she stared at Kyubey. "You mean there are evil people in Mitakihara who forged contracts with those monsters?"

"*Indeed, I just discovered it 2 hours ago, and yes it seems like there are people who forged contracts with their Shadows in Mitakihara.*"

Mami sent a concerned look towards Madoka and Sayaka before she turned towards Kyubey. "Just how strong are we talking about, Kyubey, could they be able to defeat me and Sayaka?"

Kyubey seemed to ponder for a moment. "*Yes, they would most likely be able to defeat you and Miki Sayaka. If Kaname Madoka were to make a contract, then the odds would flip in your favor.*"

Mami looked at the girl in question, who shifted awkwardly. "In that case, I'll have contact a certain someone."

Kyubey shot a look at her, but he didn't say anything.

Sayaka in turn shot a concerned look towards Mami. "Who is this 'certain someone'?"

Mami wore a pained expression on her face. "It's someone I was once friends with, a veteran magical who's more than powerful enough to help us.

"But before we get to that, Kyubey would you able to tell us more about these Shadow users?"

Kyubey tilted his head. "*I can, yes. These Shadow users, once they forged a contract with their Shadowsnthey can summon their Shadows in worlds close to Shadow worlds, like the labyrinths, this does mean that they are most of the time not capable of wielding outside labyrinths.*

"*Furthermore, if a Magical Girl were to make a contract with her Shadow, then she'll be no longer have to honor her contract with me.*"

"That sounds awful, so those who forge a contract with the Shadow can just break their contract with you?" asked Sayaka in a serious voice.

"*Correct,*" replied Kyubey, "*thankfully very few Magical Girls do that.*"

"I'd hope so, I mean what Magical Girl would want to forge a contract with monsters like Shadows after fighting Witches," muttered Sayaka in a low voice.

"*In any case, dealing with these Shadow users should be quite easy if the person Mami is thinking agrees to come back,*" said Kyubey as it stretched.

Madoka was not expecting Mami's once friend to be so...delinquenty...

Kyoko Sakura was definitely different from Mami, but she wasn't as bad as one would assume.

She was fun to be around, even if Madoka didn't like Kyoko's nickname for her or how she and Sayaka always got into arguments over the smallest of things.

Nevertheless, after some point their arguments started to become less heated and they started to spend more and more time together.

Madoka was happy that they were starting to get along and hoped that helped with whatever was going on in between her and Mami.

She did not miss that there was some tension there, most likely the one that Mami referenced, but she hoped that with the two of them working they might be able to overcome it.

In any event, three of them should now be able defeat these evil Shadow user, Witches, and the normal Shadows.

And hopefully, she'll be able to think up a wish, so that she could join them. She doesn't want to waste her one chance on a wish she'll regret.

"Madoka," called out a voice from behind her, she turned around to see Mami behind her. "Is everything alright, you seemed to be deep in thought."

Madoka giggled a little. "I was just thinking about what I could wish for."

Mami smiled at her. "Sayaka and Kyoko sensed a labyrinth nearby, would you like to come with us today?"

Madoka nodded eagerly.

Being invited along into a Witch's labyrinth got progressively more rare for her, mostly due to Kyoko who said that she shouldn't come along into a labyrinth if she isn't a Magical Girl.

Despite Sayaka's quick rebuttal of that, Madoka had to agree with her. By being there she, ultimately, was placing herself in danger and distracting her friends' attention from the Witch.

Mami almost couldn't believe how well things have been going recently for her. First, she now has a new student in the form of Sayaka. Second, Kyoko agreed to come back after she told her about these Shadow Users. And third, she now has actual friends, perhaps Kyoko would even agree to come back after they deal with the Shadow Users.

She, herself, was still not quite sure how to deal with them,

Mami along with the two other magical girls and Madoka stared at the group who cleared out that particular labyrinth.

"Naoki..." muttered Madoka as gazed at her cousin with a few tears in her eyes.

Sayaka went to comfort her, she also couldn't quite believe that Naoki was affiliated with these Shadow users.

Mami was tempted to do the same, however, she needed to keep a close eye on them, in case they notice the Magical Girls and decide to attack them.

Thankfully, nothing of that nature happened, but she, nonetheless, kept up a constant vigilance.

Kyoko was snacking on some chips as she turned to Mami. "So, besides pinkie's cousin, is there anyone else you know in that group?"

Mami looked down once more and pointed at long black haired girl. "She's a Magical Girl."

Kyoko turned her attention to Kyubey. "Hey, you said that magical girls who signed a contract with Shadows have no need to hunt Witches, right? So, what's she doing?

"And by the way, I thought you could sense these Shadow User, so how did you not notice Pinkie's cousin?"

Kyubey stretched out as he anwsered, "*I wasn't certain for a long time, but now I know that she had made a contract with her Shadow. As for fighting Witches, yes, she need not do that anymore, however it seems like she decided to still do it. As for how I have not noticed it before that, too, is a mystery to me...*"

"Alright that's that, and what about the pretty boy leader? He was also wearing you school's uniform, does anyone know him?" Kyoko asked in a bored voice as she turned to the others.

"He's a classmate of mine, and he's also the student council president. His name is Amada Ken," this came from Mami.

Kyoko whistled mockingly to that. "So, pretty boy is popular, huh?"

Mami regarded the group critically. "Amada-san seems to be the most powerful of the group, if I had to guess, I would assume that he had made a contract with his Shadow before the others."

"That is m*ost likely correct, I also felt that Amada Ken uses some sort of other Shadow summoning process than the others in his group do,*" stated Kyubey as he walked up to the group.

Sayaka's attention then turned towards the south side of the city. "I sense a witch over there. I suggest that we go over there and deal with it, so that we have enough grief seeds for when we confront these Shadow users."

Madoka looked down on the ground. She clearly didn't want her friends and family to fight each other, and to hurt each other.

The red haired girl grinned. "Heh...I can't believe I am saying this, but Blueberry here is right for once, we should stock up on 'em."

Sayaka squaked in indignation. "What do you mean 'right for once'!"

They soon started to bicker again, and Mami let out an exacerbated sigh.

Then they went to deal with the nearby Witch. And they swiftly dealt with it, they waited for the labyrinth to disappear, but nothing happened.

"I'll get the grief seed..." muttered an anxious Sayaka as she glanced warily at the still not disappearing labyrinth.

Before Sayaka could even go there, a laughter rang out from where the grief seed landed. And the figure of a familiar pink haired boy appeared there.

"Minato...?" muttered a confused Sayaka as she and Madoka stared at him with wide eyes.

Minato didn't even turn to them and merely regarded the grief seed in his arm with some curiosity.

"Minato...what are you... doing here?" asked Madoka from behind her with a confused voice.

"Hahaha..." he laughed aloud at her question. "I wanted to see you 'Magical Girls' personally, and I have to say that I'm not impressed..."

Sayaka got angry at his words and shouted, "And what were you expecting?"

He turned towards and regarded her with a look of contempt. "I was expecting something more grand, I mean you, humans, sold yourself for a single miracle, and I'd have expected for you all to be disappointed and cursing the world and yourself for what you got."

Kyoko let out a chuckle. "I gotta respect your guts, I didn't any of Pinkie's relations would have ever said something like that. But"—she raised he spear and rushed at him, stabbing the wall near his face—"that doesn't mean you can just spout stuff like that!"

Minato didn't even flinch from that, and Madoka let out shriek at what Kyoko did.

Kyoko, on the other hand, appeared to somewhat impressed as she took a step back from him with a grin.

Sayaka, meanwhile, clenched her fists as she glared at Minato. "Oh I get it! You're jealous of the fact that you can't be one, right?! Well tough luck, a bully like you doesn't deserve this kind of power!"

"Sayaka-chan!" shouted Madoka from the side, "Don't call Minato a bully, he's—"

Whatever she was about to say was cut of by Minato as he started to laugh loudly once again. "Ha...Even Phil's people are far more worthy of respect than you are. Not to mention that I would never be jealous of person like you, with such a little power alloted to you by deal which you clearly didn't understand."

"Phil's people?" muttered Sayaka in confusion trying to make sense of what Minato was saying.

Mami had a wary look on her face as she intterupted them, "And what exactly are you planning to do with that Grief Seed, Kaname-kun?"

"Hmm..." he trailed off as he threw a glance at it before moving it up to his mouth and then he threw the Grief Seed into it and began to chew it.

Mami had a horrified expression on her face, and Sayaka's was also similar. Even Kyoko had shocked expression at what he did.

It seemed like Kyubey was also somewhat alarmed by this as he made his way over to Minato and communicated to him, "*That's not good. If you swallow that, it would cause you to die.*"

As soon as Madoka heard that she rushed up to Minato. "Minato spit it out—"

But before she could even reach him, he swallowed it. They stared at him in horror and then a black fog erupted around him which quickly vanished.

And once it did, they could see Minato still standing with a bored look on his face.

Kyubey was the first to approach him. "*Kaname Minato...how are you...*"

However, he was unable to finish his sentence as Madoka ran up to Minato and embraced him in a tight hug.

Minato during the whole hug wore an irritated look on his face. "Who did you think the one was who was maintaining this labyrinth after witch's death?"

"*That's not possible...unless...*" Kyubey muttered while he gazed at Minato.

The boy smiled back at him and asked rhetorically, "Unless what?"

"*I figured it out, you're not real.*"

Minato let out a small hum at that as an arrogant smirk appeared on his face; he motioned for Kyubey to continue.

"*A person by the name of Kaname Minato has never existed. You're merely a Shadow who took this form.*"

Madoka eyes widened as she took a step back. "No! That can't be! Minato was always...Minato was..." she tried to search through her memories for Minato, however, no matter how hard she tried the earliest memories of Minato she had was the day Naoki arrived.

She took a step back as Minato's grin changed into a smirk. Mami and Sayaka stepped protectively infront of her.

The "boy" glanced back at Kyubey. "Heh, you're right in some things; however,"—a tentacle erupted from his shoulder and quickly crushed Kyubey—"I am no mere Shadow!"

"Kyubey!" the girls shouted; Mami quickly summoned a musket, and she fired at Minato.

The shot hit him right where his heart is supposed to be, but he didn't even flinch back. He started to laugh mockingly, "Heh, truly pathetic, unfortunately, or rather, fortunately for you all, that little rat will no longer be able to interfere as he's dead, I also have some business that I need to take care of with these Persona users. So, I'll just leave you to your grief, perhaps you will even uncover the truth that way."

The "boy" started to turn into black butterflies; these butterflies, too, disappeared soon after they appeared. The labyrinth followed it; completely disappearing as well.

Mami stared at the place where Kyubey once stood in shock. Kyubey was always by her side even when no one else was.

She felt tears gather in her eyes as tried to process everything, suddenly a hand reached out onto her shoulder.

"Hey, Mami is everything okay?" asked Kyoko in a...worried tone?

Kyoko is worried about me? she suddenly felt better enough to put on a steadfast face for Sayaka and Madoka and told them that they should talk about this all in her apartment.

Kyoko Sakura looked over the others thoroughly once they returned to Mami's apartment.

Pinkie's and Sayaka's reaction was quite obvious to see. Mami's on the other was more...difficult.

It was obvious to her that Mami was trying to put up a strong front for Pinkie and Sayaka. The death of Kyubey no doubt shook her to her core, what with Kyubey being her first friend, even if Kyoko herself never trusted Kyubey after what happened with her father, his death still shocked her.

And now they'll have to deal with these Shadow users and this Minato Shadow. She should just leave now, she wasn't even sure why she agreed to even come here—maybe the fact that Mami had asked for her to come back—but now that Kyubey is dead she felt like she could not just leave her alone (again).

Sayaka asked Mami somethings, which Kyoko wasn't really paying much attention to.

She waited for Pinkie and Sayaka to leave. And then she confronted Mami. "You can drop the act now that they are gone."

"I am not sure what you're saying, Kyoko," he lips trembled as she got that out.

"Right, right..." Kyoko muttered, "listen, I am not saying that you should drop the mask infront of Pinkie and her friend, I know that you'll never agree to that, but you don't have to keep that mask on when we both know that it's just a mask."

"My, my...it almost sounds like you're trying to comfort me, Kyoko, I thought that the only reason you agreed to come was for the food and the Grief Seeds," said Mami.

Kyoko frowned and then threw a glare at her. "You're not changing the subject," she shifted around awkwardly. This is going to be so embarrassing, "Just listen, I know that you cared quite a bit about him, so...if you need someone to talk to...then I am here..."

Kyoko quickly looked away. *Why did I say that, this just made everything more awkward, guh...*

Then she heard a noise coming from Mami, so she turned to look at her.

There were tears in her eyes as she tried to hold them back.

Kyoko's body reacted without she could think and took a step towards Mami. And Mami in turned took a step towards her and embraced her in a hug.

Kyoko's immediate thoughts were to push her away, but her body didn't react to them. Instead she hugged Mami closer to her as she cried into her shoulder.

They stood there for around 5 minutes till Mami stopped crying, and then they she started to wiggle out of the hug, which Kyoko reluctantly let her.

Her eyes were puffy and she looked really vulnerable at this moment, they stood there for a few awkward seconds in silence until Mami finally spoke up, "I would appreciate if you didn't tell this to Sayaka, and Madoka..."

Kyoko shook her head. "Yeah, no problem, you gotta look cool infront of Pinkie and Sayaka."

A small smile appeared on Mami's face. "I appreciate that...and thank you, Kyoko, I would like to prepare some tea and cake for you..."

"You really don't have to—but who am I to decline," Kyoko chuckled a bit.

Chapter 7

"So, given all of that, I would conclude that this 'Philemon' is the one most likely behind the barrier," said Minako as she finished explaining to Ken. "Well, what are your thoughts?"

They had started to discuss the barrier again, with the information that Philemon provided to Takashi, Alice, and Naoki.

Ken scratched the back of his head. "Well...it's probably true..."

Aigis, who was sitting next to Minako, replied, "Indeed, it is most likely the correct anwser to out question about the barrier; however, I should also note that the way Akemi Homura described Igor's behavior to you was also quite suspect, with supposedly granting Homura the power of the Wildcard just because she could remember her name, which is something he has never done before.

"Not only that, but the fact that there was no music in the Velvet Room is also not normal. I suspect something nefarious is going on with the Velvet Room and Igor as well."

Minako frowned. "That's true...it's really suspicious that the Velvet Room disappeared five months and when it comes, Igor's behavior is vastly different. Do you think that the Igor, Homura-chan interacts with is actually impersonating Igor?"

Aigis was thinking about it. "Some parts of his behavior do lend credence to the hypothesis; however, there also a few things which hold it back as well."

"Is it the fact that Igor is helping Homura with Persona fusion?" asked Ken.

Aigis slowly nodded. "Among other things."

He let out a deep sigh. "Everything is so confusing about this entire case. First, the barrier around the city. Second, this 'Philemon' character. Third, the Velvet Room's weird behavior. And last but not least, Homura-san's and Naoki-san's suspicious knowledge of things they shouldn't know."

Minako frowned. "The events around Mitakihara feel like a prelude to something massive," she took a deep breath. "Anyway, we theorized about Igor and Philemon enough, let's talk about those two teammates of yours."

"Naoki-san is less suspicious than Homura-san, that being said, there are still things which he just shouldn't know. For example, the day before yesterday he explained to Alice-san and Takashi-san how Shadows and Personas are the same thing."

"He could have got that information from Philemon," Aigis reminded them.

"He could've gotten it from him, yes—but that's just it, he could've gotten everything from Philemon," said Minako in her serious voice. "The fact is, that according to Toudou-kun and

Kido-chan, Philemon doesn't hand out any information to them; this should raise a few eyebrows about why Kaname-kun got all that info from Philemon.

"This leaves us with few remaining theories, it could mean that Philemon is only handing it out to Kaname Naoki specifically for whatever reason—and that alone would make this 'Philemon' way more suspicious—or it could mean that he, Kaname-san, didn't get the information from Philemon."

Ken cleared his throat. "So we are currently stuck in an impasse, if Naoki-san isn't lying, then that means that Philemon is most likely trying to manipulate him; however, if he is lying, then that means that he learned that information from somewhere else."

Minako hummed softly. "By the way, Ken, how are you handling being the leader of this group?"

"It's certainly a lot of work, that I will say. Thankfully, they do listen to my advice and order most of the time, but sometimes I feel like I am herding a bunch of wild cats, especially with a certain member."

Minako-san snickered a bit. "Yeah, that's normal, and in any event, you have Koro-chan with you, so herding will not be difficult."

The dog in question stood up when he was addressed and barked at the screen.

"He says that he will always assist you in herding them," said Aigis.

"Aw...I would have totally given you scratchies for that comment, Koro-chan, Ken, can you scratch him for me, please."

He obliged and starting scratching him behind his ears; Koromaru, in response let out a happy bark.

"I think we discussed Kaname Naoki-san enough for today, let's talk about the other suspicious person in the group of yours," stated Aigis.

Minako threw a quick glance at her but didn't say anything.

Ken noticed this and asked, "Minako-san, during your talk with her, did you learn something new?"

"I did; however, it was nothing that had anything to do with Personas and Shadows; she wasn't willing to talk about her life personal life that much."

Ken sighed. "Let's just go through what we know about her past then. She suppose was part of team who was investigating these Shadows, that team, however, ended up betraying her? I think."

Aigis nodded along. "I suppose the question then is, when was she investigating these Shadows?"

Minako hummed as she listened to them.

"She was hospitalized for several months from heart disease; that doesn't give her much time to investigate these Shadows..." muttered Ken.

"Perhaps she was investigating them prior to being hospitalized?" wondered Aigis.

Minako suddenly perked up. "I think you maybe looking at it the wrong way. What if Homura-chan wasn't hospitalized due to a heart disease, but became of what her previous teammates did?"

Ken rubbed his head. "That could explain why she doesn't seem to have problems with her heart now; however, that still leaves with the question why isn't she telling us more about these 'teammates' of hers."

Suddenly he felt his phone vibrate, and when he looked down he saw a message from Naoki asking to meet at his place.

He then informed Aigis and Minako about this.

"I guess we'll talk later, for now please keep a close eye on both of them," said Aigis.

Minako waved him goodbye. "I swear the first thing I'll do when I get in is to slap the person who put up that barrier and put you in danger."

Ken laughed a little. "Bye Minako-san, can you also tell Shinjiro-san that I miss him as well?"

Minako smiled softly at him. "Yeah I'll do that. He also misses you as well."

Soon the call ended and after around eight minutes they showed up

"I am sorry for suddenly texting you, but according to Homura this is urgent..." Naoki trailed off.

In response Ken shook his head. "It's no problem."

He motioned for Homura to say what she found important enough to have this meeting called.

"I am sorry for having kept this from you all; three weeks from now, a really powerful Shadow named Walpurgisnacht will appear here," said Homura with a serious voice.

Another point making you look suspicious, Homura-san...

"Walpur what?" asked a confused Alice.

"Walpurgisnacht, huh...?" muttered Naoki as he stared at Homura, "the night of the Witches, an interesting name.

This also makes you look suspicious as well, how do you know...German?

"Just how powerful are we talking about exactly?" asked Ken after he focused his attention back on Homura.

Homura seemed to be a bit unsettled at the fact that Naoki knew what Walpurgisnacht meant, but she soon answered, "Walpurgisnacht will destroy this entire city if we don't do something about it."

Good. If it's not any reality warping god, then this team could still be trained to defeat it. If Homura-san said that it is as powerful as Nyx's avatar, then I would start panicking.

Ken stretched his arms as he said, "Then we'll handle it. However, I do have a question, for you, Akemi-san. How do you know that it will come here?"

"Statistics," was her short and simple reply.

"Have you encountered it before, Homura?" asked Alice with a concerned voice.

"I have."

That's...concerning...

Naoki also looked at her with obvious concern.

This "Walpurgisnacht" could also be the cause of her hospitalization and the reason why she doesn't talk about her teammates...

"When will this "Walpurgisnacht" arrive in Mitakihara?" asked Ken as he was thinking about way to deal with it. I mean the way she phrased it's not in Mitakihara, so that means that the Shadow Operatives might be able to target and defeat it...that would be really good—but I doubt that it'll be that easy.

Homura looked at him before replying, "It should be around 15 days."

"That doesn't give us much time to get ready for it, but I'll do my best to prepare you all for it in any case. Thankfully, all our weapons arrived, so we can start with training you all with them."

Ken went to retrive the packages in which the weapons arrived, and he soon unboxed them on the table.

Homura looked between the weapons with a critical eye before she grabbed the bow. When it was Naoki's turn he looked hesitantly between the spear and the sword before ultimately choosing to use neither, and selecting the naginata.

Then it was Alice's turn and she didn't hesitate to grab the spear, leaving Takashi with the sword.

"Alright, 15 days is not nearly enough time to train you with these weapons to be masters with them, but it should make you all somewhat competent on how to use them. Tomorrow after school we'll start your training with them," said Ken as he looked at everyone in the room.

Koromaru barked in affirmation as well.

"Tomoe-san, can I talk to you for a minute or two?" called out Ken to his classmate during lunch break.

He needed to have a talk with her in his responsibility as Student Council President, and he figured he should get this over with quickly, after all he still needed to train the others on how to use their new weapons today.

The blonde haired girl immediately got defensive, and Ken hurried to explain. "This doesn't have anything to do with your school performance."

He had to say this because he had spoken with quite a few students with not that great grades last week already.

Tomoe was, still evidently warry, but she soon acquiesced.

So, Ken lead her to the student council room. Thankfully, no one was present there.

"So..." began Ken, "..our homeroom teacher is a bit worried about your interaction with others in class."

She raised her eyebrows. "Is that so?"

"Yeah, I know that this can be quite awkward, but Sato-sensei is quite concerned about the fact that you haven't participated in any extracurricular activity in school since you started coming to this school..."

"I don't really have time to start participating in a club now; I have the exams that I must prepare for, and I spend time outside of school with my friends, so..." she trailed off.

"I understand, in that case I will tell Sato-sensei that you're focused on your exams," said Ken

Sato-sensei could have done this entire conversation in a minute or two... thought Ken to himself.

Ken didn't really understand why he had to have these conversations with third year students who choose to quit club activities; most of them did so because they wanted to prepare for their exams. Tomoe's was a bit different because she didn't attend any clubs in the three years she was here, but Ken didn't see a reason why he should even have this conversation now; it

would have been better if it had taken place in second year, but now it was pretty much useless.

"Is that all? Will you really just tell him that?" asked Tomoe with some uncertainty in her voice.

"Yeah, this will be all. You can go back to lunch break now," replied Ken as he sorted some papers out.

The blonde haired girl bowed and left the Student Council room.

Two days in, and the training was going quite well all things considered; they were advancing far faster then Ken expected them to, especially Homura, somehow she was almost as good as Yukari towards the middle of Tartarus, which meant she pretty rarely missed a moving target.

So, he arranged for them to train against the Shadows in these Shadow Nests.

"Huh? What's this?" muttered a confused Alice as she stared at the writings on the wall where the Shadow Nest was.

It looked like some kind of poetry, but Ken didn't understand the language it was written in, so he couldn't make many assumptions other than that.

Naoki took a closer look at it. "Old German poetry of some kind...maybe even from Goethe, but I can't tell you much beyond that.

"I guess I could try to translate it, but it'd be a pretty direct translation, which will most likely strip away some important things away..."

Homura, who so far hasn't uttered a single word about this, spoke up, "It's from Goethe, more specifically his work, Faust."

Ken didn't know much about old German poetry, so he wasn't surprised to not know either this "Goethe" person or his work "Faust", and it appeared that neither Takashi nor Alice knew anything about it either, with Alice muttering a weak, "Weird," before moving away from the wall.

Naoki, on the other hand, seemed to recognize that work as he started to frown when Homura mentioned its name. And he stared at the wall intently.

But he didn't say anything more as they proceeded to ventured into the labyrinth, were they started to train more on the larger Shadow.

Soon enough the large Shadow ended up being defeated, with it dropping the same thing that most of these Shadows have dropped so far.

He looked around waiting for the Shadow Nest to dissappear, but it didn't seem like it would dissappear.

This ddoesn't feel right, something's off.

Ken eyed it for a couple of seconds before he went to retrive the Grief Seed, and then he handed it over to Homura. She somehow arranged things with Igor to take those Grief Seeds off her in exchange for things that these Shadows didn't drop.

"We're done for today. We'll aim to get more of those Grief Seeds tomorrow, so that they can be traded in in the the Velvet Room," said Ken.

"We can't allow that!" yelled a voice from behind them.

They turned around to see three girls wearing some sort of cosplay outfits. Ken recognized one of them fairly quickly though.

"Sayaka?" Naoki muttered in confusion as he stared at the blue haired girl, and at her weird outfit in confusion.

Alice and Takashi stared at her curiously and in confusion.

The red haired girl grinned at them as she brandishing her spear.

In contrast, Tomoe regarded them with an indifferent expression and said to them, "I am afraid to say that you all will have to leave, or we'll have to drive you out of here!"

Ken tried to play diplomacy with the girls. "We don't need to be hostile, Tomoe-san. We just want to deal with these Shadows. There's no need for this to come to blows."

The red haired girl sneered at him. "Look, pretty boy, we know what your kind does. And this is our territory!"—her sneer turned into a feral grin—"If you don't listen to us, than we'll put you out of commission...permanently!"

Naoki took up a defensive position, and Ken hoped that Tomoe would calm her companion down.

Suddenly, Homura's eyes widened, she then said to Ken, "Something came up that I need to deal with, I trust you all to be able to handle these three by yourselves."

She then disappeared which shocked all of them, well...exept for the red haired girl who started to laugh.

Wait, what? Where are are you going, Homura-san? Ken wondered to himself.

Sayaka grinned when Homura disappeared. "Heh, guess Miss Transfer Student was feeling scared of us."

Naoki, then decided to try the diplomatic route himself. "Look there's no need for us to fight, I am sure we can work out some sort of agreement."

The red haired girl's grinn widened. "Not happening, as I said to the pretty boy, this is our territory."

"In that case..." muttered Ken as he went to summon Kala-Nemi.

Tomoe's eyes widened as Ken pointed the evokes at himself, and...ribbons erupted from her hands?

What?

This, however, proved to be too slow as Ken was able to call out Kala-Nemi.

The large mechanical Persona blasted those ribbons away with lightning. Ken ordered them, "Spread out, I'll handle Tomoe by myself. Take them on two on one!"

He soon cut through a few more ribbons with Kala-Nemi.

"Alright Takashi and I will take on Sayaka, and Koro-chan and Alice will deal with red hair," ordered Naoki.

Koromaru barked affirmativelly and Alice nooded and they quickly dashed towards the red haired girl.

Ken then turned his attention back to the blonde haired girl.

He would have liked to describe it as some sort of epic fight, but he wasn't a liar; he was on the defensive against Tomoe's ribbons, and he couldn't do much to her with Kala-Nemi and his spear.

Thankfully, the others seemed to be fairing far better, with Takashi and Naoki quickly disarming the blue haired girl, Sayaka.

While, Koromaru and Alice were not doing quite that well, they were still putting the red haired girl on the defensive.

So Ken believed that they will be able to do...

Ken wasn't sure what he wanted to do to them now that he thought about. Maybe make them listen?

In any case, he focused his attention back on Tomoe and her ribbons.

If ribbons is all he has, then I will be able to handle her quite easily until the other subdue her friends.

"Hastur!" shouted Naoki who started to run up to the two of them. He let Takashi take care of the disarmed blue haired girl, and ran to help Ken.

Unfortunately, Ken thoughts looked like they were tempting fate as Tomoe's eyes turned serious and she summoned an old gun of some sorts and shot at Naoki who summoned his Persona to deflect the bullet.

"Stay away!" shouted the blonde girl. "Or I'll be forced to injure tou permanently!"

Ken took a step towards her. "Look, I am sure there a reason why you might think we might be dangerous, but can't we just talk this out, we don't want to fight any of you."

Before Tomoe could respond, the red haired girl jumped in front of him to the side of Tomoe, and in her hand she was carrying the blue haired girl in a princess carry. Alice muttered a short "Sorry..." which was followed by one from Takashi as well.

"Hmphhh, as if!" scowled the red haired girl. The girl in her arm quickly scrambled to her feet while she turned to adress them. "Yeah, we would never make a deal with you, Shadow users!"

Shadow users? I mean she's not technically wrong, but still...it's a weird term to use...

Suddenly loud claps rang out form behind them. Ken slowly turned around and he froze. Something about this person unsettled far more than even Erebus did, it was Minato Kaname, Naoki's cousin.

"Such an breathtaking sight. This was truly worth every miserable second amongst you, humans!"

The girls took up defensive positions as if they they were afraid of whatever Naoki's cousin was.

"What are you doing here?" asked Tomoe in a forceful tone.

"Hoh?" he asked while he transformed into a man who looked somewhat familiar to Tomoe; same blonde hair, same eye color. "What I am doing is merely playing a game; just little one between the parent and the child."

"Y-y-you're not my dad!" shouted Tomoe as she wrapped up the former Minato in ribbons like a Christmas present.

He merely smiled at this and soon teleported out of the bindings. "You're the one who desires for your parents to return. I am merely fulfilling your desires, am I not? I don't get it, you humans are always contradicting yourselves."

"What are you?" asked Ken with a forceful tone.

He grinned at him maliciously, then he transformed into his mom.

Ken tried really hard to make it look like he wasn't bothered by this, but it was easy to tell that this was causing him distress with how hard he tightened his hand on his spear.

"What I am, you ask, well let's just say that I draw my strength all the negative emotions of Humanity."

"Are you saying that you're some sort of Shadow of Humanity itself?" asked Ken with narrowed eyes.

"That's right! I am the Humanity's Shadow, as long as there's evil in your heart, I'll always exist within you," he started to laugh.

"And what do you want from us?" asked Ken in an agitated voice.

He smirked at him. "Oh nothing more than the destruction of all of Humanity, but for now the destruction of this city will do just fine."

Ken tightened his hold on his spear even further.

The blue haired girl shouted at him, "We're not just gonna let you do that!"

He, in turned, only laughed aloud more. "You think you foolish girls are able to stop me?! That's almost as hilarious as thinking you even have a future!

"The fate of this little system of yours has already been decided, all that matters is whether the ruin of Mitakihara could he avoided, if you defeat Walpurgisnacht, then Mitakihara will have a future—but you will certainly not have one!" laughed the Shadow of Humanity.

System?

"So we just have to beat you in this game of yours?!" asked the red haired girl angrily as she jabbed her spear into him.

His smirk widened. "That would be correct for them." he then motioned to us. "However, as I alluded to previously: You three will not play any part in that."

Tomoe surrounded him with ribbons once again. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's quite simple, you three will be turned into Witches by yours truly!"

"W-what do..." before she could even get out her question she started to scream.

"Tomoe-san!" shouted Ken as he ran up to her. But before he could reach her, he was pushed back by the Crawling Chaos.

In its hand were three distinct jewels, which were turning dark at extreme rate, then the jewels shattered into those "Grief Seeds".

The three girls' bodies flopped to the ground like puppets whose strings have been cut.

Three Grief Seeds floated around it.

Naoki clenched his fists as he shouted at him. "What did you do!?"

It laughed loudly. "I just made then fulfill their destiny, this is just what they were made for. We'll see each other soon, at the end of my part, for now I'll take my leave."

Ken quickly got hid spear in his hand and tried to rush him.

However, he disappeared before he could reach it.

He took a deep breath and turned back to the others who were checking on the the bodies of the girls.

Naoki frowned as he checked on Sayaka. "They are dead..."

"What do you mean?" asked Ken in a alarmed tone.

"They are dead!" he shouted, then he took a deep breath. "Their consciousness was linked to those jewels, I am not sure how. But with whatever he did to them, they can no longer control their bodies, and I am not sure how conscious they'd be..."

Ken took another deep breath, this whole thing was quite stressful. "You sensed all that?"

"Yeah, after the Crawling Chaos started doing what he was doing to those jewelries."

Ken looked around noting the absence of one person. "Can you sense Homura-san? I am worried that she still hasn't come back."

Naoki nodded and concentrated on sensing her, and after a minute his eyes widened.

"Naoki-san,what's wrong?" asked Ken in worry.

"Madoka's in this world and there's a strong Shadow near her. I need to go!" he shouted started to run to the right. "You three take those three out of here, while Koromaru, Homura —who is also nearby—and I deal with the Shadow."

Ken wanted to say something against that, but he was already gone from the hearing range. Koromaru whined looking him and the disappearing figure of Naoki.

"Go, with him," urged Ken as she scooped up Tomoe in a bridal carry.

The dog barked and started to run after him. He then turned to Alice and Takashi. "You two take uhh..."

He tried to remember if any names were mentioned.

"Miki Sayaka, and I also don't know the name of the red haired girl," said Alice as she picked up the blue haired girl, which going by the process of elimination was named Miki Sayaka.

That left only the red haired girl whom Takashi had picked up.

They eventually left the Shadow Nest and headed to his apartment. They laid the bodies of the girls down on the couch.

And he went to contact Mitsuru. Unfortunately, she was busy with other Shadow Operative business, so they talked with Aigis.

They explained everything that happened, and she got quite worried about them, so much so, that she contacted Minako, who quickly made her way to the Shadow Operatives HQ.

"What is this that I have heard from Aigis, Ken?" she asked in a fake innocent voice.

Due to feeling fatigued from everything that happened today, Ken let Alice and Takashi explain everything time time, only correcting them on some things.

"The Shadow of all of Humanity..." trailed off Minako, "this all seems to be spiraling out of control..."

She sounded very worried. "I'll talk with Mitsuru about doing more about that barrier..." she sighed. "Anyway, what are your current plans to deal with this 'Crawling Chaos'?"

Ken frowned, he tried to think up ways to deal with it; however, nothing came to his mind.

Then Alice suggested something, "How about we talk with Philemon? Maybe he would be able to help us?"

Minako-san glanced at him from the side. Evidently, she was still not trusting this, 'Philemon', and if was honest with himself, he didn't trust it fully either.

"In any case, we should wait for Naoki and Homura to contact us," said Ken as he checked his phone hoping for a message, but there were none.

Minako-san sighed out loud. "I'll contact Theodore and Marie in the meanwhile, they may know something about the Crawling Chaos."

Ken nodded and then he felt his phone vibrate. He looked down and saw that Naoki sent him a message...requesting they come to Homura's place.

He also sent them the address. Ken was reluctant to agree—mostly because of the three girls in his apartment—but after some pestering from Alice, he folded and agreed.

And after wandering around some time, they found Homura's apartment.

They were let in by an exhausted Naoki and an also tired Koromaru.

"Wow..." muttered Alice-san as she looked around the Homura-san's room.

Ken also had to admit that the layout was certainly breathtaking, especially whatever she did to make it look like a Shadow Nest.

"So, what did you call us here for?" asked Takashi as they walked over sat down on a couch.

Ken noted that Naoki's cousin was also present. "Also should she be here? I don't think you need us all here to explain what's a Shadow Nest is, unless..."

Naoki only nodded. "Madoka accepted her Shadow and gained her Persona."

"Right. Is that why you called us here?"

Naoki shared a quick look with Homura. "Among other things."

He beckoned Homura forward, the girl in question, stood up and said, "I would like to come clean about some things.

"What I am talking about are Magical Girls and the system behind them."

Chapter 8

I rushed through the Shadow world as fast I could, dealing with the small Shadows in my way with my Naginata, and with Koromaru not far behind me until I finally stumbled upon Madoka.

She was running away from one of the smaller Shadows. I quickly scanned them. "Hastur!" I shouted summoning my Persona and blasting those Shadows away with a nuclear spell.

Madoka was gasping for breath as she almost collapsed onto the ground.

Thankfully I managed to catch her quickly enough. "Madoka, are you okay?"

After taking a few more deep breaths, Madoka calmed down somewhat and replied, "Yeah...I...just...Naoki...Homura-chan is fighting that Witch alone..."

For a moment I was a bit shocked that she knew Homura before I realized that they are classmates and also... *Witch I guess she doesn't know that these are called Shadows...but still something about calling them Witches doesn't feel right to me...*

I quickly scanned the area, and to my shock there was another boss Shadow where Homura was. She appeared to be winning thus far, so that was good.

I took a deep breath. "Right. Stay behind me while I deal with all these small Shadows, hopefully Homura will be able to keep up the larger one till we get to her."

I sensed that the boss Shadow was not far away from us, so I made my over there as fast as I could while I was protecting Madoka.

Thankfully, Homura didn't appeared to be injured as she was dodging the Shadows attacks; I soon joined her in the fight and we ended up easily defeating it.

Once that was done, Homura, turned to me and threw a glare in my direction. "Why didn't you take Madoka out of here? This place is far too dangerous for her."

"You...were kinda in the middle of a fight against a strong Shadow and I couldn't just leave you there..." I said, trailing off towards the end.

Homura didn't let up on the glare as she replied, "I could've handled that. Madoka's life is more important."

Uhhh...I am not sure what her actual relationship to Madoka is—but I don't really like this statement.

"Look, Homura, you're my friend, and I couldn't just leave you alone, and it really doesn't matter now. Madoka is safe and the Shadow is dealt with; this dimension has also already disappeared..."

Before I could even finish that sentence I realized something; this dimension did, in fact, not dissappear.

"Huh...weird...anyway, Madoka, we do actually need to leave right now, there may be a Shadow still nearby, and that's why..."

Just as I was about to say something more, I was interrupted by a really familiar voice.

"Kaname Madoka, it's now time..." came from nearby a familiar, yet at the same time an alien one.

Koromaru tensed up and barked at direction of the voice.

I looked at where the voice came from, and wasn't the least surprised to see a shadow, what suprised me was the fact that it had a similar to a certain someone standing behind me.

It was Madoka's shadow self; I quickly turned to look at girl herself, who was trembling.

And then Homura took a resolute step forward, and Madoka yelled at the Shadow, "Why are you here?! Go...go away!"

So, she has encountered it before...that's not good.

The Shadow's attention turned to Homura, and her yellow eyes brightened at seeing the girl.

"Homura-chan! I thought that I wouldn't get the chance to meet you while that stupid little girl still lives, but with you being here, I can now convince you to give up on her."

She said this with a finality in her voice, as if she wasn't looking for any arguments from Homura.

However, Homura got even more serious after hearing that and she...got a gun in her hand?

Where did she get that?! Why did she have a gun in the first place?

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to ask any of those questions as Homura raised the gun at the shadow as she asked, "I'll ask this: What are you?! Are you some illusion created by a Witch?"

Witch? Is she calling the Shadows that? It's the same as Madoka's name for them. Why is she calling it that?

Madoka's shadow didn't seem to be that fearful of the gun in Homura's hands, and she started to giggle, "Silly Homura-chan, I am very much real, in fact I am the true self of that stupid little girl."

Homura's hands tightened on her handgun and then she shot at the shadow's left shoulder.

As soon as the bullet hit, Madoka, the actual one let out series of coughs as her knees sank to the ground. I quickly rushed to her to make sure that she was okay.

She was still coughing, and there were some blood in what she was coughing up. Meanwhile the shadow stood there without a change in its expression, even after Homura shot at it.

Homura quickly turned to look at Madoka with a horrified expression on her face. And at that point I decided intervene.

"That Shadow is a part of Madoka. By hurting her, you are hurting Madoka as well."

Homura regarded me with a suprised and grief filled expression before her face turned neutral and her expression hardened. "You seem to know about these specific Shadows, so tell me how do we deal with them without hurting Madoka?"

"We don't; Madoka will have deal with it herself. Keep it distracted while I talk to Madoka."

I slowly turned to look at the girl I'm question, who was starting to get up from the ground, she was still coughing, but thankfully there was no longer any blood coming from it.

"Madoka I know that this can be quite scary, but that shadow is a part of you, and only by accepting that will you be able to defeat it."

Expecting a question about accepting the shadow from either Madoka or Homura, I quickly rush to continue what I was saying, "Now, I am not asking you to let the Shadow define who you are, but you will have to accept it as a part of you."

"Your sympathy is wasted on that girl; she's too weak and indecisive to accomplish what you are asking of her." came from the shadow behind me.

"Shut up!" I shouted at the shadow, which seemed to shock it somewhat, I, too, was a bit taken by how hard I shouted at it. "I don't care if you are Madoka's shadow, and her suppressed feelings and thoughts, I am not allowing you to speak to my cousin that way!"

The Shadow stared me in the eyes for a few seconds before it ultimately relented with a glare.

So I turned my attention back to Madoka, who was looking between me and her shadow with an unreadable expression on her face.

Before I could even comment anything to her; she stepped forward and said to her shadow, "Naoki said that I'll have to face you by myself. So, what do you want from me?"

The Shadow seemed to be somewhat taken aback by Madoka before she started to laugh, "Nice mask, you almost had me, but that's all you can do, masks. Deep down you are scared little girl that fears what I represent."

Madoka took a confident step forward, not the least perturbed by what her Shadow said. "So? Yes, I am scared of this place and of you, but that doesn't mean I am going to let that fear control me, if by putting on this mask I could help Homura-chan and Naoki, then I'll gladly put it on."

The Shadow took a step back, as it gritted its teeth, as it looked at Madoka with an enraged look.

Alright this is going relatively well so far...

"...do you agree to receive all of me then?" The Shadow angrily.

Madoka stared it in the eyes as she slowly responded, "Yes, I do."

Madoka took a step towards the Shadow and embraced it in a hug. The Shadow froze for a second before it let out a laugh.

It then soon disappeared and figured appeared behind Madoka; she gained her Persona.

The girl eyes widened soon after and she clutched her head while she fell to the ground.

"Madoka!" I shouted as I rushed to her side.

"Are you okay?" asked Homura.

She then looked up and stared at me with wide eyes. "I...remember...I remember everything...all the previous loops..."

What?

My black haired companion seemed to understand what she meant, though as her eyes widened as her lips started to tremble.

Madoka got up still shaking, and made her way to Homura, whom she embraced in a hug as the black haired girl stiffened.

Homura looked like she was on the verge of bursting into tears. "M-Madoka..."

"Sh...it's okay, I now remember everything that you did for me Homura-chan..." my cousin muttered into her ear.

"I hurt you, I couldn't save you, yet you still..." tears started to gather in the dark haired girl's eyes.

Madoka noticed this pulled Homura into an even tighter hug as the girl in question started to cry in earnest.

"It's okay, Homura-chan. I now remember everything that you did for me, and it was all partially my fault, I should not have made you make thay promise."

She muttered comforting words as she let Homura cry on her shoulder.

They stayed there lile that for around 10 minutes; that was till Koromaru baked, it was quite easy to tell that he was exhausted, so we hurried out.

I sighed as I walked up to them. "Madoka..."—the girl looked up when I called out her name—"...I think we should withdraw for today, and we can talk about everything tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, we're all exhausted, and..."

"No," muttered Homura in a low voice, "We can talk about it today at my apartment...it would be better to get the whole thing over with."

I wasn't sure about this, especially with Homura's state at the moment, but I soon relented.

Madoka threw a worried glance at her before she reluctantly agreed.

So, we made our way to her apartment and during the time to walk there, Homura started to explain everything.

Well everything about Magical Girls. How they turned into a Witch, about their one wish, Kyubey, etc. etc.

And she also revealed her nature as time travels after a bit of prodding from Madoka. I winced as she told me that, time loops are not a pretty thing.

"That sounds...awful...we should tell the others about that as well..." I muttered.

"Are you sure?" asked Madoka in a worried voice. "I don't really know this team of yours, can they be trusted?"

Before I could reply, Homura replied in my place, "Yes, they can be."

I nodded along with a smile, glad of the fact that Homura was saying things like that.

Madoka appeared to be still not totally convinced, but she acquiesced.

On the way there I texted Ken and the others about the change of plans. After some time the all showed up looking as exhausted as I was.

Once Homura opened the door they stared at the inside with shock. No doubt because it seemed to roughly resemble a Shadow world.

Ken was the first one to get over his shock after her entered, no doubt because he had experienced Tartarus before, with all the the weird shit that it threw at him.

We all sat down near a table, as we began our conversation.

"So, what did you call us here for?" asked Takashi.

Ken noted that Madoka was also present. "Also should she be here? I don't think you need us all here to explain what's a Shadow Nest is, unless..."

I quickly nodded. "Madoka accepted her Shadow and gained her Persona."

Ken raised an eyebrow at that. *Ahh...he's most likely suprised by the fact that a Shadows self appeared, and to be honest, I am, too, shocked by its appearance.*

"Right. Is that why you called us here?" asked Ken likely thinking about her wanting join, which is something I haven't talked with Madoka about at all. We really should have a talk,

especially after what happened to Sayaka and her gaining a Persona.

I, then, shared a quick look with Homura. "Among other things."

I beckoned Homura forward, the girl in question, stood up and said, "I would like to come clean about some things.

"What I am talking about are Magical Girls and the system behind them."

She then proceeded to explain what she told me with a few outburst from Alice at the turning into Witches part, and about the fact that, we, were, in fact, not fighting Shadows at all.

("Magical Girls, are young girls who make a a contract with a weird cat looking alien which calls itself Kyubey, but in reality its actual name is Incubator, it grants a wish for the contract. Once the contract is formed, the Incubator proceeds to rip out the contractor's soul somehow uses it to fulfill the wish.

"While doing that, it also transforms the soul into a gem which the contractor uses to pilot their now puppet body. Furthermore, Magical Girls now are required to venture out and fight Witches as over time they lose their magic in order to maintain the connection with the puppet body and—")

(Alice cut in suddenly, "And what happens when this magic runs dry?")

("I was getting to that. If the magic in the soul gem runs out, or if the Magical Girl starts to curse the world, then the Magical Girl's Soul Gem will break and transform into a Grief Seed and the Magical Girl in question will transform into a Witch.")

"So, is it like a Pyramid Ponzi scheme?" asked Takashi after Homura finished explaining

She stared at him for second. "I guess it can be called that."

I clenched my fists as I asked my next question, "And is there a way to stop being a Magical Girl?

"Not that I know of,"—she threw a glance at Madoka who wrapped her arms around her waist from behind—"that being said, Igor pretty much told me that I no longer had to worry about turning into a Witch since having a Persona passively regenerate the Soul Gems."

Alice downcast changed rapidly as she heard that. "That's great, now we just need to make sure that every Magical Girl can unlock their Personas, then I'll all be sorted! Say, Homura, how many Magical Girls are there?"

"How would I know that?"

Alice's enthusiastic look quickly disappeared. "You...mean that it's not just a local thing...?"

"No it's worldwide phenomenon. There can be as many as 100 thousand Magical Girls or as few as 5 thousand, but I simply don't know."

I frowned at that, Homura had not mentioned, so I, too, was under the impression that it was local, or at least localized to Japan. *That is indeed troublesome. The best source to get them Personas would be to inform them about the Persona Game and hope that non awakened Persona would also regenerate their 'Soul Gems'.*

This also means that best way to end this whole Magical Girl would be to have Philemon and Nyarlathotep agree to step in, and I am not liking my odds on that one.

"So, that's what happened with those three..." muttered Ken under his breath.

He, was, however, not very quiet as Madoka picked it up. "What do you mean by those three? Don't tell me..."

Everyone other than Homura glanced at, urging me to handle this. "Eh...we should discuss that topic at home..." I fumbled. "Hopefully, Minato will not be present..."

"Is that fine with you?" I asked Madoka, who nodded slowly with a sad expression.

I then turned to look at Homura who froze when I uttered the name Minato.

"Minato..." muttered Homura, and then I flinched back when she let out a scream and fell to the ground.

If there was anything that unsettled Homura more than even the Incubator; it would be Minato Kaname. In all her prior loops, he had never existed. Normally she wouldn't be that off put with strange new people.

After all, Naoki was also at one point an anomaly, but he ended up being one of her most consistent ally in preventing Madoka from contracting the last timeline he was in. However, something about Minato unnerved her to no end.

So, she froze time, in order to investigate this all; she made her way to the Kaname house at night, and there she began to look around in Minato's room.

It was completely empty; it was as if no one ever lived in this room, there was nothing beyond a bed and the same creepy chairs that were also in Madoka's room, for some reason, and just as she was about to leave she heard clapping. She wirled around to see the very boy she was investigating.

He was smirking at her, and her eyes immediately widened as she looked down on the shield to make sure that time was still frozen, and sure enough it was.

"How…How are you still moving?" she asked in terror as she took a step back.

Minato started to laugh at her question. "The flow of time is just one of the many rules that was agreed upon by us for the game. It holds no effect on me."

As he said this a golden butterfly flutter down and settled on the windowsill; it looked like it was glowing in the dark.

"Us?" Homura gritted her teeth. "And what do you mean by "the game"?"

What is he? And what does he mean by the game? Are the the butterfly and he somehow connected to the Incubators?

Minato's face twisted into a sneer. "Don't compare us to that parasite. It should be quite grateful that we have allowed it to live and harvest energy for this long.

"I'd hoped that by allowing it to grant wishes, one of you guinea pigs would wish for the destruction of humanity. But well that never happened, and we can't allow Kaname Madoka to make wish. If she were to make one, then she would be able to rewrite the rules of the world, and we can't have that."

Did I say that out loud…? No, I didn't…so, can he read minds?

Homura stared at him for a minute straight before she decide to ask something, "What are you two? You implied that time was merely a suggestion to you, are you some kind of gods?"

Minato, or whoever, or whatever he was, smirked before turning to look at the butterfly. Its antenna twitched, but other than that nothing seemed to have happened.

After around half a minute, Minato turned his attention back to Homura and said, "We are the sources of people's soul, the literal manifestations of the collective unconscious. Phil here," he motioned down to the golden butterfly, "leads those with strong hearts, while I lead the weak into the abyss. All of this is to ascertain whether the guinea pigs, which are also known as humans, are capable of evolving into something whole that can understand its purpose."

This further unsettled Homura, so she clenched her fists and she asked, "And what is your connection to the Incubators? You implied that you let it thrive on Earth."

"They are rotten parasites; we have tolerated their existence on this planet for too long. Thus, Phil and I have decided that after this small game, they'll no longer be welcome," growled Minato, "now what should we do with you is the question."

He appeared before her, and before she could even blink he grabbed her Soul Gem. She screamed as she felt like 1000 stakes have pierced through her with her Soul Gem turning murky.

"We should just have you transform into a Witch that would the most fitting end for you, would it not?" he asked with a smirk as he knelt down to look at her face.

The Golden Butterfly flipped its wings as he flew down to the Soul Gem and landed on it. There was golden flash and the murkiness started to disappear along with the pain that Homura felt.

The Butterfly flew over to Minato and its antenna twitched again. Minato let out a small humn as he looked at Homura who was getting back on her feet.

"Fine, fine. We'll just have her memories erased, so that she doesn't meddle in my plans and so that you don't lose a piece," Minato grumbled out.

He reached for Homura who leapt backwards instinctively, however, she was too slow for him and everything went white around her.

Homura gasped as the memories returned to her.

Koromaru let out a bark as fell to the ground.

"Homura-chan!" cried out Madoka who rushed to her side, and knelt down to grab her hands.

I was not too far behind her and the others also rushed to Homura.

We surrounded Homura as we helped her back to her feet.

We all eventually shuffled away as Homura regained her balance, though Madoka stuck close to her.

"Are you alright, Homura?" I asked

"Kaname Minato is not normal. He never existed in any prior time loop, he claimed to be one of the sources of People's souls, and he erased my memories."

I stared at her as suddenly something flashed in my mind. And I stumbled nearly falling over.

It was the suspicion I had towards Minato, the Crawling Chaos. He had erased it from my mind.

"Naoki, you alright?" asked a worried Alice.

I took a deep breath, "Yeah, it's just that I remember my own missing memories as well."

She frowned at that while Madoka shot me a concerned look.

"It's nothing major, and it's not anything that we didn't already know."

Homura then explained what her memories were. While explaining it, Madoka moved closer to her and hugging her from the side.

"Wait, what do you mean time control?" asked a shocked Takashi.

Ah, yeah, we haven't told them yet...

Homura frowned as she started to reveal her time traveler nature.

Ken was the first to speak up after Homura revealed everything, "You mean you have been stuck in the loop for years?"

He was obviously concerned about Homura, his concern seemed to double when Homura confirmed his question.

Alice also was quite concerned about Homura. "I would've never suspect something like that..." then she hugged the girl from her right side.

Homura stiffened when she was hugged, and tried to wiggle out, but Madoka prevented that by also hugging Homura from her left side as well.

Even Takashi, despite his prior suspicion of her, had his eyes filled with worry.

It seemed was not expecting this type of reaction as she was staring at the wall with a dumbfounded look on her face.

"Well, on the bright side, you have never encountered Persona users before, so with us, I am sure thay we'll be able to defeat Walpurgisnacht, and whatever the Crawling Chaos will throw at us," I said trying to stay posting and to brighten the mood.

This seemed to somewhat work as Alice let out a loud "Yeah!" but the others were still concerned about Homura in Ken's case, or were still processing everything in Takashi's case.

"I'll...be willing to keep this a secret from the Shadow Operatives, if that's what you want, Homura-san," said Ken.

"Really?" asked Homura in suprise snapping out of her stupor.

Ken nodded with determination. "Yeah...you're my friend Homura-san, and this secret should be yours to reveal."

She stared ag him for a couple before she replied, "Thank you, Ken, but I...do want to talk with Aragaki Minako about it, if you all now know this."

"Wait a minute, the team that betrayed you were those three, weren't they?" asked Alice suddenly.

"Yes, they were, I revealed the truth to them many loops ago, and they did not take it well. I am sorry for lying to you about that..."

Madoka wrapped her arm around the black haired girl's torso as she explained that.

"Nah, it's fine...I am just...still getting over the fact that you're a time traveler. Anyways, we should try to do something against all this. I am sure that Philemon will be able to help us, I think he was that butterfly that helped you."

Yeah the butterfly is Phil, but no; him helping us is not gonna happen. I guess our final option would be Reiji, he's still in Mitakihara, and he is an experienced Persona user. Eh...we'll see if we need his help, but I doubt that this is even remotely similar to P2, Nyarlathotep's was acting quite different.

We then soon all left as it was getting quite dark and went home. Madoka decided to invite Homura with us, and not gonna lie, Madoka can be really sly when she wants to be as she pressed close against Homura and whispered into her ear the invitation.

The blush on Homura's face was enough to gain some understanding of where they stood.

Well, I guess that explains their relationship...

It was pretty late when we arrived home; Uncle Tomohisa was clearly worried about us when he saw our state.

He went to us ask and/or demand where we were; however, before he could even ask anything Madoka told him that we'd explain everything tomorrow.

She also asked if Homura could stay over this time.

He glanced between them before he ultimately decided to allow it.

I heard a loud crash and when I went down I saw Aunt Junko slummed down t the bottom of the stairs, with Uncle Tomohisa helping her to her bedroom. I went down to help him.

Uncle Tomohisa shot a questioning look at me. "Naoki-kun, would you like to tell me what you two have been involved in, we are not blind."

I sighed as I drank my hot chocolate. "I promise that we'll tell you and Aunt Junko everything tomorrow."

He had a worried look on her face, but seemed to accept that for the time being.

I also went with them into Madoka's room. "Well...not sure how to say this, but Nyarlathotep—that being the main bad guy we'll have to defeat—kinda turned Sayaka, Tomoe?, and the red haired girl into Witches..."

Explaining sensitive stuff was definitely not my forte.

Madoka looked like she was barely able to hold back tears. Homura laid her hands on her shoulder.

I quickly asked a question, one which I failed to consider when we were discussing things in Homura's apartment, "Is there really no way to transform someone back from Witch? The way Homura explained it, it sounded like the soul was still the same..."

"The souls are the same. However, I have never ever encountered a way to bring them back," answered Homura.

"Well, there's still the Persona side of things, maybe something there could bring them back?" I questioned.

If it has something to do with souls, then Philemon and Nyarlathotep should be able to do something about it. And Nyarly confirmed that very fact by turning them into Witches in the first place, so now we just have to get Phil to do something, easier said then done.

Homura conceded on that front.

"I think we should talk about all this with the others at a later date, and with the Shadow Operatives. They may know something which could help us."

"Shadow Operatives, I think Amada-senpai also mentioned it, but what are they?" murmured Madoka.

Ahh...we forgot to explain quite a lot of things...no doubt due to all of us being exhausted and shocked by the existence of the Magical Girl system.

I quickly explained them and then I looked at clock and my eyes widened. I didn't quite realize how late it was, thankfully tomorrow was a Sunday, so there was no school, but still.

"Madoka, there still something I want to ask you," I said.

She, in turn, nodded.

"Well, just a simple question. Homura, you can anwser if you want to, there's no need if you don't want to, of course. Just how many loops are we talking about?"

Madoka shared a look with the black haired girl.

"Over a hundred," replied Homura.

I winced. *That can't have been good for either of them...I am not a fan of therapy—I have gone through it a bit in my previous life—but even I would recommend it here. Now the problem that remains would be to get a therapist, who knows about Personas, and I am not seeing any...*

Wait a minute, oh right, Maki! She's be the best in this case, far better than Maruki would be, not that I was even entertaining the possibility of contacting him.

That reminds...when we deal with all this, how the fuck will I influence the events of Persona 5? Eh...I will think about that later.

"Alright, I think we're all pretty exhausted for today. Have a good night you two. And Madoka, you can always talk to me about...well whatever."

As I went to leave, Madoka hugged me from behind. "Thanks for everything today...and have good night too."

I could feel myself flushing a bit as I quickly exited the room and after changing clothes, I flopped onto my bed and instantly fell asleep.

I gasped as I awoke in a quite familiar location.

"How are you friend?" asked Philemon except something about his tone was not sounding quite right.

It sounded like he was agitated by something. Not to mention that this whole is very unusual. Phil never did something like—taking you away in your dreams; he usually let that part to Igor.

Well, in any case, I wasn't seeing a way out, so I spoke up, "Eh...could be going better. You wouldn't happen to know about this Magical Girl system?"

The butterfly man nodded. "I do, why do you ask?"

"You wouldn't happen to know a way to reverse the Witch transformation do you?"

He stopped dead in his tracks and looked me in the eyes. "There's nothing that can be done to reverse it. Those three girls fulfilled their destiny."

Yeah, no, not buying that. Do I look like a nine-year old to you? You're literally source of souls, and Nyarly was able to corrupt, so you should be able to heal them. Also you already did that with Homura.

"Are you sure? Shouldn't it be easy for you to somehow reverse? You helped Homura when she she was almost turned into one by the Crawling Chaos."

He chose to ignore that all, and continued to speak. "That being said, there's something I wish to discuss. Would you like to make an agreement with me?"

What?! Alright this makes me 3% certain that you're not actually Philemon, and those percentages are L percentages, so basically you're 100% not Philemon.

"What would this agreement entail?" I asked, fishing for information.

"I will grant you heavenly strength if you agree to be my piece in the next game."

Oh yeah, hell no! Also 'heavenly strength', why does that sound familiar...Oh right! Nyarlathotep to Jun in P2.

(Nyarlathotep: The sacrifice on offer is yourself. Since you were praised as an angel, I'll grant you heavenly strength.)

Thank god, that P2 Innocent Sin was my favorite Persona game. And also thanks for confirming who you really are, 'Phil'.

"I will, unfortunately, have to decline this generous offer of yours, and I'd like to go back to sleep."

He almost growled, but soon calmed down enough to wish me a goodbye.

"Of course, have good day / / / / / /."

So the next day came; Madoka, Homura and I sat down at the dinner table opposite of Uncle Tomohisa and Aunt Junko.

Aunt Junko cleared her thoat as she started to talk, "Let's begin then, you three have some things you need explain to us.

"First, how about the fact that you have been sneaking out in the middle of the night," *that happened one time! And how did you even find out about it?* "or about the fact that you were truant last week," *that was also just one day!* (A Shadow trapped us in its world for 5 hour till we managed to get out. I am not sure why we even hunted it early in the morning, but Homura wanted us to, and told us it'll be a short in and out 20 minutes hunt.) "or how about the fact that a random young boy appeared in our home and we all believed him to be family, depiste the fact that we had no memories of him prior!" *huh, I could've bet that Nyarly would have just removed those memories from her, he did that with everyone else in school...*

"So, an explanation would be appreciated."

I shifted around awkwardly. "Right...an explanation.

"Well, for me it all started with a game called Persona..."

We ended up telling her most of what was happening in Mitakihara. At first they didn't believe us, till Homura froze time while she was holding then.

Excellent display of power, I gotta say.

And well, after that they'd agreed to come with us to showcase what we normally dealt with.

So, we ventured into a Witch's labyrinth with Uncle Tomohisa and Aunt Junko. They dropped off Tatsuya at a friend of theirs.

Aunt Junko stared at the changing surrounding with wide eyes. "I…wasn't quite expecting this…"

"Shadow Nests are usually less trippy than these are…" said Ken as he got out his evoker.

Uncle Tomohisa stared at the fake gun with an uncomfortable expression before he turned to me and asked, "So, how do you summon your…powers?"

"Like this…" I held out my hand, and the card manifested, then I crushed it summoning forth Hastur.

He took a step back, but quickly regained his composure and turned to look at the others. "Do all of you summon it like that?"

"Uh, yeah, I mean other than Ken, and, Koro-chan I guess, we all summon it like that," answered Alice as she scratched the back of her head.

We went further into the labyrinth searching for the Witch.

"Stay close to us, this one's not as strong as some other one, but it's still dangerous," I advised the adults in our group.

Then we arrived at the center of the labyrinth. Where the Witch hatched from the Grief Seed.

The others put on a defensive stand while I scanned it.

"It's weak to fire. Koro-chan!" I urged the canine, and he barked back in response and sprang forth into action with a heavy fire spell against the Witch.

It struck the Witch, and its Familiars soon started to surround it and protect it. "Ken they are weak to Light."

He pointed the Evoker to his head and the sound of glass shattering could be heard; on the side Uncle Tomohisa stared at Ken and the Evoker with wide eyes, and Aunt Junko had a worried look on her face.

The Light spell which Ken unleashed wiped out all the familiars. With the familiars taken care of, Koromaru resumed firing Fire spells at the Witch.

After a while we managed to defeats the Witch and the labyrinth around us disappeared.

Aunt Junko had a frown on her face as she glanced at Ken. "Amada-kun, why do you summon that way?"

"Hmm…Ah yeah, it looks a bit disturbing the first time. It's just how I am used to summoning my Persona, Kaname-san.

"This was the first method I knew since 2009. And this has also been proven to be the best method to summon Personas in the real world."

"You mean you were fighting these monster when you were even younger? Since 2009, that means you have been fighting these monsters since you were 11-years old?" asked Aunt Junko in an agitated voice with furrowed eye brows.

"Yes, I had been fighting Shadow since I was 11," was Ken's short reply.

This caused Aunt Junko to clench her fists and Uncle Tomohisa's expression turned serious. "Then—"

Uncle Tomohisa went to ask, but I interrupted him, "We should go to Ken's apartment, there Ken will explain it all of it further."

I shot a look at Ken to see whether he was fine with that and he nodded.

Meanwhile, on the side, Aunt Junko looked like she wanted to argue more about this, but after a second she acquiesced.

On the way there, Ken sent a message to Mitsuru, most likely telling her that Madoka's and my guardians wanted to talk to the leader of the Shadow Operatives.

We soon arrived at Ken's apartment, there he got to work to connect to Mitsuru and to talk to her.

"Mitsuru-san, you're connected." said Ken as the screen turned and showed the red haired woman.

Aunt Junko eyes widened and she let out a squeak. "Kirijo Mitsuru!?"

Mitsuru glance at her and Uncle Tomohisa, and Madoka asked, "You know her, mom?"

"Know her?" she nearly yelled, "my company is subsidiary of the Kirijo group."

Mitsuru let out a small laugh. "I am glad that I am easily recognisable, however, I am not here to talk as the CEO of the Kirijo group, but as the leader of the Shadow Operatives."

"Shadow Operatives?" asked Uncle Tomohisa.

Ken shot a look at Mitsuru. "The Shadow Operatives are the people who normally deal with Shadow incidents."

Aunt Junko looked between Ken and Mitsuru. "Then why don't deal with these incidents? Is there something stopping them from doing things?"

"As a matter of fact, there is," replied Mitsuru, "there is some sort of barrier which prevents the entry of Persona users, our normal agents are able to enter perfectly fine, but those with Personas are not."

Aunt Junko regarded her with a cold look. "And you are just okay with that?! Are you fine with leaving kids to fight?"

Mitsuru frowned at that. "I am not fine with it, but I don't have many options to help them, one of those options was to send them resources in order to help them, which I am doing.

"Besides, even with no other Operative there, I trust Amada and Koromaru to handle everything that need be handled in relations to Personas."

"Mom,"—Madoka grabbed her arm—"please let her explain..."

She glanced at Madoka before she let out a sigh. She, obviously still was a bit frustrated, but let it go reluctantly.

"Fine, fine," she motioned for the woman to explain.

"As I was saying, due to the barrier none of our agents with Personas could enter the city. Normally we would have left it at that, but Mitakihara is rather important to us, as that is the place where a rather high ranking Shadow Operative lives, and I am not referring to Amada here."

Aunt Junko glanced at the boy. "Then who are you referring to? Where is this Operative?"

Ken spoke up at that moment. "She referring to my guardian, who's one of the strongest if not the strongest Shadow Operative. Unfortunately, she was outside of Mitakihara when the barrier appeared."

Aunt Junko frowned, but didn't say anything.

"Should this incident with barrier have happened with only Amada, then he would have been asked to go outside of Mitakihara, and an investigation by us would have been launched into the barrier.

"Fortunately, he ran into a group of three students fighting what he persumed to be Shadows before it was even discovered."

Uncle Tomohisa looked at me questioningly. "Those three were Takashi, Alice and I," I quickly told him.

"...it was then decided that it would be better for Amada to stay and help them to defeat these Shadows—or as we now learned Witches."

Aunt Junko looked between the three of us. "Naoki-kun."

I did not like that tone.

"After this incident is dealt with, you'll be grounded for a month. And Madoka, you will also be grounded for that duration."

Huh...I was never grounded before. I wasn't mad or anything, logically, I knew that something like this could happen with the way we had been doing things, so I responded, "That's fair."

Madoka shrugged, seemingly also not minding it that much.

She seemed to somewhat taken aback by me not arguing, but her attention quickly turned to Mitsuru.

Before she could say anything, Ken spoke up, "There's still something we should discuss. I informed Mitsuru on some details, but Homura-san should explain it to her in a more detailed way..."

Homura shifted around as she started to explain everything.

While she did so, I kept a close eye on Mitsuru, and my relatives. Their reactions were certainly different.

Mitsuru kept an ice cold mask on her face. However, it wasn't hard to tell that she was angry at Kyubey, and astonished at sheer scale of everything.

While my relatives were shocked by the cruelty of this entire system.

"Akemi-san, do you know where this, Kyubey is at the moment?" asked Mitsuru.

Homura shifted from one feet to another. "Unfortunately, I have lost all traces of it. It almost seems like it is dead, but that can't be—"

"Uhmm, actually," said Madoka as she interrupted Homura, "he's most likely dead. I am sorry for not bringing this up yesterday, but Minato kind of killed him and called him a parasite which should have never been allowed on earth."

Mitsuru hummed. "Minato is the name that this Cognitive entity used while it pretended to be a human, correct? Ken mentioned him, but I want to make sure."

I quickly responded. "Yeah, and I also have something else to share."

I then told them about my recent encounter with Philemon—while leaving out the parts about how I discovered that he's Nyarlathotep, thus I was forced to just say that it was suspicion of mine and not a fact.

Thankfully, the others were convinced by my opinion. Alice and Takashi had no problem with believing that Philemon was evil by the way he treated them. Ken looked like he was happy that we were no longer listening to Philemon.

Whereas, Homura and Madoka were fairly neutral—having never interacted with Philemon ever.

Aunt Junko, however, had a question that she wanted to ask us. "So, you say that the being who granted you these powers is also the one who set up everything in Mitakihara? Why would he do that, and would it be safe to continue to use these powers?"

Ughh...good question. Well it could be that the actual Philemon is somewhere else also helping. I mean he did lead Ken to us, and helped Homura...Now the only question is where is he?

While I was thinking Ken decided to anwser her question, "This is not a unique situation. There was another entity which granted the power of Persona to a person as a part of a game, which this 'Philemon' did say that he's playing a game at the moment, so he's likely doing the same as that entity did.

"And also, nothing happened to the person who was granted a Persona by that being, so there's probably no reason to really worry about that."

Aunt Junko looked at him in the eyes before she sighed. "Fine, but,"—she looked at Mitsuru —"once this is over, I want you to run some tests on their powers, to make sure there are no complications."

The red haired woman nodded. "Of course, it would quite negligent of us to not to do something like that."

That reminds me...Hey! Are you really my other self?!

I called out to my Persona, and to be honest I was not sure what yo expect.

Didn't say 'I am thou, and thou art I' to you?

You're no really confirming or denying it...this'd be relatively easy to say...

I mean you no harm.

Uhhh huh...

Uncle Tomohisa spoke up after that. "Could you invite Amada-kun's guardian into this call? I have some questions for her."

Mitsuru looked down on a tablet. "She should be available in around an hour."

Uncle Tomohisa nodded. "That's fine, while we wait could my wife and I have discussion with you about the Shadow Operatives?"

"I am free for half an hour, so yes," muttered Mitsuru after checking her schedule.

We were forced to leave the apartment again, so that the adults could have their discussion.

We went to the same park where we went when Homura and Minako had their talk.

"So...how do you think this went?" asked Alice after she sat down on a bench next to me

"Pretty well all things considered," was my reply.

She hummed. "Still...I find it kinda unfair that you'll be grounded for a month after we deal with all this."

I shrugged. "That type of responses was expected. After all, they just learned that I was putting my life in risk for over two weeks now. Having it only be a month is the only surprising part. I mean just imagine what would your parents say, if they learnt what you were doing?"

The girl shuddered. "I'd be in so much trouble. Don't even bring up something like that.

"Eh...by the way—"

"Guys! We brought you some drink," shouted Takashi as he and Ken carried 7 cans. "Who wants what? There two tea, two colas, two orange sodas, and some water for Koromaru."

"Can I have the tea?" asked Madoka. Takashi handed her one of the tea cans.

"Eh...can I also get a tea?" I asked, and soon enough I was handed the tea a can.

Alice took an orange soda. "As I was saying, I think their discussion is going to drag for hours, and I want to go to a more...enjoyable place."

"I am not going to the Arcade with you," said Takashi.

"Awww..." whined Alice. "What about you, Naoki, will you come with me, please?"

I was tempted. Last time was enjoyable enough, we just need to make sure that we don't run into any Witches.

"Sure."

Alice raised her fists. "Great!" she then turned to Homura. "Say, Homura, would you be interested in a rematch?"

Homura looked at her with a flat look. "Are you sure? You didn't take loss well when we played last time."

"I'll have you know that I have been training in it for around a week. I will 100% defeat you this time!" Alice puffed up while she said that.

Madoka had a curious look on her face as she whispered to me, "Defeat?"

"Homura beat Alice's best score in an Arcade game, and Alice swore that she'll get revenge and take back her place," I replied.

Madoka brightened up at that. "In that case, why don't we 4 go. Unless..."—she turned to Ken and Takashi—"you two also want to come along?"

Takashi shook his head. And Ken shrugged. "Eh, I need to give Koromaru a bath today, so I'll go home once their talk with Mitsuru ended and bathe Koromaru then."

Koromaru whined at that reminder.

"Well, then, have goodnight you two," said Madoka as she waved them goodbye.

The Arcade was not as busy as it was last time. And Homura and Alice immediately made their way to Gun game machine.

"Naoki," murmured Madoka in a quite voice, "do...do you really think that there's something we can do to reverse the Witch transformation?"

I looked away from the two of the playing the game and focused my attention on Madoka. "Of course, there must be a way."

She chuckled. "I, certainly, would like to share your enthusiasm...it's just that in no prior time loop has that happened."

"But there were no Persona abilities in the prior loops," I countered.

"True..." she said slowly, "...it's just that I fear that even with all that, we wouldn't be able to reverse it..."

I moved my hand onto her shoulders. "I get that—but you should try to look it at more positively. I can almost certainly guarantee that there exists a way to reverse it."

She giggled a bit as tears formed in her eyes. "Thank you, Naoki...I really needed to hear that."

As I was about to comment something, a loud shout interrupted our heartfelt moment. "Nooooo!!!"

We turned to look and saw that Homura once again totally dominated Alice in the game.

Homura looked really proud as Madoka rushed up to her side to congratulate her. While I confronted a crying Alice on the floor.

Alice soon stopped her crocodile tears when she saw how late it was. "What!? Uncle Reiji is gonna be...not happy if I break my curfew! See you guys tomorrow!" she yelled as she ran out.

I waved her goodbye before I turned back to Madoka and Homura.

Before I could say anything a ring interrupted me, Madoka looked at her phone, then she spoke up, "Mama says that they just finished their talk, and went to pickup Tatsuya. She also says that we should go home if we haven't yet."

"Well, then..." I muttered, "...have goodnight Homura."

I went to leave, but noticed that Madoka was coming with me.

Instead she grabbed Homura's and was said to black haired girl. "Homura-chan, you can come with today as well."

Homura tried to pull away. "I wouldn't want to impose..."

But Madoka held firm. "Nonsense, you're never imposing on us, Homura-chan, right Naoki?"

Her voice was sweet, but it was that fake sweet which promised pain if I said anything contradictory, so I replied with a, "Yeah..."

She signed and relented. "Very well..."

We arrived home just before they did. And I almost faceplanted into my bed. *Today was exhausting,* I thought as I went to brush and take a shower.

Hopefully we can focus on the turning Witches back into normal humans tomorrow, I thought as I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 9

I awoke groggily, and groaned what hour it was. I wasn't late for school or anything, in fact, I woke up way too early.

It was 4AM, I closed my eyes and tried to get back to sleep. But nothing seemed to work.

So, I stealthily made my way down to the kitchen to make myself a cup of coffee because no way I was going to go through without some coffee.

But when I went I encountered quite suprise. "Don't you have work today? Shouldn't you rest?" I asked my very much awake aunt who was drinking something—most likely coffee.

She was also dressed she was just about to go to work for some reason.

She laughed a little. "I could ask you the same thing, Naoki-kun. Don't you have school today?"

I looked to the side. "I woke up and couldn't go back to sleep..."

She chuckled. "No need to explain, I am not your teacher."

"But you're my guardian."

"Yes," she muttered, "now come sit down, I'll make you some coffee as well."

I reluctantly did so and soon she came back with a cup of coffee. It was way too sugary for my liking, but it'll have to do.

An awkward silence soon spread after she handed my mug.

"So..." I started, trying to break the silence, "why are you awake at this hour?"

She sighed. "I suppose I couldn't go to sleep after seeing those Shadows? that you were fighting all this time and hearing from Kirjo-san, and Aragaki-san about these previous Shadow incidents."

Aragaki? She spoke with Shinjiro? I was a bit confused until I realized something. *Oh wait, she's talking about Minako, so that means that she's married to Shinjiro...*

That makes sense. "It would be certainly a lot to take in." I said in agreement.

She nodded in response. "True, true. But enough about that. There are a few things I wanted to ask you about."

I raised my eyebrows. "What things specifically? I may not be able to anwser everything."

"First, how are you taking our involvement in this situation?"

I pursed my lips as I anwsered, "You had the right to know, especially after Madoka was put in dangerous because of it."

"But you're not a fan of it?"

I looked to the side. "I would've preferred if you weren't involved—but there's no way to undo what already happened, and it's not like I could've realistically prevented you from learning about it."

"Always so mature," she muttered, "even when you were little you always had that mature air around you. You rarely did anything to get in trouble."

"Shouldn't that be a good thing?"

She shook her head nack and forth. "Naoki-kun, it's expected for kids to get into all sorts of trouble. Even Madoka got into them all the time, and she's older than you."

The last part came out in a bit of teasing tone. *Yeah, I don't really need to be reminded that Madoka is older than me by a month.*

"And you can anwser this, I am sure. The train accident which lead to your mother's death was caused by these Shadows, right?"

I was speechless for a moment. "...no. While it is connected to **the** Shadow. But it was not caused by Shadows, rather by a Persona user."

It felt...really good to get that off my shoulder.

She nodded slowly. "And you know who this Persona user is?"

I shifted around. "I have a prime suspect."

"And the others in your group don't know this all, is that right too?" she asked seriously.

"They don't," I confirmed. "How did you come to this conclusion, if you don't mind me asking?"

She shook her head with a small smile. "I don't. It was actually quite easy once Kirijo-san explained what apathy syndrome was. And after hearing all the symptoms from Aragaki-san, I concluded that the train was a form Apathy syndrome, was I wrong?"

I frowned, I have forgotten for a bit how sharp she was. "No, you were pretty much spot on. The only thing you were wrong about is assuming that it was caused by Shadows."

She looked at me sadly, before she sighed. "Why didn't you tell your friends about it? Neither Kirijo-san nor Aragaki-san knew what caused psychotic breakdown incidents."

"It would have distracted them from everything going on here. I'll tell them this info later once we deal with everything."

She scrutinized me deeply before she relented. "In which case, have a good day, Naoki-kun. I will have to leave for work now."

"At this hour?" I asked while rasing my eyebrows.

She smirked in response. "Well, it seems like my excellent work has caught the attention of my boss's boss, and she invited me to have a longer talk with and her associates.

"Who knows, I may end being named the next CEO."

So, she's meeting with Mitsuru and some other Shadow Operatives. Most likely talking about previous incidents or talking about what she can do to help us.

Nonetheless, I was still somewhat skeptical. "Still, at this hour?"

"She could only free up some time in her early morning schedule," she said as she went to the door, "so I will have to catch a train at 5AM in order to make it there in time."

She opened the door I felt the cold breeze hit me. "Have a good day, Naoki-kun. Also, tell Madoka that I wish her one as well. I should be back by the afternoon."

After school we crowded in Ken's apartment, where the bodies of Tomoe Mami, Sakura Kyoko, and Miki Sayaka were.

I concentrated on summoning my Persona, and I have to say that just calling it harder to summon in the real world is a major misnomer. It feels basically impossible to summon it, and when I finally did I was barely able to scan them.

"Yeah, there's nothing in them. They feel like puppets," I said as I wobbled down onto the couch after I de-summoned my Persona.

"There still must be something that we could do!" trembled Madoka as she knelt down to look at Sayaka's body.

Alice turned to look at me and Ken. "Naoki! Ken-senpai! There must be a way to undo this all with Personas and Shadows, right?'

I frowned, "If Sayaka and others were to be conscious, then yes there could have been something we could have done. But, at the moment I just can't think of a way to turn her back..."

Ken turned to her with a tired look. "As far I know, the Shadow Operatives have never encountered something like this before, therefore, so all out usual efforts would not work."

I tried to think of a way to make this work, Sayaka confronting her Shadow is no go, on account of Sayaka being well...unconscious. She also can't shoot herself in the head, so we can't have her awaken to Persona that way. Izanami isn't around to grant a Persona, so that's also not going to fly. Ripping of your mask would also not work for a similar reason to using an evoker not to mention we have no access to Metaverse Navigator.

Hell, I am not even sure that gaining a Persona would even undo this whole thing.

I, then, decided to do something which I so far I have rarely done.

Any help? I asked my Persona.

Miki Sayaka's and others' souls are currently stuck in the depths of the Collective Unconscious.

Uh, that's great and all, but there is not really a way for us to get there...

Suddenly my eyes widened as I had a realization, Philemon and Nyarlathotep.

Yeah that's not gonna work. Nyarly will definitely not help us in this case. And I have literally no idea where the actual Philemon is.

Then Homura decided to speak up, "What about Igor, wouldn't he be able to help us?"

Ken appeared to be far more trusting of Igor, but somethin about the appearance of Igor was not adding up to me.

Perhaps, because Igor cannot be around, as he is currently trapped with Yaldabaoth taking over the Velvet Room.

Huh...Can't believe that I forgot that, even with Akechi running around, guess I've been too focused on everything happening around Mitakihara.

Or perhaps you didn't intentionally forget, but was made forget.

True...But in any case, who, exactly, is pretending to be Igor? Yaldabaoth?

Before I could think about this harder, footsteps could be heard in the apartment coming from a bedroom.

"Who's there?" asked Ken forcefully as Koromaru started to bark.

The door opened and a man wearing a cloak around his body with a theater mask on his face stepped out of the bedroom.

The man then took off his mask; my eyes grew wide, and my first thoughts were, *Where the hell did he hide that nose?*

Before us stood Igor—or the person who was pretending to be him. Whoever the person is, they definitely pulled of the look.

I scrutinized him. *Well...not gonna lie, seeing him stand is definitely cursed...Also no really, where did he hide that nose?*

The others' reaction was far more hostile towards him. With Alice quickly brandishing her spear and Takashi taking a defensive stance.

In the meantime, Ken, lowered his guard somewhat and Koromaru did the same.

"Igor," called out Homura, "can anything be done to help Miki Sayaka?"

Alice and Takashi also relaxed a bit after hearing this person is the Igor person that helped Homura.

Igor held his hand up to his chin. "Miki Sayaka's soul is currently too corrupted by grief, anger and madness, there isn't many things that can be done to save her."

His voice was definitely closer to the real one. But there's still a bit of a difference...

"You sound different," blurted out Madoka.

"Madoka?" asked Homura, who was next to her.

Madoka fumbled to explain. "I-I...had a weird dream before with him, but he had a deeper voice in that dream and he had two little girls as his... servants?"

Igor turned to look at her and muttered, "Curious...I was not informed of that..."

My eyebrows raised. *Yaldabaoth was interfering as well? Great, just great...*

Madoka continued to explain, "Then in the dream black butterflies surrounded us, and I can't really recall the most of it from there on..."

Well that's also complicates things. So, Nyarlathotep attacked Yaldabaoth after he dragged Madoka into the Velvet Room. Well I fucking hope that Nyarly actually just dealt with him fully, but I am not that lucky.

Igor cleared his throat. "In any even, you, Kaname Madoka, are invited to fuse Personas im my realm. And now to get back on topic, there's isn't much that can be done to save your friends."

"Surely something can be done!" shouted Alice, "You, yourself, said: '...there isn't many things that can be done to save her.', so there still must be something that we can do!"

Igor stared at her with an impassive look on his face. "The cave behind the Alaya shrine leads to the Sea of all Mankind's Soul. All souls are born there, and someday return there. Their souls is about to undergo that journey.

"Should you wish to save them go to the Alaya cavern and work together. Though, do be warned, if you choose this path there is a high likelihood that you fail and become part of the Sea."

"Well then, we got nothing to lose," I replied to him, "in any event we are going to put our lives at risk, therefore, it should be for some ideals that we believe in, or for someone that we care about."

Igor stared at me for a couple of seconds before he said to us, "Only those who have been called to the Sea of Souls can enter that cavern. You have all been called there. Work together to save the lost souls!"

After he finished saying that he vanished from our view.

Wait why did that sound familiar...?

Suddenly a memory popped up in my head of Philemon "...**Maki Sonomura is about to return to that sea right now. It calls for you and for her ideal self. Now go! Only those who have been called may enter that cavern, work together to save the lost soul.**"

I let out a small laugh as a sly smirk graced my face as I looked at "Igor" *So that's how it is...Philemon...*

We eventually decided that we'll go there tomorrow. In the meantime we would stock up on all things we might need there.

Homura and I were the ones doing most of the stocking up, while the others discussed strategy, although I failed to see what they could realistically discuss and plan out.

"So..." I called out to my black haired companion, "you and Madoka?"

This is gonna be awkward as fuck.

"Yes, what of it?"

"You two are dating?" I asked.

Homura frowned. "We have chosen to decide our relationship after we beat Walpurgisnacht."

I nodded. "That's good,"—she looked at me curiously—"look, I am not gonna give you the Shovel talk. I can see how much you're devoted to Madoka, and I can also see that you'll pretty much never intentionally hurt her.

"And I can see that Madoka also really likes you...and well, I guess all I wanted was that I approve of you."

Homura hummed, but didn't reply. So, we continued to buy things.

After we stocked up, and after we delivered everything to Ken's place. We decided to do some training in a nearby labyrinth, as Homura called them, and during that training we encountered another problem.

"Madoka, what is going on?" asked Kamijou, while he frantically looked around the labyrinth. "Just what is going on Sayaka? Why is she missing?"

"Why do you think Sayaka has anything to do with this?" I asked carefully. I didn't really remember to know what my reply should have been, but it seemed like that was not it.

He narrowed his eyes. "Kaname-san, do you think I am an idiot?"

"No, not at all—"

"Then don't try to lie to me; I know that she is the reason why I healed—my Shadow revealed it to me."

Well...that's worrying...

I frowned, Madoka took that opportunity to speak up, "You're right, Kyosuke, Sayaka is, indeed, involved in this. We are trying to save her."

"Save her? Save her from what?" asked Kamijou.

Ken let out a small sigh and went to explain. And after he had finished explaining what happened, with the Witches, Incubator, and Sayaka's wish and fate; Kamijou's face darkened as he listened to Ken. "So, you will be attempting to rescue Sayaka in a day, right?"

Ken nodded along. "Correct, we are currently training for both the rescue and for our eventual fight against Walpurgisnacht."

Kamijou's face was serious as he looked Ken directly in the eyes. "In that case, allow me to join your group! I don't want my childhood friend to die when I could've done something to help her!"

Ken turned to look at us. "Does anybody have any objections?"

Alice shook her head. With Takashi following along. "No objections from me."

"Neither from me." said Madoka. Homura followed after Madoka by repeating what she said.

That only left me. "I have no objections either."

Ken smiled a little. "Well, welcome to the team then, Kamijou-san."

Kamijou let out a small breath of relief when he heard that.

"So what can your Persona do, and how exactly did you encounter your Shadow in the first place?" I asked hesitantly.

He looked to the side. "It was...an experience...I saw a black butterfly after I had a talk with Sayaka's parents, and for some reason I felt that I need to follow.

"After that I found myself in a weird world lile this, and there I ran into my Shadow. At first it tried to make me reject it, but I told it that I wanted to know where Sayaka was, and well after that he told me what happened to her, and even told about group who's planning the rescue her. You're that group, right?"

"We are," replied Ken as he looked over him.

What exactly were you planning, Nyarlathotep? Also gotta hand it him, accepting his Shadow without anyone present telling him to do it, is certainly something I wouldn't have done.

"As for what my Persona can do..." Kamijou muttered, "I can make my enemies weaker and my allies stronger I think..."

"Ah," said Alice, as she walked up to him "so you're a buffer and debuffer."

He blinked in confusion, not getting what Alice was saying. "Yes..."

"In any case, we should focus on the Witch for now," I said with a sigh, "also I would advise against following those black butterflies."

Kamijou nodded along. "Would it be a bad time to mention that a black butterfly lead me here as well?"

I frowned. *Just what exactly are you planning, Nyarlathotep?*

Ken shook his head. "That's...fine. We'll deal with that later. Now, we'll just focus on the Witch. You should accompany us."

We quickly dealt with the Witch and showed Kamijou some basic stuff in regards to Personas.

"So...Kyosuke. Can I call you Kyosuke?" asked Alice as we prepared to explain everything to him.

"You can...but I don't know your name though..." he replied.

Alice flushed in embarrassment as she introduced herself. What followed was everyone, whom he didn't know, introducing themselves to Kyosuke.

Once that was done Kyosuke spoke up, "Is it fine to use first names here?"

I waved it off. "Yeah, it's okay. We're a team, and...well it'd be kinda awkward to refer to everyone by last name with Madoka and I especially so..."

He nodded.

I glanced at Homura then and indicated that she should be the one to explain this.

She agreed with a sigh and started to explain what happened to Sayaka and what their plans were.

"You mean she..." asked Kyosuke, as he looked down on his hands, "...used her wish to heal me? And now she's a Witch because of me?"

"Ah...no, Sayaka-chan, actually wished for the ability to be able to heal everything and that..." Madoka explained trailing off towards the end.

"She still wished for that power because of me!" he yelled at her.

I saw an irritated look appear on Homura's, so I decided to intervene before she did. "Does it matter?"

He turned to look at me with glare, and went to say something, but I cut him off. "Look, she already made her wish, and there's nothing that can change. We should focus on the future instead of dwelling on the past. And in any event, we will rescue her tomorrow."

He took a deep breath. "I—I apologize for my outburst..."

"Nah, you're fine dude, but Naoki is right we will turn Sayaka and the others back to normal, so we shouldn't look to the past," said Alice.

"Thank you, Alice-sa..." he trailed just as he was saying the honorific.

"I think we should call it quits for today," said Takashi, "we should rest up and go to the that cavern after school is done."

"Is everyone fine with that plan?" I asked and everyone nodded.

"Homura-chan, you should spend the night with me again," said Madoka as she looked at Homura with pleading eyes.

"Madoka..." muttered the black haired girl with some reluctance.

However, that reluctant soon melted away as Madoka kept looking Homura in the eyes.

"Fine...I agree, but just today...tomorrow I'll go back to my apartment..." murmured and exhausted Homura.

Madoka, meanwhile, was smirking as she latched onto Homura's arm.

Honestly, Madoka, can you give the girl some rest? Ever since you awakened you've been glued to her side all day, every day...

We arrived back home, and I headed to brush my teeth, and then I hit the hay. We had a long day ahead of us, after all.

The cavern was not that different to the P1 version. Other than the fact that there was no maze to solve this time.

We entered a room black butterflies surrounded flew around. They all eventually coalesced into a person, a quite familiar person.

Huh, going for him again?

In front of us stood Nyarlathotep with the appearance of Hitler, he even had the shades on and had the Spear of Destiny in his hands.

Note to self: Don't get stabbed by that, I doubt the rumors have much affect at the present time, but I'd still want to avoid it.

"What the..." muttered Alice, apparently being weirded out by his appearance.

The others had a few more reactions, most of which were repulsion, disgust and anger.

Meanwhile, he smirked at us as he readied his spear in one hand.

"Should you wish to proceed, you must defeat me. But know that power of Nyarlathotep is very real!" he announced with a thick German accent.

"So, you're just a minion of the Crawling Chaos?" asked Takashi as he got ready to fight.

"No," I replied, "he isn't a minion, he is the Crawling Chaos."

Nyarlathotep growled as he took Uncle Tomohisa's appearance. "You just had to ruin the fun part, hadn't you? Anyway, why are you here?

"Didn’t, Phil warn you what would likely if you entered this cave?"

"Phil?" muttered Kyosuke in confusion.

Well, that confirms it 100%.

Homura stepped forward. "We were warned by Igor, but we decided on doing this anyway in the hope that we'll be able to return Mami, Sayaka, and Kyoko from being Witches."

He started to laugh loudly. "Really? Are you really going to throw away your future and the future of the city just to save three little girls, who made choices fully of their own free will."

"They were tricked by Kyubey, or were in a life threatening situation in Mami's case," replied Madoka sharply.

"Humans always try to get out of their responsibilities, you could have asked the Incubator everything, and he would have explained everything, but no!!! Instead of admitting fault, you blame it for your own faults.

"In any event, you already made your choice quite clear. Therefore, if you wish to rescue them, you must pass my trials. If you pass them, then I will turn them back into humans, and I will even grant them Personas."

I did not like the sound of **him** granting Personas, but this was out only chance.

"And what exactly are these trials of yours?" asked Ken as he readied his spear.

"Simple, you must defeat me, and then the three Witches in the depths of the Collective Unconscious, that's all. If you pass, then girls will wake up back in their original bodies."

Nyarlathotep then transformed into the Great Father. And my reaction was: ***Burn it with fire!***

It looked somehow even more hideous than it did in P2.

I quickly scanned it. "It's weak to fire and electric. Koro-chan!"

The dog barked and unleashed a full powered fire spell on it.

"Homura! Takashi!" I shouted at them.

They summoned Personas with fire and electric spells and they went on the attack.

I then focused my attention on our debuffer and buffer. "Kyosuke! Debuff Nyarlathotep!"

This all went on for 20 minutes until Homura and Takashi were starting to get exhausted, so I prepared my next part of my plan.

I scanned him to make sure that he still had the resistances and weakness and then I ordered Homura and Takashi to withdraw and for Ken and Madoka to step up.

The two of them alone with Koromaru were able to inflict even more damage on Nyarlathotep while Takashi and Homura recuperated.

"Will I go up next?" asked an excited Alice.

"I'd prefer you not. We will need some people who are not exhausted against three Witches. Which reminds me, Takashi, you will be navigating that fight."

The boy in question looked up. "Okay, I'll try my best."

Soon a final electric spell from Ken caused him to groan as he transformed back into Hitler.

"You have done well—but if you think you're able to overcome those three, then your sorely mistaken."

I glared at him. "We'll see about that ourselves."

"Of course,"—he laughed—"I can't wait for you all to meet your end!"

And then he burst into tiny black butterflies, and soon disappeared.

"Alright..." murmured Ken, "this went beyond than expected. Now we just need to find—"

Before he could finish his sentence there was large rumbling felt through the cave.

"I think that's them," I said, as I started to scan. "They're a bit deeper into this cave."

We ventured further and further and further. And then we saw an entrance to another room in the end of the long hallway.

"I think this is it..." I said as we stopped just outside. We could all feel that vibrations and rumblings were coming form there.

I motioned to Ken, who stepped up. "Okay, everyone, this is our chance to save. We can do this."

Not the best motivational speaker, but it'll have to do, I thought as we stepped into the room.

Inside the room whete three unnatural looking beings. What I persumed to be Sayaka's had a bit of a resemblance to a mermaid, Sakura's was a...lighter riding a horse...*Okay*

And lastly was by far the smalles, and also by far the weakst. Surprisingly, it was also by far the most normal looking one.

"So, that's Sayaka..." muttered Kyosuke, "she looks like a weird nonsensical mermaid..."

"Most of them tend to look pretty nonsensical," I replied as I got ready for this fight. "Takashi, focus on Sakura's and Sayaka's."

"Got it!" he replied with determination. "Miki's is weak to Ice and Electric."

Ken, Madoka, and I went on the offensive against Sayaka's Witch first. However, it seemed like it'd not be that easy as Kyoko's Witch started to attack us after we hurt Sayaka.

"Homura-san, Alice-san, Koro-chan keep her distracted," ordered Ken.

Those three leapt into action and started to distract it.

Thankfully, Tomoe's Witch wasn't doing anything dangerous to us, so for the time being we were just letting it be.

I, then, refocused my attention on Sayaka's Witch as I summoned forth a few Personas to set stuff up.

"Black Frost. Bufudyne!" the evil Jack Frost emerged from the card that I crushed and it went in with the Ice attack.

We then started to dog pile it.

"Kala-Nemi! Maziodyne!" the strong electric spell shocked(pun not intended) the mermaids Witch as it started to fall to the ground.

"I'm sorry, Sayaka-chan," muttered Madoka, "Bufudyne." The Witch struggled to move off the ground as the ice attack hit it.

It looked really vulnerable at that moment. So, I went in to finish it. "Megidolaon!" I shouted as I unleashed my most powerful almighty attack.

This seemed to do the trick as we all breathed out sigh of relief as the Witch form of Sayaka fell out of the sky, with Sakura's soon following after her.

I looked over to the three that had eliminated Sakura's Witch form, and noted they looked like the keel over at any moment.

We then turned our attention to the last remaining Witch.

Takashi stepped up, "I'll do this. Persona! Megido!"

The almighty attack struck and the Witch was no more.

I gasped for breath as bright light surrounded us, and soon we found ourselves back in the real world, in an all to familiar shrine.

"We did it!" yelled Alice as she tackle hugged Takashi.

Madoka had a large smile on her face as her arms intertwined around Homura.

I, then, looked over to out newest member. "How you feeling?"

Kyosuke took a deep breath. "It...was certainly a lot more stressful than I was expecting it to be, and unlike you, I didn't even do anything—"

"Nonsense, you have done plenty and did you parts well," I interrupted him.

Kyosuke didn't seem to be that convinced, but he let it go. "Right...well I am glad that Sayaka is safe now..."

"That reminds me..." I muttered while I turned towards the others who were celebrating, "we should check in on the girls."

Chapter 10

Loud coughs rang out in the house as Madoka woke up. She briefly untangled from Homura-chan, who curled up against her.

Last night they went back to Ken's apartment and Naoki confirmed that Sayaka, Mami, and Kyoko were alive again, and that their souls returned to their bodies, along with gaining Personas.

After that Ken informed them that they'll be moved a Kirijo affiliated Hospital in the city, which will look after them.

He also promised to inform them about everything today at lunch time.

She smiled at Homura as she went to dress up and to check out where the sound was coming from.

Thus, she soon found herself outside Naoki's room. Papa was already in there checking on the boy in question.

He also looked really ill, then Papa noticed her. "Ah, Madoka, you're awake, can you get a thermometer for me?"

Madoka nodded and went to get one, and she soon returned triumphantly with a thermometer in her hand.

She handed the thermometer to Papa, who soon started to check his temperature.

"Yeah, it looks like you have fever, Naoki," said Papa as he checked his temperature. "A very high one, as well."

Naoki groaned in the bed, but didn't say anything.

Papa cleared his throat and looked at her. "I'll inform the school." He then turned to Madoka. "Can you inform your friends about this as well?"

Madoka nodded.

"What's going on?" asked a new voice.

Madoka turned around to see Homura-chan in the doorway. "Naoki is sick," she said to her.

"Ah...well, I wish you speedy recovery then," said Homura-chan.

The boy blinked up at her, and muttered something that they couldn't decipher.

"Aww..." groaned Alice when Madoka told her about Naoki being sick as they ate lunch on the rooftop. "Does this mean that we'll not go hunting Witches?"

Ken, whom Alice sat next to, looked between them. "We don't strictly require his navigational skills, after all, you and Takashi-San can also function as navigators, as proved by our last mission. But, I was just thinking...how about we relax for today, and not think about Witches, hopefully by tomorrow, Naoki will feel better."

Takashi nodded slowly. "Yeah, I think we should wait for a bit while Miki-san, Tomoe-san, and Sakura-san recover."

Ken perked up at that. "That actually reminds me of something, I have been informed that they woke up this morning, so we should go to visit them."

"That's great!" exclaimed Kyosuke. "When exactly are we planning the visit?"

Ken hummed. "If all of you can make it, then I would prefer be after school."

Madoka visibly relaxed when she heard that, and she started to smile.

"Before the break ends, can...can I talk to Homura-san for a second?" asked Takashi somewhat nervously out of the blue.

Alice shot a curious look at him, while Madoka frowned. And Homura-chan looked at him critically before she agreed.

"So, why did you want to talk to me?" asked Homura while she stared at Takashi.

He looked to the side. "I suppose that I wanted to apologize for my early conduct towards you, I probably should have apologized yesterday, but I wanted it to just be the two of us talking. I thought that you were just pretending to be our friend and that you'd betray us..."

She raised her eyebrows. "You shouldn't, I was being way too secretive, and way too manipulative towards everyone in the group. I was shocked by how accepting everyone was, if were a genuine threat to the group, then you'd have been the only one that could have stopped me."

He laughed a bit. "Yeah, at some point it started to feel like I was the only one who was remotely concerned about what you could be."

He then shook his head and extended his right arm for handshake. "How about a new start for our relationship then? Being friends?"

She studied his outstretched hand for a bit before she shook it. "Let's do that."

"...so, how are you doing in school?" asked Mom.

She had got call from her when school ended and as they were making their way to the hospital.

The others were kind enough to stop and wait for her to finish this call with Mom.

Alice laughed nervously thinking about her grades. "Eh...alright, I guess."

"You're not causing any trouble for Reiji are you?"

"Mom! I'd never cause any problems!"

She laughed. "I am sure. How are you doing with making new friends?"

At that question Alice perked up. "Great! I have made a lot of new amazing friends!"

"That's **great,** I am sure that Takashi-kun is enjoying the fact that he's not your only friend anymore as well."

Alice narrowed her eyes. "What you mean by that, Mom?"

She laughed a bit. "Nothing, nothing. **By the way**, I am curious about something. Do you have a crush on someone in this new friend group of yours?"

Alice blushed as she squeezed the phone in her hand. "No! Nope! Absolutely not!"

She then hung up before her mom could tease her more.

But even still, her thoughts dwelled on **that** boy. *He's never going to reciprocate my feelings anyway...*

"Are you alright?" asked a concerned Homura to Alice as they made their way to the hospital.

The short haired girl appeared extremely gloomy after her phone call with her mother.

"Did something happen between you and your mom?" Homura further inquiried.

That seemed to snap her out of her gloom. "No, no! It's just...say, Homura how'd you go about confessing to someone?"

She has a crush on someone in this group? I haven't seen her interact with else other than people in this group. It could only be...Naoki, right? I mean she even invited him to the Arcade yesterday...

She shook her head, it didn't really matter whom she had a crush on. "I don't really know how to do that, you should probably ask Madoka about it..."

She frowned as she glanced at Madoka who was chatting with Kyosuke. "I...am not sure about that..."

So, that confirms that it has to be Naoki...

"I am sure that Madoka wouldn't have a problem with your crush."

"Nah, I agree with you...it's just I don't wanna tell this to more people, it'll make this awkward. I only did it with you 'cause you noticed my mood."

Homura hummed and she went to respond; however, before she could do that she was interrupted by Madoka shouting.

"Come on, Homura-chan, Alice-chan, you're lagging behind."

Homura went to look at the other, and sure enough they were, indeed, lagging quite behind them.

"We can continue this conversation later, if you feel like it," said Homura as she jogged to catch up with them.

Alice didn't say anything, but she ran up to them as well.

Sayaka stared at the ceiling in the hospital. Her parents have already visited and were ecstatic that she was fine.

But she did not feel fine whatsoever, not only did she become a Witch, but she now knew that it would have happened to her one day no matter what.

She was not sure whatever lie they were told, but thankfully they didn't question that much about what got her into a coma.

What would I have told them? That I trusted a weird rabbit and for that I was turned into a monster that ate people until I was rescued by Madoka, Kyosuke and their new friends.

Not to mention becoming a Shadow user now. Sure it was probably not as bad as Kyubey made it out to be. But the fact that people had to make a contract that evil Shadow to get this power was not making her hopeful.

It's not like anything changed all too much. I still got a monster inside me after all...

Then a nurse walked into her room. "Ah, Sayaka-chan, you have three visitors today."

She raked her brain trying to recall who may visit her today, but came up with nothing.

The three visitors soon stepped in. Kyosuke, Madoka and the transfer student.

"Why is she here?" Sayaka asked as pointed at the transfer student.

Madoka frowned. "Homura-chan was worried about you, so she came to visit you with us."

"Yeah right," scoffed Sayaka, "I bet she came here to gloat about how making a deal with monsters like Shadows is so much better!"

Madoka frowned even harder and Kyosuke stared at her with a shocked expression.

The black haired girl looked down at her on the bed with a critical look. "Why would I do that? You're saved from being turned into Witch, you should take some joy in that fact."

She glared at her and yelled, "Right! I just now have a monster stuck inside of me that's so much better!"

"Sayaka, the Shadows aren't monsters, they are a part of a person," said Kyosuke gesturing, trying to calm her down.

The transfer student, meanwhile, glanced at Madoka and asked, "Should I leave? I feel like I'll only make her more...aggressive, I would also like to talk to Kyoko for a bit."

Madoka frowned as she replied "I guess, but..."

She trailed off as she looked at Sayaka.

"I guess just try to return after talking eith Kyoko-chan."

The black haired girl nodded and left the room.

Sayaka looked over the two of them remaining. "Where are the rest of your new friends anyway?"

"Ken-senpai went to talk with Mami alone, and Alice-chan and Takashi-kun went to speak with Kyoko, and Naoki is sick, so he didn't come with us. But that's not important now, Sayaka-chan we wanted to talk with you."

"About joining that little team of yours? Not happening! I will never use a Shadow, nor will I join a team that uses evil monsters like that."

Madoka growled and shouted. "Sayaka-chan! We're not you enemies, and we're not using monsters!"

There were some tears coming from Madoka's eyes as well.

Sayaka was taken aback by Madoka's reaction, and nothing came out of her mouth.

"Why do you always have to be so stubborn and suspicious of everyone?! Kyosuke-kun and I are your childhood friends, yet you don't seem to trust us at all!"

Kyosuke looked like he wanted to intervene between, but wasn't sure how.

Sayaka, on the other hand, was too shocked by the way Madoka was talking to her to forumulate a reply.

"Hey," said Kyoko intterupting everything as she walked in to the room with Homura and Alice.

Madoka, who took a deep breath to calm down, shot a look at Homura. "Where's Takashi-kun? I thought he was with you?"

Alice was the one who answered her. "Eh...he went to get Ken-senpai to have a little talk together."

Sayaka glanced at the red head, they haven't talked since they woken up and she desperately wanted to talk to her.

"What do you make of their offer?" she asked Kyoko in front of everyone hoping that by showing that she'll not join either, Sayaka can convince them to give up on this goal of theirs.

"It's really good—I mean they just saved our lives and mow they're offering me a place to sleep and pretty much unlimited food all in exchange for joining their group and to fight Walpurgisnacht. That's a good deal; I was gonna fight it anyway."

"You can't be serious..." she muttered.

"Why not, Blueberry?"

"Are you really fine with having these Shadows, these monsters attached to you?"

"Why not? We were all going to turn into monsters anyway, so having control over them sounds much better to me."

"I feel like I should not interrupt this, but I'd like to reiterate that Personas are not monsters," said Kyosuke, whom they both ignored.

"And what about Kyubey? Do you really wanna team up with that uses monsters which where created by the Crawling Chaos?" asked Sayaka.

"Fuck Kyubey! He knew that we'd turn into Witches, yet he still kept creating new Magical Girls. And didn't you notice how they were against the Crawling Chaos? Besides being ridiculously stubborn are you also stupid?" Kyoko asked rhetorically.

"Bite me!" she yelled at the red head.

In response, Kyoko chuckled. "Oh I will do that and even more, Blueberry! I'll eat you!"

Kyosuke made a noise at the back of his throat, a noise Sayaka wasn't sure what to make of.

Kyoko then started to advance towards her, only stopping when she heard the sound of someone entering the room.

"Are we interrupting your flirting?" asked Kido who just entered the room with Mami and Amada.

Kyoko sputtered at that and glared at the boy.

"Mami!" Madoka meanwhile rushed up to their senpai and hugged her. "I was so worried about you!"

The blonde haired girl let out small grunt as Madoka nearly tackled her to the ground, but she immediately brightened and returned Madoka's embrace.

"Madoka, I am glad to see you too," Mami smiled as she returned the hug.

They stayed like to for minute till Amada cleared his throat. "Right, I am sure that this is all quite shocking to all of you. Therefore, I am proposing we have the discussion on Personas at a later date to make sure you're ready for it, and to hopefully include Naoki-san. Is that fine with the three of you?:

Mami and Kyoko nodded. Sayaka grumbled but eventually nodded as well, following Mami's example.

"How are you, Akemi Homura?" asked the Crawling Chaos wearing her face.

"What are you doing here? Leave!" she yelled at the thing.

She had come back to her apartment to pick up some things—mostly clothes—before Madoka and her went to the Velvet Room, and wasn't expecting to run into their adversary.

The being smirked in return. "I have only came to warn you, and that's the way you respond, my my, you are certainly arrogant."

"What warnings? If it's about Walpurgisnacht, then we already know."

An irritated look appeared on its face.

"Oh, no, I am not talking that. What I am referring to here is you and little old Naoki."

Homura stared at it for a few seconds before she asked, "And what exactly should the two of us be warned about? We defeated you, and we'll defeat Walpurgisnacht."

It hummed as it paced back and forth in the room. "You did pass my test, to even my shock; however, that is all meaningless if you cannot confront yourself. You two had been given the easy way through all of this game, and to a certain extent so have Kido Takashi, and Toudou Alice, but unlike the two of them, you two have been given the power of Persona in response to game.

"What I'm telling you now, is that the two of you will have to confront yourselves—and I am sure that this will force you out of the game. After all even **you** don't know what Akemi Homura is, and not to mention Kaname Naoki's situation."

She glared at the thing. "I said leave!"

It tilted his head backwards to glance at her. "Of course, I will be looking forward to seeing everything around you fall apart."

It then bursted into black butterflies and they soon disappeared.

She relaxed a bit, then she went to her phone to contact Madoka. She still needed some help with Igor and Persona fusions; Madoka always seemed to have better odds with him.

"Akemi Homura, I have to say you have outdone my expectations for you," said Igor, "not only did you forge genuine bonds with almost all of your teammates, but with some of them you're fairly high ranked as well."

"Are you saying that you thought she wouldn't be able to bond with them?" asked Madoka with a glare.

After Igor invited her, she started to bring Madoka along when she was fusing Personas, or handing in Grief Seeds.

"No. But I thought that it would take a far longer of time—something which she doesn't have—for her to make bonds with some of them, and by that I mean Kido Takashi. Though, I will admit, the time given to you is far shorter than it would normally be. And she still needs to make a bond with Miki Sayaka in order to have a bond with everyone on your team."

Madoka frowned as she turned to Homura-chan. "Well...I am glad that Homura-chan is doing that well then...I'll try to help with Sayaka-chan...

"By the way, Homura-chan, who are your highest ranked Social Links?"

"You're my highest ranked one, followed by Naoki, then Alice, then Ken, then Amy, then he group. All of them are at least Rank 5, the rest are under that."

Madoka frowned at that. "I am starting to get what Igor was getting at...Homura-chan all of my bonds are above Rank 5."

Homura-chan looked to the side with shame before Madoka quickly hugged her. "It's okay, I am sorry if I was judgemental on you..."

"No...you were right, I have been doing longer, and yet you still far better at this than I am..."

Madoka tightened her hold. "In that case, how about I arrange something for you to help with your bonds."

"I guess I'll agree, but what are you planning?" she asked Madoka, whose face lit up

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Minako let out a sigh in relief. "Well that's good. I was dreading that it would be like Shinji's coma or even worse."

Koromaru barked in response to that. They didn't completely understand him like how Aigis did, but they could tell that he was also glad about them recovering.

"Yes, thankfully, it didn't turn out to be that bad, but we still don't really know what to do with the three of them. They are still suspicious of us even with Madoka-san's being with us. And not to mention that, while they were thankful for not being Witches, they also didn't seem to appreciate being turned into Persona users, especially Miki-san."

Minako went to reply, but then the doorbell rang.

"I think that's Tomoe-san, I invited her here to have a talk and work things out. Do you think you could stay for the talk? I told her that a member of the Shadow Operatives will also be here, and I feel like you would be far better than Mitsuru-san for this situation."

Minako looked at her schedule on the phone. "I could manage around the next 40 minutes."

He then went to answer the door and to let Mami in.

His classmate sat down next to him. "Hello, I persume...that you're the Shadow Operative that Amada-san told me we'll have our talk with."

Minako looked at her critically through the screen. "I was not going be originally, but I'll do this. First and foremost, introductions. My name is Aragaki Minako. I am the field leader of

the Shadow Operatives. I was also not given anything to ask, so I'll do this my own way. Now can you tell me about yourself?"

Tomoe nodded to that. "I am...Tomoe Mami, a third years student at Mitakihara Middle School. I had been a Magical Girl for over three years. I like to cook and bake."

Minako hummed. "Good, good. If you don't mind, could you tell me what your wish was? We already know about the Magical Girl system due to Homura-san."

She's being very professional in this discussion, Ken noted.

Tomoe stared to the side with a resigned expression.

Minako caught this and quickly said, "You don't have to, if it's sensitive to you."

Tomoe took a deep breath. "No! It's...fine...I was in a car crash when Kyubey walked up to me and offered me the wish; I wished to live."

Ken immediately turned his attention to Minako and saw how her eyes immediately softened at what she heard.

"Alright..." muttered the Minako, "we'll not talk about that. Let's talk about something else. How many people have you seen make the contract with the creature, 'Kyubey'?"

"Around 23, many of them...many of them because of me...I-I am such...a terrible person! I have...I have made so many girls agree to a contract and then...and then I hunted them as Witches!" the blonde haired girl started to cry.

He quickly embraced the girl and let her cry into his shoulder.

Koromaru also immediately went up to her and started to lick her hand.

He let her get it out of her system.

"I...am sorry...for being such a mess...I apologize, Aragaki-san, Amada-san..."

Minako quickly replied. "No worries, Mami-san. I can see how this all was a affected to you, so I'll try to keep my next questions to a minimum.

"Can you tell me what you know about the Crawling Chaos, Ken reported that Miki-san talked about it in the hospital, and we want to know what you know."

Tomoe replied after a second, "I...don't really know much about it. All our knowledge of it came from Kyubey, and he even said that all his knowledge came from some Magical Girl.but what I do know is that according to Kyubey, the Crawling Chaos is the origin of all Shadows."

Ken quickly exchanged a look with Minako. That didn't sound to either of them.

"Very well, next question then. What did this 'Kyubey' creature tell you about Personas?"

Tomoe had a confused look on her face. "I...don't think he told us anything...unless he was having another name for it?"

An eyebrow was raised by Minako. "The beings we summon, what did it tell you about them?" she prodded the blonde haired girl.

At that, Tomoe, realized what they were asking. "Ah...he called the Shadows as well..."

"I suppose that it technically accurate," said Ken, as he scratched Koromaru, "but it's also misleading in some ways."

He glanced at Minako who nodded. "I got this. Shadows are born from all the thoughts and feelings of Humanity itself, therefore, they can be quite hostile, and their appearance can be also disturbing to say the least.

"That being said, I don't you ever encountered and actual Shadow other than Madoka-san's Shadow, which is a whole another thing, correct?"

She nodded. "Madoka's Shadow...was the only one we encountered, yes."

Minako hummed. "And what did 'Kyubey' tell you about it?"

"He said...that the Shadow is born from the evil thoughts and feelings that exist within a person..."

"That's...not totally accurate," said Minako, "it's true that most of the time that is the case. However, it's far more accurate to say that the Shadow Self is born from the suppressed feelings and thoughts, and/or even the memories of a person. Those suppressed thoughts are not always evil; however as I said previously, it is, indeed, ture most of the time."

Tomoe nodded weakly.

"Right, on to my next question: Homura-san said that she doesn't know how many Magical Girls are there in the world, is that true?"

"Yes...I would assume. I...also don't know how many there are."

"Alright, I think we're done for today with the questions. Ah wait, one more: Do you have anyone in this group who you can rely on and talk to? If not—"

"I can help you, Tomoe-san," said Ken cutting Minako off.

"—you can also talk to me," Minako finished as she threw a glance at Ken.

"I thank the both of you...I'll contact you if I need someone to talk to..."

Then she left the apartment. There was silence for a minute till something came to Minako's mind.

"So, Ken, you have a type? I didn't expect you to offer her company like that," she said teasingly.

He could feel his face immediately redden. "I was just offering her someone to talk to that was her own age."

"Now, now, you're being awfully defensive about this, Ken-kun. I saw how you comforted her when she started crying."

He glared at her, his cheeks still red.

"She's not a bad person, that I will say," she said in a more serious voice, "in fact, she a bit similar to you, what with being all formal like that, though, she's quite fragile and emotional at the moment, so do treat her well, but l am talking about you, so I am sure you will."

They soon heard a bark, and turned to see Koromaru snuggle into the spot that Mami occupied previously.

"I think Koro-chan also approves," she said with a laugh, the teasing voice coming back.

He glared at both of them then he sighed and got up. "C'mon Koro-chan it's time for your walk. Bye Minako."

The Shiba barked excitedly and Minako waved them off.

"So, who's paying for this, 'cause I got no money?" asked Kyoko as they entered shopping mall.

A shopping trip with all the girls was not what Homura excepted, but it'll probably the most helpful if she wants to do raise her bond with them.

Sayaka was still throwing suspicious looks at her, and she was, evidently, keeping her distance from her.

"I'll be the one who pays for this," said Homura in response to Kyoko.

"Cool," muttered the red head.

"It's kind of sad how Mami-senpai and none of the boys could make it..." muttered Alice.

Madoka frowned as well. "Yeah, it's a shame that Kyosuke-kun, had to perform at a music play. And that Ken-senpai and Mami, had to have their talk with the Shadow Operatives. And that Takashi-kun..."

Madoka looked like she was wrecking her brain trying to remember why he turned down her invite to come; she turned to Alice looking for an answer.

"He said he didn't feel like it," was the answer that Alice provided.

Homura somewhat doubted that was the whole truth, but she didn't speak out.

Madoka frowned. "Well, if Naoki weren't sick, then I'm sure he would've came along."

Homura somewhat doubted that he would have willingly came along as well, but she was sure Madoka would have somehow forced him to.

"I don't really care as long as I can back my my top spot at DDR in the arcade," muttered Kyoko.

Homura let out a small hmph at that. "As if I would allow that."

The red haired girl turned to stare at her. "Are you saying that the 'HomuHomu' person and you are one in the same?"

Sayaka burst out laughing at that name, and Homura flushed a bit.

Meanwhile, Madoka, on the side let out a loud squeak. "Homura-chan, you're using that nickname of mine as a name in the arcade?"

That name was a pretty old one formed in one of the earlier loops; Madoka insisted that she should use something else other than her real name in the arcade, and well that name stuck.

She reluctantly nodded to both Madoka and Kyoko.

The latter smirked as she ate a pocky. "In that case, 'HomuHomu', I challenge you."

Homura felt her bond with Kyoko increase when she accepted that challenge.

So, the two of them along with Alice made their way to the arcade. The short haired girl only tagged along because she wanted to continue their conversation after she finished playing with Kyoko.

The others in the meantime, went shopping.

"Heh, looks like I'm beating your score HomuHomu!" yelled Kyoko as she danced for the game.

Homura looked a bit annoyed, but otherwise didn't show any emotion.

Kyoko did, in fact, end up beating Homura's previous best score.

And despite her best effort, Homura wasn't able to overcome it.

"Ha! Take that!" shouted Kyoko.

She grumbled a bit in return.

"Ha! This victory deserves some treats, you two want some?"

They both shook their head.

"Well, more for me then," said Kyoko as she went to buy some snacks for herself.

Once they were alone Homura asked her question.

"So, you had a crush on Naoki?" asked Homura while she stared Alice in the eyes.

Her eyes widened at that question. "What? No! I mean sure he's cute, but the one I had a crush on was Ken-senpai."

Homura raised her eyebrows. "Really?"

Alice nodded. "Yeah, I mean just look at him. Government secret agent, handsome, experienced Persona user, not to mention that he's really nice and helpful, and Koro-chan is just so adorable, who wouldn't fall for a guy like him?"

Homura raised her hand.

Alice sputtered at that. "You don't count."

"Madoka also didn't fall for him."

"She doesn't count either!"

"I am pretty sure that neither Sayaka nor Kyoko fell for him either."

"They also don't count!"

Homura started to laugh at the exchange, and she felt her bond with Alice rise. She was now tied with Naoki at Rank 9.

"It's nice seeing you relaxed like this, Homura," she suddenly said.

Homura flushed a bit at that comment. "What do you mean?"

She fumbled to explain. "It's just...seeing you smile and laugh made me realize how much you changed since we met, you were so...not emotionless—but heavily guarded around everyone."

"It was because of you and everyone else that I opened up. But to get back on topic, how would you, theoretically, confess your love to him?"

She looked to ground. "I...I'm not sure—and even if I did who'd say that he'd accept. I see the way he's looking at Tomoe-san..."

"You think Ken is in love with Mami?" asked Homura with raised eyebrows.

If anything, that would by far one of the most shocking part of this whole timeline...

"I mean..." Alice trailed off, "he went to visit her alone and now they are having a discussion all by themselves. He was also so nice to her in the hospital..."

She wasn't sure how many of their interactions Alice saw, so she'll take her word one that, but all she saw was pretty normal.

Homura then hummed. "Why don't you try to confess your feelings to him anyway? It would be more productive then letting them fester in you like this, and he might not have even realized his own crush to Mami yet, so it would now be a good time to make him aware of your feelings towards him."

"You think so?" she asked hesitantly.

Homura nodded and Alice looked down on the ground in response.

"I guess I could...yeah I could!" she got more confident after her first reply. "I'll tell him!"

"Yo," called out a familiar voice, "what I miss?"

Kyoko was carrying some snacks with her. Alice laughed a bit nervously.

"Eh...nothing. I was just excited about something..."

"Sure," Kyoko muttered as she strode towards the other games, "anyway we wanna play more or not?

Homura spotted a particular game, one which she already had plenty of experience with. "Let's do some more."

If someone were to tell Junko Kaname a month that there existed a supernatural world filled with evil monsters, and that Madoka would be one of the people fighting against it; she would have laughed in their face.

It still felt weird even after she had personally seen it, and even after she had seen the affects of it in the form of the thing that was Minato.

She couldn't believe some of things that Misturu Kirijo revealed to her, about these Personas and how this power worked.

Nonetheless, she needed to trust in them for this.

Tomo had went to visit his family and to maybe get them to take in Tatsuya while the Walpurgis thing came to Mitakihara.

If that didn't work out, then they'd have have to in Kirjo Mitsuru and the Kirijo group to make sure that he'll be okay.

As she went to Tatsuya's room, with worry about him in her mind she saw a familiar figure in there.

"I wouldn't recommend screaming; they will not be able to hear you even if you do," stated Minato as he picked up Tatsuya.

"Put him down!"

He grinned at her; he did not obey her order. "Aw...but he's my brother, and I want to hold for a bit..."

She took a step towards him. "I said. Put him down!"

He hummed in acknowledgement and after a few seconds put the toddler down. "Tatsuya is such a good name, shame that it wasn't written Kanji though; I happen to know a good Kanji combination for the name, would you like to hear it?"

"I wouldn't."

He smirked at her then proceeded to act as if he hadn't hear her. "The Kanji for achieve and the question mark Kanji; those two would make such a good name, I know because I encountered few people with that name."

She glared at him. "Who were these people exactly?"

If she couldn't get him away from Tatsuya, then she might as well hold him up until someone else gets here.

He, in return, smirked at her. "I am glad you asked Mom. One was a fool who almost caused the destruction of the world with his sin, while the other was an arsonist who nearly killed two children and burned his face.

"I think those two would make such a great role model for him, wouldn't you say?"

All of this was said with a mocking tone; she was tempted to slap him right then and there, but knew that could only cause Tatsuya more harm, so she held back that urge.

He the picked him up again with a smirk. "Now what would you do if made sure that he'll grow up like them?"

"Put him down!" shouted another voice, a voice which was coughing quite a lot.

Naoki stood in doorway, and looked like he could barely stand up.

Minato face twisted into a sneer before he complied. "Aww...is poor Naoki-kun ill? You look like you could keel over at any second, and yet you're trying to order me?"

More coughs rang out as Naoki replied, "You...still listened, and...what's your...goal here? Are you...mad that we...won?

Minato hummed then he transformed into...a politician. Junko didn't really know his name, but she heard he was starting to get some fame as of recently, he was bald, he had a small black goatee, and wore orange-tinted square glasses.

"Fat from it. After all you still have to beat Walpurgisnacht, and I doubt you'll accomplish especially with those girls who earlier tried to hurt your. I doubt you'll ever be able to work together."

Junko looked to Naoki, and something about his demeanor changed; he clenched his fist then he glared at him. *Does he know this politician?*

"Oh and by the way," said the former Minato as he gestured to hid body, "this here is how your father looks like, have fun with this information!"

Naoki's eyes widened as he then disappeared into black butterflies.

"Naoki-kun," she called out to the boy, who was still staring at the spot where the Crawling Chaos disappeared; he looked like he was in some sort of trance.

She went on to shake him, which thankfully snapped him out.

"Naoki-kun, are you alright?"

As he went to reply, vilonet coughs came out of his mouth. "...yeah...just in shock..."

Junko hummed. "I can only imagine..." having something like that be revealed would, indeed, be shocking.

She then did something which on a second thought she shouldn't have—because of his illness; she hugged the boy.

He stiffened in the hug, but made no effort to get out.

"Naoki-kun, if there's anything you'd want to talk about, then my ears are open," she said to him as sheet go off him.

The boy nodded, but he still had an absentminded look on his face.

"Now..." she trailed off, "...you should go back to resting, you're still sick."

"Yeah, I should..."

She helped him to his room where collapsed into the bed, and soon fell asleep with a troubled expression on his face.

Honestly, that boy...

The game is not going in my way!

I told you that this would happen, Crawling Chaos.

Hmph...I thought you would pick who was unaware of the events of Mikage-cho and Sumaru.

Why would I do that? You gave me free reign after all.

Our agreement is soon coming to an end.

I am well aware.

Hmm...you also awakened those three girls early in the hospital.

They became my pieces after they managed to rescue them, therefore I could do that.

...

In any event, Akemi Homura's and Kaname Naoki's trial is coming up. I am thinking that I will use my last Shadow self that I have access to as well. That Sayaka girl seems to be best target thus far.

All I have to say is that I have my confidence in them.

In any case, keep the Velvet Room's attendants in line, and prevent them for revealing anything.

That is proving to be a troublesome, considering the state of the Velvet Room. Something which could have been changed if we agreed to it.

Now it's my turn to ask: Why would I agree to helping you?

Hmmm...

...

...

...

Chapter 11

Kyosuke looked at assembled people in the opera. To this day he still couldn't believe that somehow both his hands and legs have healed up. Not to mention that in some miracle he didn't even lose any skill in playing the violin.

He soon finished his play and bowed to the people applauding. Then he exited the stage and after a few minutes he headed home and promptly went to sleep, he still had school to attend after all.

However, on the way back home be got distracted by a black butterfly, something about it seemed very weird to him, and he felt like he should follow it.

Then, the world around him twisted. It felt like he was in a painting of some sorts.

He looked fearfully as everything around seemed to smear into paint.

Then he heard loud clapping. He swiftly turned around to see...himself?

The person there looked exactly like him, except he had yellow eyes. "Well, well, who do we have, if it isn't Mr. Useless!"

"What are you? Where am I?" he asked in desperation as he looked around.

The doppelganger looked around distastefully. "I am you, your other self. As fort this place, I suppose the locals call it a Labyrinth, it's disgusting thing really, but that's not what I am here for."

"And...what are you here for?" he asked hesitantly.

It stared back at with grin, an evil grin. "Oh nothing much, other than tell you how useless you are!"

He flinched back a bit. "What do you mean?"

It walked up to him. "Precisely that. You are useless you can't do anything for those who helped you, and you can't even help poor little Sayaka!"

"Where is Sayaka? Do you know what happened to her?"

"Sayaka is in the depth of the Collective Unconscious, her soul will soon return to where all souls came from."

Kyosuke could feel his heart shattering at that. "What...?"

"That's right! She did everything for you, healing your leg and arm, always being there for you and now she will die because of that!"

"Sayaka did that all for me?" he couldn't believe what he was hearing from his supposed other self.

"That's right! She was in love with you and did everything for you, and you have not repaid her in any way, my what terrible friend you are!"

He clenched his fists tight. "I...will help Sayak!"

His other self smirked at him. "And how will you achieve, you are useless, you can't do anything."

He glared at him. "Then I will become someone who is not useless!"

The doppelganger stared back at him. "Do you, then, accept your faults as well?"

Kyosuke's gaze was unyielding. "Yes! I made mistakes, but I want to help Sayaka!"

He hummed. "Very well, **I am thou, and thou art I!**"

Immediately he felt pain in his head, that pain quickly left as he felt the world around him rerorient.

He now understood what he needed to do. He will be the one saving Sayaka this time.

It was three days since he gained his Persona and joined Madoka's group, and it had been just a day since they rescued Sayaka.

He was feeling really grateful for Ken-senpai's group and he called Madoka to the side, after Ken went to deal with everything in regards to Sayaka and the others. He wanted to speak her about a certain thing.

"Madoka, can I ask you something?" he asked the pink haired girl.

She blinked at him. "Sure, Kyosuke, you already did, but you can ask another one as well."

He threw an unimpressed look at her before he sighed and moved on. "Anyway, can you tell me how I should go about asking someone out?"

Madoka flushed a bit. "Why me?"

"You're the only one in the teak who is dating someone, well you and Homura-san, but I don't know her as well as I do you..."

Madoka hummed to herself. "Well...who do you want to ask out?"

Kyosuke shifted from one foot to another. "Sayaka...I want to ask her out after all she did for me...I think my Shadow also confirmed that she's in love with me..."

Madoka eyes lit up, but there was some reservation there as well.

"Hmm...well I am sure that Sayaka would appreciate and reciprocate your feelings as well...it's just may not be the best time for her..."

Kyosuke frowned. "I guess I can wait till she wakes up, but there's something else I would to ask as well."

Madoka nodded for him to continue.

"Were Sayaka and I in any relationship in one of the prior...timelines?" he still felt bit weird about the fact that Madoka and Homura both were essentially time travelers, but maybe he could use this to her advantage.

Madoka frowned at his question. "A few times...but most of the time you were not..."

Kyosuke felt himself relax at that. Even if it was only a few times that he ended up dating Sayaka that still meant he had a chance with her.

"Why only a few time?" he asked.

"Mostly because she refused to ask you out after she healed you, most of the time by that point she viewed herself as a zombie due to her Soul Gem being...well her Soul. The few time she did ask you out were in timelines she never learned that fact."

He nodded. *So, I will not have to worry about that here, considering she no longer has to worry about that.*

"Uhmmm...I have one more question, Madoka. Can you tell me how often Sayaka, and Kyoko-san get together?"

Madoka appeared to be deep in thought. "About 50%, sorry if that's upesting to you..."

He quickly deflated at that, but it didn't dissapoint him as much as he would have expected it to.

"Well, thanks for everything, Madoka, I have a practice today, so see you." He waved at the girl a bit dejectedely, who waved back at him.

Kido Takashi wasn't certain what to do in this situation. He had told his dad that he didn't really like Homura back when he was suspicious of her, but now here she was, because Alice invited her here.

Speaking of Dad, something about him seemed...strange, Takashi didn't quite know what that could be, but it felt like something was keeping Takashi from learning something significant.

He chalked it up to Persona stuff. *I really should Naoki some more about this all...*

Dad looked Homura over for a second before he allowed her in, and then Alice dragged them to her room where she stayed.

"So what exactly are we doing?" he asked the two girls.

"Simple," said Alice with a grin, "Homura, is planning to go on a date with Madoka in the future after we defeat Walpurgisnacht, so we have to help her."

He raised his eyebrows, Homura and Madoka was no suprise to him, he wasn't blind, but the fact that she supposedly needed was. "Why would Homura need help with that?"

Alice went to answer, "It's because—"

However she was cut off by Homura, "It's because...I need your recommendations about places here."

"You don't have some already?" he asked.

"I do, the problem is that I want to suprise Madoka with something she never experienced before, and all the places that I know, Madoka had been there already."

Takashi hummed. "I see now why you picked us. In that case, how about you tell us about all the places you have been to? That way we can suggest some where you haven't been."

Homura nodded, and Takashi sweatdropped when she pulled out a list from her pocket. She then started listening every single place they had ever been to.

Isn't this a bit too much? I don't think Madoka would be mad if you took too her to a place that you have only been to once or twice before.

It seemed like Alice thought the same ash coughed aloud. "Maybe...you should scale that back to places you have gone to more than just once, otherwise I don't we can be much help to you."

Homura looked not sure about that, but acquiesced to what Alice said.

"Very well, in that case, I'll narrow down the list, in the meantime why don't we talk about Alice's crush?"

"You have a crush on someone in the group?" Takashi asked a bit shocked as he turned to Alice whose face started to turn red.

"Homura, he wasn't supposed to know that!"

Homura slowly blinked as she looked between them. "I apologize, I thought that he knew..."

She trailed as an awkward silence enveloped the room, in which no one was quite sure what to say.

"It's Naoki isn't it?" he asked suddenly breaking that silence.

"Why did the both of you think it was him? It's Ken-senpai!" she whined.

Takashi raised his eyebrows. "Really? I could have sworn that, nevermind."

She pouted at him. "Well, it's Ken-senpai!"

Homura glanced between them before she turned to Takashi and said, "I thought you'd have more reaction than that, maybe being protective..."

"Her being interested in someone else means she'll have less time to annoy me."

Alice gasped in a fake scandalized way. "How heartless! And I thought we were good friends!"

He threw a flat look at her.

Meanwhile, Homura looked between with a small smile on her face. "I don't think I fully understand your relationship."

"It's simple, Takashi's my best friend!", "She's really annoying!" they both said earnestly at the same time.

Homura laughed a little at that.

It felt kind of weird to see Homura like that, but it felt good to see her more expressive.

She definitely deserves being happy after everything she's been through.

He then sighed. "Right, I think we should focus back on Homura, unless you want to talk about it."

She flushed a bit at that. "No! Just...just focus on Homura, please..."

*Honestly, she's always so handful...*Takashi was already taking a pity on the person who'll go out with her, be it Ken, or Naoki, or anyone else.

"Hitomi-chan, are you alright?" asked a voice snapping the girl in question out from her stupor, she looked up and realized that it was break.

She turned to Madoka who asked her. "Yeah...I was juts worried about Sayaka, she had just been admitted to the hospital, and I..."

Madoka waved her worries away. "I am sure that Sayaka-chan will be alright."

Something had changed with Madok a few days ago, it almost looked like she was far older at times.

She also started to go out with Akemi-san, which was not something Hitomi expected at all. She was sure that if Madoka were to go out with a girl it would have been Sayaka.

Nevertheless, she could tell that they both obviously cared about each other, so she was content to see where it will go. *I will also have to retire the girls can't love girls joke...*

Madoka also started to hang out with Naoki's friends, Madoka tried to invite her to come along with them a few times, but she was unfortunately too bust with Tea ceremony classes.

But now that Kyosuke was also hanging out with them, she tried to free up some time in her schedule.

She had wanted to ask him out, but she also didn't want to ruin her friendship with Sayaka, so she planned to allow her to ask him out, but now that she's in the hospital, Hitomi had to put that on hold.

"Madoka! Homura! Kyosuke!" yelled a voice of the short brown haired girl, whom Naoki was friends with as she entered the room.

Behind her was the tall boy, Hitomi was kind of embarrassed to say that she didn't know their names.

"Do you wanna come with us onto the roof?" asked the girl as she walked up to Hitomi's friend.

Madoka eyes lit up. "Yeah, I'd love to, but..."

She glanced at Hitomi. "Could Hitomi-chan come along as well?"

"Sure!" said the girl impulsively, her friend seemed to be somewhat more reluctant, but he didn't speak up.

So, she followed then to the roof, where

a few people were already

"Hello, Hitomi-San," Naoki greeted her, and honestly, Hitomi was kind of suprised that he remembered her name.

They barely interacted when they were younger, and they haven't interacted at all since he came back.

She greeted him back with a small smile while the other boy on the roof sent a curious look at her.

He was still showing signs that he was still a bit sick though, especially with how weak his voice was.

"Ah, Ken-senpai, I invited a friend of mine, I hope it's no problem," said Madoka to the Student Council President, the boy just nodded in response to that.

Madoka then realized that not everybody here knew Hitomi, nor did she know everyone here so they introduced themselves to each other, with Amada-senpai being the last one to do that.

Hitomi honestly wasn't sure how Madoka made friends with the Student Council President, but she needed to put on her best mask, she could not afford to be terribly informal and rude infront of—

"Hey, Ken-senpai, can I see what ya got for lunch?" asked Toudou-san.

How informal! Did no one teach this girl manners?!

"Sure," he replied to her.

Toudou-san leaned in close to see his bento box.

"Can we trade some?" she asked.

Hitomi stared at them dumbfounded. She could not quite believe how the girl was behaving in front of not only their Senpai, but the Student Council President.

Amada-senpai, looked at her with some curiosity before he shrugged again and handed her the box.

She took a few things out, and then

"Hmm...It's really good, did you make them yourself?" she asked after swallowing.

"Yeah, Shinjiro, is much better at preparing it and making it than I am, but I am far better it than when I was younger."

"Shinjiro-san's that scary looking man in the photos in your place?" Toudou-san asked.

She has been to his home?! Are they, perchance, dating?!

"Hitomi-san," said a voice interrupting her thoughts, the voice of Kido-san, "what do you do in your free time, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Ah...unfortunately, I don't have much free time in my schedule, I have Piano, Dance and Tea ceremony classes after school," she replied.

"You must be really diligent, then, unlike someone I know." He threw a deliberate glance at Toudou-san.

Toudou-san squawked in response to that comment. "Who you calling lazy?!"

She then turned to Naoki. "Naoki, do something!"

He threw a flat stare at her. "Why me, specifically?"

"C'mon just do something!"

He sighed in mock exhaustion. "Takashi, don't call Alice lazy, during the time I have known her, she has alway been really proactive, now if you called her too energetic that would be correct."

"What's that supposed to mean? When did this turn into a pick on me day?" she whined playfully.

Akemi-san, went to comfort her, patting her shoulder, while Madoka giggled at the exchange.

They all fell into chatter after that. Even Kyosuke, who up to this point hadn't said a single word joined in.

Hitomi felt like kind of an outsider to this group, and it felt a bit confusing to see Madoka interact like that with anyone other than her and Sayaka.

It felt like she was being left behind, and Hitomi didn't like that feeling. Nevertheless, Hitomi knew realistically that the day they will go their separate ways was bound to come up. *Maybe we will not even be friends by the time we go to High School, that would be terribly—*

"Hitomi-chan," called out Madoka's voice interrupting her thoughts, "would you like to with Homura-chan and I to go shopping, if you have e free time, of course."

She nodded quickly, feeling the smile return to her face, thankfully, she managed to clear up time in her schedule.

I think I was too quick to judge her, if Madoka had anything to say about it, then we'll never stop being friends.

Chapter 12

Being so sick that I couldn't walk was not fun. Not to mention the revelation of **him** being my father.

Really just what I need that Fascists piece of shit being my father, just who could have been worse, Big Yahu maybe?

Wow, I can't believe that I am even entertaining the thought of a man committing a Genocide being just a bit worse than my actual father...

Well, I mean Nyarlathotep could be lying, but he wouldn't lie about something that could be disproven quite easily, and I am sure that this could be as well.

This also brought about some unpleasant realization. *Oh god! Akechi is my half brother!*

I will have to deal with that all at a later date, preferably around 2015–2016. Now I should focus on other thing.

Now on the bright side, I managed to catch up on quite a lot of books that I planned to read, not as much as I would've liked, but it's still a start.

I had kinda neglected it due to dealing with Witches prior, but now I was able to focus on it, mostly, and finished Cards on the Table by Agatha Christie.

Gotta say, even though I have no idea how to play Bridge, I should have expected the suspect to be—

My thoughts were interrupted by knocking on my door.

"Naoki-kun, can we come in?" asked Madoka from the other side. It was getting dark so it made sense for them to be back.

"Yeah, sure."

I had a vague idea I knew who she meant by the "we".

The two of them soon opened and passed through it. Madoka

Homura sat down on one of the creepy chairs in my room while Madoka was standing. "Naoki, are tou feeling well?"

I looked at her in the eyes. "Yeah."

"In that case, there's something I want to discuss with you. The Crawling Chaos had talked to me."

I raised an eyebrow. "Nothing too bad happened I hope."

"No nothing really, but he said that he was warning me about how I soon will face my self...?"

That sounds like he was telling her that she will soon encounter her Shadow Self.

"I currently persume that he was talking about the Shadow Self, would you agree?" she asked.

"Yes..." I muttered, "that would make the most sense, and I am not looking forward to it."

To say I am not looking forward to it would be an understatement, I thought to myself, *I would absolutely despise it.*

Nevertheless, I didn't see any way out of this whole thing, so I'll try to accept my Shadow, hopefully it'll work.

"Hello," I said to all the new members of the group as we gather in Ken's apartment, we gathered a bit late, due to Madoka spending time with Homura and Hitomi.

Tomoe, seemed to be glad about something, Sakura, on the other hand, was grinning at me with a gleaming look in her eyes.

And Sayaka, was...Sayaka; she looked very distrustful of almost everyone present.

"So...did you all join our group?" I asked them.

"We did," answered the red head, "well, to be more accurate, Mami and I did."

She then pointed at Sayaka. "This idiot refused to join, and I don't know why she's even here.'

Sayaka glared at her. "I am here because I don't want to give up on you and Mami!"

I side eyed her. "Right...well sure come along..."

"Are you an idiot too like Pinkie here? She shouldn't come along." Sakura said.

Homura glared at her at that remark.

"I'll have you know, my little grey cells are of adequate quality and quantity," I replied.

Sakura stared at me with a confused look before shrugging and moving on.

"So can anyone tell me what was discussed, Alice sent quite a lot of messages. Most of which I had no idea what to make of."

Takashi winced at the side. "Ah, yeah, that. Well, Alice wanted us to adopt a team name. She kind of messaged all of us individually..."

I raised my eyebrows. It certainly felt like we'd need something other than just group, but I struggled to think of a good name.

"Well, what were the suggestions?" I asked.

Kyosuke cleared his throat. "The former Magical Girls group from Kyoko-san."

I had flat look at that name. "Most of us weren't Magical Girls."

He continued. "The Holy Group, from Mami-san."

"Not really feeling it."

"The Fighters of Justice for Mitakihara from Alice-san."

I turned to look at the girl in question before turning back to Kyosuke. "We are not a Super Sentai team."

"The Specialized Extracurricular Witch Hunting Squad, or S.E.W.H.S..."

Gonna be honest, so far that sounds the best, and I am pretty sure I know from whom it came from.

"...from Ken-senpai. And the Witch Hunting Club from Madoka."

"That sounds the best. How many are in favor of it?"

"As of today, Takashi-kun, Homura-chan, and I are in favor," said Madoka, "are you saying that you'll support it as well Nao-chan?"

I shuddered at that nickname. Meanwhile, on the side Alice snickered, "Nao-chan? Hehehe...."

"Yeah, sure," I answered Madoka's question without saying anything about her awful nickname.

"Great, that means we got by far the most voted for name for our group, with a majority, therefore, we will be called the Witch Hunting Club, right, Ken-senpai?"

The boy in question sighed aloud. "Yea, okay, we'll be called the Witch Hunting Club then. In any event, I'll have to do somethings for the student council, Naoki-san, and for the Shadow Operatives, so we'll do our normal training a bit later. Is that fine with all of you?"

We all nodded, well except for Sayaka, and we ordered some food to celebrate the naming of our group.

I made my way over to the park after school to relax a bit after everything, but there I encountered an unexpected sight.

Alice, except something wasn't quite right with her, she was down on the ground leaning against a tree with her hands in her face.

She was also crying, and no, not in the fake crocodile tears she usually shead, but actual sobs.

I approached her slowly.

"Hey," I said.

She looked up at me with suprise. "Oh...Naoki, what...are you doing here?"

I stared at her for a second. "I came here to relax, what about you?"

She stared at the ground as I sat down next to her. "...I...just came here to...get away..."

"Get away from who?" I inquired.

"...Ken-senpai," she muttered after a moment.

At my inquisitive look she elaborated, "I confessed my crush to him...and he..."

Wait, wait, wait, she had a crush on Ken? And judging by her reaction, it did not go well, her confession I mean.

"I take it...that he didn't share the same feelings."

She started to cry again and I hugged her instinctively. She cried into my shoulder for a few minutes.

"...You must think...I am a mess..." she muttered.

"Nonsense," I said, "you're just getting over being rejected. Though, I didn't expect you to have a crush on Ken. By the way, I am going to talk to him about somethings, do you want to..." I trailed off, not fully what I wanted to say.

She shook her head. "No...I don't really want for you to talk him about me..."

I nodded and there was silence for a minute between as we sat on the ground.

"Who did you expect me to have a crush on?" she asked suddenly with some of her positive emotions back and got out of the hug.

I scratched the back of my head. "No one, to be honest, I didn't expect you to have a crush on anyone."

"Well, at least that's better than what Homura thought. I can't believe that she thought that I had a crush on..." she trailed as he seemed to realize something and she also flushed red.

"Who did she think you had a crush on?" I asked trying to lighten the mood some more.

She quickly answered, "Not important, anyway, I should go to Homura, I promised that I would no matter what happened, and I already wasted quite a bit of time. Thank you for talking with me."

So, the girl quickly rushed out of the park, as she headed towards Homura's place, or most likely my place as Homura was pretty much living there now.

Ken hummed at what I told him. I was, originally, going to keep this a secret from anyone till we defeated Walpurgisnacht, but that reveal by Nyarlathotep made me reconsider a few things.

It also felt a bit awkward to talk to Ken after everything that happened in the park with Alice, but it wasn't like I could comment anything about the fact that he didn't feel that way about Alice, so I just talked with him normally.

"How exactly did you discover this?" he asked with raised eyebrows.

Koromaru lay at his feet.

Right, I left out a bit...

"In truth, I have been investigating these mental shutdown incidents for a few weeks, and well, you will find all the data that I managed to compile hint towards a human being the culprit. You'll also find some date from the really early incidents where it's obvious that it was done for the benefit of someone, that someone is most likely Masayoshi Shido."

The data was not that great at indicating at Shido as I would have liked, but, unfortunately, I was not able to do much more without pulling data from my ass.

Thankfully, at least, I managed to get something with all the knowledge I had.

"What brought this on, if you don't mind asking?" Ken asked, something his demeanor, though, seemed a bit different.

"How good are you at keeping secrets?"

He hummed. "I would say that I am pretty good at it, why?"

I then explained what happened yesterday between Nyarlathotep and Aunt Junko and I, along with the revelation of Shido.

He winced at that. "I am sorry if that brought back bad things..."

"No, it's fine. It's just...I'd rather not see that man ever again, especially if he's behind the Mental Shutdown occurrences."

He hummed as Koromaru walked over to me; I petted the dog and Ken replied, "Right, I'll get this to Misturu to take a closer look at it, unfortunately, I don't much will come of it."

I kind of expected that, nevertheless, I was still a bit happy to help, and to hopefully make Shido's life harder. Especially if the Shadow Operatives are able to do something when the Phantom Thieves show up.

"Right," I muttered, "I'll guess I'll go back home then, have a good day Ken-senpai."

He held up his hand. "Before you do that, I have something that I want to show you as well."

He went a drawer and pulled out a paper, he then handed it to me.

At first I wasn't sure what I was looking at, well that was till I managed to get a closer look at it.

It was some kind of paternity test, with Ken and...Shido, proving that he was Shido's child.

Oh come on! At this point the universe must taking the piss on me! Now we just need the Futaba being Shido's child theory to be true, and then this'll be real fun!

"I am not calling you Niisan," I said and Ken had to stifle back laugh at that.

"Well..." I then muttered, "this could actually prove to be helpful to verify if what the Crawling Chaos said was true..."

Ken nodded. "We'll do that after Walpurgisnacht."

I, too, nodded along to that. "Question, why do you even have this?"

"Mitsuru-san wanted to know who might be my dad, to hopefully reunite us, after we learned what type of man he was...let's just say that we didn't go through the original plan."

Huh...

I sighed aloud. "Well, in any event, we should talk a bit more about...this all if we get some confirmation."

Ken nodded in response. "We should."

I then left the apartment after that, my mind completely full of the absurd thing that I have just learned.

I got home and the first thing is that I made my way over to Madoka's room. "Come in..." came from the other side as I knocked.

Homura sat on one of the many creepy chairs in the room, with Madoka brushing her hair.

"Nao-chan, what did you want to talk about?"

I still did not like that name, but, I had other problems, so I didn't dwell on it for long. "Has Aunt Junko told you about our encounter with the Crawling Chaos?"

Madoka frowned. "Mama did, but there were things she refused to comment, unless you agreed with allowing us to know." I took a deep breath at that.

I, then, replied "Good, I'll have to thank her later. I should explain what happened then."

And so, I explained everything to them about what happened yesterday.

"I guess that explains why Mana was reluctant to talk about it...Naoki, are you alright?"

"I am fine."

Madoka looked like she got more concerned from that reply, and scooted up close to me and hugged me.

I was tempted to push her away, I didn't usually like hugs, but this was Madoka, so I held back that urge.

"Is there something else we can do?" asked Madoka of me.

"I'd prefer if you don't tel anyone else at the present time, so only, you, Homura, and Ken-senpai should know this."

"You told Ken-senpai?" she asked in astonishment. "Wait why shouldn't the others know?"

"Because he's a bastard," said the black haired girl in the chair.

"Homura-chan!" Madoka shouted, with a scandalized look.

My eyes widened. "How do you..." I muttered before I realized how she knew it.

"Right, time loops. Well, that's not entirely right, it's a part of it I'll admit, but I am sure the others would be fine with that part, the bigger problem is who my biological father is."

Homura looked at me with curiosity. "Who?"

I took a deep breath. "Does the name Masayoshi Shido mean anything?"

Both Homura and Madoka looked pensive, yet in the end both shook their heads.

"Not particularly."

"No."

"So who's he?" asked Madoka.

"He's an up and coming politician, and he's the most likely suspect behind the mental shutdown and psychotic breakdown cases."

Madoka's eyes widened. "But...but isn't the reason Auntie is dead is because of a mental shutdown incident?"

"That's precisely it," I told her as I looked her in the eyes.

"So, that means..." Madoka muttered.

"He's the one responsible for the Death of my Mother, among other crimes he committed."

I didn't feel like revealing the fact that Ken is also his child to them that should be something he should reveal if he wants to, of course.

"That's horrible!" yelled Madoka as Homura put her right hand on her shoulder.

I nodded. "It is. That's why I don't want you to talk about him till we defeat Walpurgisnacht. I don't want to make them worry about that and me, while we have something else to worry about."

Madoka looked uncertain but as I stared her in the eyes, she eventually acquiesced.

Homura, on the other hand, was far easier to convince, and she didn't really argue against it.

"Alright everyone," said Ken as we gathered infront of a few nearby labyrinths I detected, "this will be out first time working together for Mami-san, and for Kyoko-san. To get some experience, they will be in the group headed by...me, Kyosuke-san you will also be in this group, is that fine with you?"

"Eh, yeah," said the boy in question.

Ken nodded. "And Takashi-san will be the navigator for this group. As for the other group, that will be headed by Homura-san, in it will be Madoka-san, Alice-san and Koro-chan. And Naoki-san will be navigating."

Out of the three of us, Alice was the worst at navigating, that is not to say she was bad at it, but she wasn't as good as Takashi and I. As a result she was more often a part of the group that fights Witches and their familiars due to having multiple Personas.

In any case, there was not a lot that that Takashi and I did during the whole Witch fights. The two of us stayed back and just told the others the weaknesses.

This would be the first time we split up like this and I wasn't quite sure how effective this would be, but we had three working navigators unlike prior and future Persona groups, so it made sense to use that to our advantage and to split up.

Unfortunately, that splitting up caused quite a bit of problems almost immediately.

When we entered the Labyrinth I was all alone. I looked and called out for the others, but no one appeared to be here.

Is this my trial? I wondered to myself.

"Sure is," said a sarcastic voice. One that I recognized.

I turned around to see my Shadow being there.

"Hastur!" I desperately called out to my Persona, but nothing came out.

"Pryo Jack!" I called out to another Persona that I had on me, but similarly nothing happened.

"We can't have that, can we?" my Shadow asked rhetorically.

I narrowed my eyes. "I guess we can't. What exactly do you want from me?"

It hummed. "Unfortunately, the rules don't allow me to talk about the first part, so I'll just talk about everything from when you got here—"

"Wow, rules working in my favor, that's a first," I said mockingly as I interrupted him

It threw me a glare. "You don't really care about getting justice for you dear old mom, do you? The only reason you pretend to do is because that makes things easier for you, you even pretend to yourself that you want justice, whereas you only do this all to participate in up coming events."

I hummed. "You're...right...while I do actually want justice for the death of someone, I also don't care enough to press hard for it. And why would I?

"Why would you indeed? It's not like that's the reason you used to get little Madoka to agree with you."

"Madoka hadn't seen her in over 8 years. Even with all her memories from the loops, her vision of her aunt is not full.

"I on the other hand, knew her quite well, too well in fact, I would say."

My Shadow as it leaned in close to me.

"It's to bad that you will most likely win against Walpurgisnacht, that egotistical outlook should not be tolerated to exist."

"Am I wrong?" I asked

It scowled. "What has that got to do with everything, the problem is not that you're wrong, the problem is how you treat your supposed friends and your family."

"I don't really care at this point, I have already said to Madoka that I plan to be more open towards the others, and I already told her and Homura quite a bit, so I don't see the need to have this talk."

"A good friend does not Naoki make, this discussion of ours is finished, you at least know what you are and are not trying to deceive yourself."

I nearly laughed aloud at that. "Wow...I don't mean to insult you, but you sounded so snobby with that with the first part of that statement."

My Shadow didn't really react to it, but I could have sworn that I saw its eyes twitch.

"I suppose you are right in that regard; however, you are also included in that."

It then began to dissipate and I fell to the ground on my knees from the exhaustion.

I am thou, thou art I

Thou hast accept the truth within thyself.

"Poirot..." I muttered at my new Persona.

Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time to process everything as I heard a thud from nearby.

I quickly remembered that Homura was also in the place, so I rushed over to where the sound came from.

My friend was on the ground with her Shadow looking down on her.

"Homura!" I shouted as I rushed over.

Her Shadow glanced at, but didn't say anything, instead it continued to focus on the girl. "The truth is that you hate everyone!"

"I...don't..." trembled Homura as she tried to get back up.

"It's the truth!" the Shadow yelled. "You hate Mami for her loneliness, she always puts having companions over the safety them! You hate Sayaka for her stubbornness, she always makes the same mistakes!

"You hate Kyoko for her selfishness, she always puts her desires over everyone elses. You hate Ken for he did nothing while he had that power in all prior loops. You hate Alice for

being able to make friends with everyone in the group. You hate Kyosuke for always causing Sayaka to turn into a Witch.

"You hate Takashi for turning the others against you in the beginning. You hate Naoki for not doing nearly enough to stop Madoka from contracting.

"You even hate Madoka for her selflessness, for always putting everyone over herself. She always cares about everyone else, but not you! You hate that she never listens to you! You hate that she always makes a wish despite your warnings! You hate that she always trusts Mami, but not you!

"You hate them all! Admit it! You're a hateful girl whose only aim in life is Madoka, yet that very girl couldn't care less about you!"

The girl fell back to the ground with tears in her eyes. "That's not true...that's not true!" came out from her. At first it was a whisper, but then it turned into a shout.

I quickly kneeled down to her level and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Homura, I know this can be hard, but she's a part of yourself—"

She pushed my hand away and cut me off, "She's not! She's not me!"

Her eyes turned back to the Shadow. "You're not me!"

Ah shit! Well, every Shadow encounter up to this point was a bit too easy, so I guess we had this coming.

The Shadow laughed. "That's right, I am me now. I am not you anymore, and unlike you, I will make sure to dispose of the things I hate!"

It began to transform, and Homura collapsed to the ground. "I am a Shadow, the true self! I'll start this all by crushing you, Naoki!"

Shit!

Thankfully, Poirot got quite and upgrade compared to Hastur. So it wasn't quite as bad as it would have been.

I quickly scanned it, and then launched Nuclear Attacks against it.

I then quickly switched to another Persona. This dance went back and forth for a solid 20 minutes, thankfully I had enough stuff on me to make it very difficult for the Shadow to win.

"Megido!" I yelled out as I unleashed the Almighty Attack.

The Shadow crashed to the ground. And Homura started to wake up.

I quickly went to her side. "Homura, I know this can be painful, but the Shadow is a part of you, and one you will need to accept."

She sobbed on the ground, and no matter what I said to her she didn't seem to listen. I tried to be louder; however, my throat still hurt after yesterday.

So, I gathered up all my strength and shouted at her, snapping her out.

She finally stopped crying and looked up at me. "Why...why do you...believe in...me, I am just...a useless girl who...can't accomplish anything..."

I knelt down. "Homura, you're a dear friend to me, I know you can do this. Plus if I left you, then Madoka will be really angry with me, and I don't wanna have that."

She laughed a bit at that joke, then she stood up shakely, with me helping her and making sure she doesn't fall down.

"I...agree that I hate those aspects of the people you listed, nevertheless, they are still my friends, and I...want to help them, I don't want to do this anymore, I don't want to loop anymore..."

The Shadow stared at her for a minute, then it dissipated.

Her Soul Gem flashed, then it disappeared, and her evolved Persona appeared behind her.

"Lachesis..." she muttered as she tried to get up

"How are you feeling?" I asked as I helped her.

"Exhausted...both mentally and physically..." replied Homura, somewhat strained, "I also don't know how to talk to Madoka after this."

"Healthy communication is good for everyone involved in a relationship. Just tell her what transpired here, I am she will not have problems with all of this."

Homura trembled as I helped her walk. "I...am...not sure..."

"Look, Homura, all your Shadow talked about was disliking some aspects of a person. Just because you don't something about someone doesn't mean you can't be friends with them or even date them.

"All I am saying is that, I am sure Madoka will be receptive to what you say as long you don't phrase it like how your Shadow did."

The girl pondered as we made our way out of the weird labyrinth. "Alright. I will do that then."

Once we exited the labyrinth, we found ourselves outside, we were surrounded by everyone else.

"Homura-chan!" yelled Madoka as she rushed over to hug the girl in question. "Are you okay? Does ot hurt anywhere? I can cast a healing speel any moment should there be a need to!"

Homura blushed as Madoka fretted over her.

I coughed drawing her attention to me. "What am I chopped liver?"

Madoka flushed. "Do you need any healing spell, Nao-chan?"

"Yeah, I could do with a small healing spell. Also you should work on your obsession on Homura."

"Ha, she got you there, Pinkie," said Kyoko as Madoka pouted and got to casting a Dia.

During the time in which Madoka healed I turned my head towards the others, and to be more specific to Sayaka.

She was leaning against on the ground unconscious. "Is she okay?" I asked the other.

"Yeah, she's fine," said Kyoko, "blueberry just followed us into the labyrinth and had an encounter with one of those Shadow Selves, and they did not like each other. Luckily pretty boy, and other pretty boy managed to smooth things out once we defeated it, and she accepted it."

Well that's five Shadow Selves now. Hopefully there will not be anymore. We only have 5 remaining days after all, to prepare for Walpurgisnacht.

Sayaka suddenly started to get up. "Whoa, there," said Kyosuke as he helped her up slowly.

She looked around with a dazed look before her vision seemed to clear up.

"I-I," she stammered out as she looked at us. "I...am sorry, I know that this apology means probably nothing, but—"

Madoka smiled and quickly hugged the girl completely interrupting Sayaka before she could finish her sentence. "You can be really stubborn and unreasonable at times, but you're still my best friend, Sayaka-chan, of course I forgive you."

Kyoko smacked the blue haired girl's shoulder lightly. "Yeah, what Pinkie said, just...don't do something like that again."

Kyosuke, meanwhile, hugged her from the side. "Yeah, you're out friend, Sayaka."

Sayaka started to cry. "I...don't deserve such good friends..."

This is sweet.

"So, do you want to join us now, Sayaka?" I asked after she calmed down.

"I...would like to, if the offer is still on the table."

Ken glanced at us all. "Does anyone have anything against allowing Sayaka-san to join?"

No one spoke up against it, thus Ken quickly said, "In that case, welcome to the team, Sayaka-san."

We all gathered in Ken's place to do some last minute preparation and planning. With everything that we learnt from Homura and Madoka, we figured that this would not be an easy fight, but we still had hope about it.

"Alright, Sayaka-san, you are particularly suited to be pur healer, so you will also be on the back with Kyosuke-san, Naoki-san, and Takashi-san," explained Ken to the blue haired girl.

After that whole fiasco with Sayaka's Shadow, we discovered that Sayaka's Persona was really in good in healing.

This made it so that she would always be in the back as her combat powers were less than adequate.

She didn't seem to totally like it, but there wasn't much she could argue about, so the four of us were constantly in the back, Takashi and I to help with navigating for such a large group, Kyosuke to be buffer and debuffer, and now Sayaka to be healer.

We also pretty much decided against splitting up after that whole incident, which was probably for the best, given that Kyoko and Mami had plenty of experience, so the fact that Ken took them to get experience didn't make much sense.

"Alright everyone, we only have a day until Walpurgisnacht arrives. We should all mentally prepare ourselves," said Ken as he glanced over us all. "Naoki-san, you'll be our primary navigator for this fight, Takashi-san will be our reserve navigator. Sayaka-san will be our healer and Kyosuke-san will be our...buffer and de-buffer. That means that you four will be on the back."

The four of us nodded. "Good," said Ken as he turned to look towards the others, "that means the rest of you'll be on the front in two formation. First, in front will be Madoka-san, Homura-san, and Alice-san, since those three can use multiple Personas, next to their back will be Kyoko-san, Mami-san, Koromaru and me."

We all agreed and decided to do some last minute preparations, which included gathering healing and other items.

Thankfully, the Shadow Operatives were ready to send us most of them, which I, and the others really appreciated.

Chapter 13

"Alright, why am I here exactly?" I asked the two girls in Madoka's room. We just returned home, and I kind of wanted to rest, we were just one day away from Walpurgisnacht after all.

The weather stations have started reporting violent storms approaching Mitakihara, no doubt something that was caused by Walpurgisnacht, so tomorrow people will be forced to move to evacuation centers, something I, in particular, was grateful for, because it meant that we wouldn't have to worry about civilians unless Walpurgisnacht is close to the center.

"I...I wanted to talk to Madoka about my Shadow..." muttered Homura, breaking me out of my thoughts.

I nodded. "Of course, still I am sure that I am not needed for that. Yet if you want me to remain, then I will do that."

Homura nodded in return. "Thank you."

Madoka meanwhile, looked between us with a curious look at us.

Homura then took a deep breath and started to explain what happened with her Shadow. While she was doing that I looked at Madoka's reaction.

There was not a lot of that there, surprisingly. But she got really concerned once Homura started to cry a bit as she explained what her Shadow said about Madoka.

"I...understand that if you don't want to talk to me again...after what I was thinking about you, you can tell me to leave, and I'll..."

Madoka wrapped her arms around Homura, cutting her off and pulling her into a tight hug. "Shh...it's okay Homura-chan. You're in the right, in fact, I hate the me that made you make that promise."

"Madoka—"

"First, she made you make that promise to go back to make a happy end, and then she made you destroy her Soul Gem, she was a really selfish girl who didn't think about what she made you promise and do at all."

"Madoka! I will not allow you to talk about yourself that—"

"I saw the memories of that me. I understood why she did what she did, but I am surry Homura-chan, I still can't forgive her for what she made you go through for that promise."

"I did...I made that promise because I cared about you Madoka, and—"

"You're completely justified in your views of me, Homura-chan, all I can hope for is that you forgive me—"

"I don't want to hate you!" Homura shouted cutting Madoka off. My cousin looked taken a bit at Homura shouting, so taken aback that she turned silent and allowed Homura to talk.

"I...just, I just wanted to keep you safe because you were my best friend. I don't want you to hate yourself for my sake. Everything I did was by my own account, it wasn't because of you that I choose to loop, I decided that I wanted to keep you safe, you didn't force my hand in any way, so don't hate yourself because of me!"

Madoka stood there in silence for a couple of seconds as she stared at Homura, then she gathered her breath to respond, but before she could say anything Homura kissed in the lips.

Her eyes widened as she relaxed for a second Madoka then separated from Homura much to the girl's dissapontment.

Madoka quickly noticed the look in Homura's eyes and said, "I am not mad Homura-chan, you are right, I was too harsh on myself. I just want to say something to you as well."

Homura's eyes lit up, and she nodded.

"Homura-chan, all I ask of you is to not hate yourself that way then as well. I know how you view yourself, and I don't want you to hate yourself because of my actions then. How about this: we forgive each other for the other's mistakes, would that be fine with you Homura-chan?"

Homura nodded with tears in her eyes, she then rejoined Madoka in the hug.

They then started to make out, at which point I promptly left the room, and closed the door behind them.

I really didn't need to be there at all...still I am glad that it all worked out. Today is our last day before Walpurgisnacht arrives, so it's a good that they have this behind them.

The next day arrived quickly, Uncle Tomohisa had managed to get the Shadow Operatives to take Tatsuya out of town, so we wouldn't have to worry about him either, thankfully.

We then sneaked out from the Shelter, which was quite easy. *It's almost like people don't expect others to walk out of a shelter during an emergency,* I thought sarcastically.

And I soon started to sense Walpurgisnacht, it was far more powerful than all other Witches I have sensed prior.

There in the sky, it was, flying upside-down. With some sort of clock on its back. The familiars started to surround us.

They looked they were from some sort of weird circus.

"It's currently weak to electric," I reported to the others.

It was certainly far larger than any other Witch which we had faced before, but thankfully it didn't appear to be larger than Yaldabaoth or Izanami.

"Alright everyone! Get ready!" ordered Ken as he pulled out his evoker. "Kala-Nemi!"

He blasted the familiars around us with Light magic casting most of them to die.

The Witch in the sky merely laughed as it descended towards us. Madoka, Homura and Alice stepped up, summoned Personas with Lightning skills.

And we started to engage with battle with its familiars. The battle didn’t exactly pan out as we anticipated as the Witch appeared to have a few tricks up its sleeve...

"What the...?" I muttered as I gazed at it, "Everyone, it can change its affinities, currently it's weak to Nuclear."

So, Alice went on the offensive by summoning a Persona with nuclear skills.

However, before Alice could even get an attack in, Walpurgisnacht cast some sort of timed spell around itself.

I immediately scanned what it cast, and yelled at the others, "Everyone, take a step back and be on defense! This spell is dangerous!"

They all did as I was told, and soon enough there was an explosion around the area she was in.

I flew backwards from the explosion, right into where a bunch of familiars were. Thankfully, I wasn't that injured by the explosion, and also no one else was injured by it.

"Mami, it's currently weak to Gun!" I yelled as I summoned my Persona to destroy the familiars that were around me.

"Oktavia!" shouted Sayaka as she summoned her Persona to heal the others and to buff them. Kyosuke followed suit along with her.

Once I dealt with the familiars I quickly joined at their side. As I started to scan it again. "It's currently weak to Ice."

Homura nodded. "King Frost!" she said while summoned that Persona. "Bufudyne."

Madoka summoned the same Persona and the started to fire Ice spells at it constantly. This seemed to annoy the Witch, it then flew away evading some of the attacks, but continued to laugh the whole time.

"Kyoko, you're up," I told the girl who was taking a bit of break to get back some energy. "Switch with Homura."

The girl nodded and soon Homura walked up to me with a frown. "Walpurgisnacht...is stronger than before..."

"What do you mean that it's stronger?!" I shouted at Homura.

Homura stared me in the eyes. "Precisely what I said, for some reason it is stronger than all previous timelines."

"Oh, great." I murmured sarcastically.

I turned to scan it again. "It's weak to nuclear again!"

Alice and Madoka swiftly switched to Personas with nuclear skills and Homura, who stepped back up, also did that.

Just how tanky is it? I glanced at Ken who was also frowning. *This situation is pretty dire. Emergency plan time...*

"Homura, Madoka summon a Pryo Jack and a Jack Frost!"

Yeah, my emergency plan was the Jack Bro comedy special. *Though I feel like there was another emergency plan I forgot about...eh if I forgot about it probably wasn't important.*

The two girls stared at me with puzzled, but they did as I asked of them.

And soon the comedy special happened leaving Walpurgisnacht incapacitated for a bit.

"That worked?" asked Alice loudly with a confused expression on her face.

I nodded. "It only works for a bit, so everyone go on an all out attack."

They all did, but just 40 seconds later it got back up.

"Can nothing stick?" whined Alice as she blew away a few more familiars.

"Quite a powerful Demon you have got there." remarked a cold voice behind us, a familiar that I recognized having previously met the man whom the voice belonged to.

My eyes widened along with Takashi's and Alice's, most likely for different reasons. *Well I guess I don't need to activate that plan now...*

"Dad!", Uncle Reiji!" shouted Takashi and Alice with wide eyes.

"Dad, it's not safe here!"

"I would be a pretty shirty father, if I abandoned you to fight that Demon, all by yourselves. Come Persona!"

Takashi and Alice stared with slack jaws at Reiji as he summoned a Persona.

The Persona quickly blasted away Walpurgisnacht who was still laughing maniacally.

"You!" he pointed at Ken. "Are you the leader of this group? You have by far the strongest Persona of everyone here, well you and that dog..."

Ken frowned at that question. "I suppose I am the field leader of them."

"Well then you get to leading!"

"It's currently weak to fire! Kyoko, Koro-chan!" I shouted at them.

The dog barked and the redhead grinned as they summoned their Personas. Reiji looked serious as he summoned a different Persona, and started to blast Walpurgisnacht with fire spells as well.

We continued to do this song and dance with Walpurgisnacht constantly changing its weaknesses and affinities, and it started to wear us down.

The only ones who were faring better were Ken, Koromaru and Reiji, even Homura and Madoka started to get exhausted from this.

I soon stepped in and let Takashi do the navigation, however, even with all of us working so that the exhausted can take a break, this Witch was starting to wear down on us.

Just what is it made out of? Pure defense?

I gasped for breath as I blasted another familiar. I was too exhausted to even notice that a familiar snuck behind me and struck me through the shoulder with a sharp metal object.

I gritt my teeth as I held back a scream, and eliminated the Familiar with a Megido—which was an overreaction on my part, not invalid one, but it was still an overreaction on my part from the pain.

Kyosuke quickly rushed up to me and removed the object and healed me, but at that point I also didn't have energy to do anything against Walpurgisnacht.

Now, only Ken, Mami, Madoka, Kyoko, and Reiji were still fighting against it. And even they were getting pretty exhausted.

I glanced behind me to see how the others were doing, and my eye widened when I saw a familiar black butterfly fly by Sayaka.

The blue haired girl clenched her fists as she summoned her Persona

"Everything for everything!" she shouted as she and her Persona started to glow.

What the fuck attack is that!?

Tears appeared in her eyes as she looked at us. "...I am...sorry for being such a...useless...person...I hope...this makes up for it..."

I could feel her life force draining from preparing the attack, and I shouted, "Sayaka, don't!"

But it was too late for me to intervene. The spell had fully charged by the time I shouted at her, and it hit Walpurgisnacht, which fell down to the ground.

Sayaka soon followed it with a thud.

"Sayaka-chan!" shouted Madoka as she broke up from the formation to run where the girl had fallen down.

I tried to scan to see if Sayaka was still alive, but I couldn't get a definite read due to being distracted by Walpurgisnacht.

Speaking of the witch, it was still on the ground after Sayaka's spell landed and it began to glow, and hundreds of angry looking familiars popped out soon after.

Oh great! Just what we needed!

I rushed over to where Madoka held Sayaka's body. "Madoka, help the others!" I shouted at my cousin.

Her eyes were puffy and red with tears. "But, Sayaka-chan—"

"If she is dead, then we shouldn't let her sacrifice be in vain, and if she isn't, then it's all the more important that you make sure that Walpurgisnacht and its familiars aren't able to harm her. Kyosuke, Takashi, and I will defend her.

Madoka looked uncertain, stealing worries glances down at Sayaka before she acquiesced and went to help the other against the downed Walpurgisnacht.

The aggressive Familiars started to surround us. Kyosuke destroy some of them with an electric attack. While I used ice spells most of them. Takashi eliminated the remaining ones with a nuclear spell.

I was gasping for breathe as more and more familiars surrounded us. It even looked like Homura was starting to run out of ammo.

Then, a shower of bullets rained down on the familiars killing all of them near us.

"Targets eliminated," came a familiar voice from behind us. I was quite excited to see Aigis there.

Alright this noticeably increased our chances. Wait, if she's here then the barrier isn't functioning anymore, so...

And then. "Messiah!" came a voice from behind us followed by the sound of glass breaking; Ken immediately perked up as he saw a familiar person, to him, behind us, "Morning Star!"

The almighty spell struck Walpurgisnacht head on, and all her minions died in an instant. With the Witch taking heavy damages.

Walpurgisnacht looked it was regretting all of her? their? its? (Yeah I'll go with it) life choices that led up to this point.

"Amon-Ra." "Michael." yelled two other voices also from behind us, and Alice whirled around to see her parents.

I was able to fully withdraw from the fight as Minako, Aigis and Naoya and Elly stepped up and started to utterly decimate Walpurgisnacht.

It let out one final maniacal laugh as Minako struck it down with a Megidolaon from Messiah.

I took a deep breath once I was sure that Walpurgisnacht was dealt with, and then I rushed to Sayaka's side.

"Naoki! Is she...is she fine?" Maodka asked as she cried over the body of her best friend.

I couldn't sense anything in her. I tried to scan even deeper, but there was nothing that I could sense. "I...can't feel anything..."

Madoka started to brawl and Homura went to comfort her.

Kyoko looked like was also on the verge of crying and Kyosuke looked he couldn't believe what was happening.

"Move aside," ordered Minako us as she looked at the girl in the ground. "Messiah! Recarm!"

Nothing seemed to have happened. Minako got noticeably agitated from that. "Samarecarm!"

Still nothing. "Recarmdra!"

This time she started to glow bright and the area around followed suit.

We waited patiently for the glow to die down, and when it did, there was a loud gasp from Sayaka.

"Sayaka-chan!", "Sayaka!" "Blueberry!" shouted Madoka, Kyosuke, and Kyoko as they embraced the girl on the ground in a hug.

"Sayaka-chan, don't ever do that again!" shouted Madoka with tears as she hugged the blue haired girl.

The girl in question, nodded with a dazed look as she looked around herself. "I...I am sorry for making you guys worry..."

"You better be!" said Kyosuke with a loud and firm tone. Then he kissed her, at first Sayaka was suprised by it, but it didn't take her long to return the kiss.

Kyoko let out a squeak at that as she looked between Sayaka and Kyosuke, and then she looked to the ground.

Then Sayaka stood up and walked over to Kyoko slowly and kissed her on the lips much to the red head's shock.

Meanwhile on the side, Kyosuke watched them...excitedly?

okay

"Heh, now that's dealt with. Ken-kun," Minako called out, she looked really disoriented as she made her way over to the my senpai, and possibly half-brother.

The boy in question stiffened as Minako hugged him tightly. *I could've sworn that I heard something crack...*

"Minako-san, if you don't mind me asking. Can you please us how you were able to overcome that barrier?" asked Ken while he tried to get out of the hug

There was a giggle from the side. "Oh...it wasn't Minako-san who destroyed the barrier but I. It was quite a powerful one mind you, but it couldn't stand up to 148 Megidolaon."

I recognize that voice... I thought with dread as I slowly turned to look at where the voice came from, and sure enough there stood a familiar attendant in all blue. *Welp, hi Liz...*

I wasn't the only only one who was suprised by Elizabeth as Naoya, Elly, and Reiji all looked at her with wide eyes once she said how many Megidolaons she cast.

Takashi was also openly gaffing at her. He had the most experience with Almighty skills in our group, so it must be quite something to hear Elizabeth casually just say that she cast over 100 Megidolaon.

We didn't have much time to stare at Elizabeth as we heard footsteps approach us.

I glanced to the direction where they came from and saw two adults run up to us.

Uncle Tomohisa and Aunt Junko rushed up to Madoka and I and embraced us in a tight hug. While Minako did the same with Ken and Takashi's dad and Alice's parents did the same with them.

"Alice! We were so worried about you, after we heard from Reiji about that massive demon he sensed, and that you were not at the shelter! We came here straightaway, but there was that barrier up. Next time you get involved in Persona business, you will tell us, **young lady**!" said an obviously worried Elly slipping into English as she embraced Alice in a hug.

I, then started to laugh a little at everything. We really did it! We beat Nyarlathotep! We beat Walpurgisnacht! We won!

Madoka pulled us into a group hug, which was a bit awkward due to how large are group was, and the fact that Sayaka could barely stand, and with some members (Kyoko) trying to get out, but we made it somehow work.

Homura started to cry into Madoka's shoulder, the girl smiled as she lent a shoulder to Homura.

Meanwhile on the side I saw that Uncle Tomohisa and Aunt Junko started to talk to Minako, Reiji, and to Naoya and Elly.

I then looked at where Elizabeth once stood, but she was long gone. I looked at Minako curiously who just shrugged as if to say 'What can you do?'

Minako then perked up. "Are we all finished here? I think we should have a little talk between the adults here."

I held up my hand. "There is still something more that we should do, I think it's time we had a talk with Igor."

Reiji looked at me with some confusion. "Why? Do you want to say goodbye to him?"

"Kinda, but also I want to talk to the real Philemon."

His confusion grew. "Real Philemon?"

I scratched my head. "Yeah, it turned out that Philemon we thought was real...was actually Nyarlathotep, and Nyarlathotep heavily implied that Philemon was actually pretending to be Igor."

Reiji was bit dumbfounded by that. Naoya and Elly also started to listen in and they were suprised by this too. Minako also looked taken aback by this.

So, we made our way to "Igor's" door to the "Velvet Room". And we entered.

Philemon was standing on a familiar platform to me, except everything was blue.

"What do you need, my guests?"

"Alright, drop the act Philemon, I don't know why you're trying to act like you're Igor, but it's really obvious that you are not him, what with the tower we are standing on, and there being no music." Reiji said with angry voice.

"Igor" let out a small humn as he started to transform into small golden butterflies; those butterflies soon merged together, and out stepped Philemon, now wearing his Persona 2 look.

"I suppose then, that you already know that the Crawling Chaos took my appearance in order to deceive them?" he questioned Reiji

"The kid here"—he motioned to me—"already told me that. He also explained quite a bit about this Magical Girl system.

"Now the question is..." Reiji trailed off, "Why did you drag my son and Alice into this whole thing?! I thought you promised that you wouldn't do things like this to us! Also, why did you not help them?!"

"The Magical Girl system needed to be wiped out, the Crawling Chaos, and I both agreed on that, we just had a different idea on how to accomplish this goal, as for helping them; I have done everything that I could to help them—"

I cut Philemon off, "You mean the fact that Nyarlathotep would've wanted to kill all of Humanity in order to wipe out the Magical Girl system.

"Not to mention that the only person you actually helped was Homura, while you let us be deceived by Nyarlathotep who YOU let take your appearance."

God...he's really irritating to listen to, even Nyarlathotep was not this irritating when he was pretending to be him. Tatsuya should have punched him MUCH harder.

Philemon continued as if he didn't hear me, "Before the events of Sumaru, we have erased the memories of the Magical Girls, Persona users and even some memories of the Incubators.

"However, after the events of Sumaru we decided to take on a less active role in the game. Therefore, we no longer managed this system, and the Magical Girls, Persona users, Shadows and even cognitive gods were able to meet.

"This caused quite a few problems for both of us, with the Magical Girls disrupting the Game, thus, we have decided the intervene, and only intervene in this case."

I stared at with cold eyes. "And why us specifically, is it because of Homura?"

"That girl was part of the equation, however, she was not the only part. The main reason why we decided on Mitakihara was because Walpurgisnacht was scheduled to make landfall hete, we thought that it would be fitting end to see whether Human potential was able to overcome it, if not then the entirety of Mitakihara would have been wiped out, but the Magical Girl system would have been destroyed as well. We agreed on that."

I gritted my teeth; Homura clenched her fists at that remark, and Minako was looking furious at Philemon.

Naoya seeing our reaction, decided to ask the next question, "Philemon, we understand your side—"

"We don't!" interrupted Reiji. Naoya shot him a look and continued on, "—but why did you only help Akemi-chan? And why did you let the Crawling Chaos manipulate the others?"

"It was part of the rules we agreed to."

"**Philemon...**"

I was taken aback a by as Elly spoke up in fake overly sweet voice.

"**...did you just say that the entirety of Mitakihara would have been wiped out, including my daughter, Takashi-kun, and their friends?**"

It took me a few seconds to understand that she was not speaking in Japanese but English. Nonetheless, even with my English being somewhat rusty, I could tell that she was was not happy.

He stared at her without saying anything. We stood there in silence for around a minute straight.

Finally, Elly started to shout up quite a lot of colorful insults, which I chosen to omit.

After a solid 2 minutes of shouting at him, Elly calmed down somewhat; Philemon acted like he hadn't heard anything and continued on where he left of on, "As I have explained previously—"

"That just it! You haven't explained anything to us!" shouted Reiji angrily intterupting him, "State why you allowed that thing to manipulate my son and his friends!"

"The Crawling Chaos and I, eventually, came to an agreement. If they could defeat him in his weak form and go on to defeat the Queen of Witches, than he'd work with me to remove the Incubator, and to restore all Magical Girls' souls to their bodies, as well as remove all their memories of being a Magical Girl, from the most of them.

"Nyarlathotep wanted very few experienced Persona users to help you in this quest, therefore, he made it so that the barrier around Mitakihara would not let any Persona users in, notably this didn't apply to leaving Mitakihara, thus, Personas users leaving and not being able to return to Mitakihara was one of the rules we agreed upon for this game."

After he finished speaking I noticed that Minako was gritting and clenching her fists, whilst she advanced towards him.

Aigis glanced at her with what I persumed to be nervousness, and she hesitated on what to do.

Minako with forced calm expression walked up to him and before he could even question anything threw a punch at him. Reiji looked like he wanted to join to beat the crap out of Philemon.

She instinctively took a step back as Philemon's mask fell to the ground and I saw my own face most people also took a step back, thus I presumed that everyone present saw their own face.

He knelt down to pick up his mask. "I am you and you are me."

Minako pulled herself together and looked she wanted to have another go at him, however, Aigis at point decided to intervene and hold her baback.

"Suou definitively didn't punch you hard enough, if you are still pulling things like this, Philemon." said an unfamiliar voice. I slowly turned around to see Kei Nanjo along with Mitsuru. "This whole situation could have been handled a many different ways, most of which would have been better."

Philemon barely even reacted to them, instead he turned towards me and said, "As I was saying, I had all the trust in you to defeat the Crawling Chaos and Walpurgisnacht."

"Your trust is great and all, but why didn't you intervene more, you pretty much had free reign to do with how much the Crawling Chaos was intervening. The only real intervention you did was lead Ken towards us, purged Homura's soul gem of the grief, and told us about the cave behind the shrine," I said. "And also, why did you agree with allowing Nyarlathotep to get Grief Seeds, thankfully, we didn't use his services, but that could have gone real horrible if we did use it!"

"All souls are born from him, and someday return into him, it wasn't my duty to try and stop him from taking what came from him in the first place, and, in any event, we agreed that the two of us each would take care of Grief Seeds. Now is there something you would wish to discuss?"

I huffed as I existed Philemon's tower, the others there talked some more about things which I barely paid any attention to.

"I take it that that meeting didn't go well?" asked Aunt Junko.

Reiji scowled. "Biggest understatement in history."

Nanjo observed us all with an indifferent look. "Now, that we all got all that out of our system, we should have a discussion around these events. Starting with the barrier and the person who dealt with."

Minako looked to her left. "I don't think Liz is coming here anytime soon, she only agreed after I bribed her with some of Minato's stuff."

He sighed as he glanced at Mitsuru. "We'll talk about the barrier later then. Now I want to talk about something more private; I think we all should talk about things at more comfortable space."

I wasn't sure how much Nanjo knew, or was involved with the Shadow Operatives, but he sure knew something, and Mitsuru knew something about him as well.

Ken glanced at Minako who nodded and stepped forward "I think we can discuss things at our apartment, right Mitsuru?"

The woman nodded, and with nobody objecting, we made our way there.

"Shinjiro is not at home, right?" asked Ken as Minako went to unlock the door

She froze. "No...but that reminds me that I failed to tell the others that the barrier is gone... haha...oops..."

"Don't worry, Minako, I have reported it to everyone else, along with telling them to keep out for the time being," stated Aigis from Minako's side.

"Thanks Aigis," she replied as we made our

Nanjo shared a look with Reiji. And then wasted no time to start talking to us, "To begin, all of you are in Middle Schpll, correct?"

We all nodded.

"And there are three in this group are orphans—"

"I am also one," I said cutting Nanjo off. *Well as far as I knew, I was one...and I for certain don't consider Shido my dad, and also there's still no way to prove that Nyarlathotep was actually correct, so...*

"Yes, yes," he said brushing us off, "the point I was getting at, was that I don't really want to have Middle School Persona users who don't have any guardian to look after them, let's just say I don't like the precedent."

He looked at Reiji who glared at him. Naoya also looked a bit annoyed at what Nanjo was saying, and Elly's smile started to strain.

"I am sure that you only mean the best by it, Kei, **correct**?" asked Elly.

"I do. Anyway, I would like to propose to Kirijo-san, that they be provided with a qualified guardian, in fact, I would be willing to fund their entire schooling and their university education, even if it's an elite university, along with funding the guardian directly for looking after them."

The adults in the room sat down and shared a look of suprise, though the suprise was far less prominent with Mitsuru.

"Do we have to tell our parents?" asked Sayaka with a frown, " 'Cause I don't really want to do that."

Kyosuke, frowned, too. "Yeah, I don't really want to disclose this all to my parents."

Nanjo frowned before he glanced at Mitsuru. "While I am in favor of the idea of telling their parents, I would not be opposed if you set up some sort of system which makes sure they don't missuse their Personas, after all you're the leader of the Shadow Operatives here, Kirijo-san."

Wait a second, I just thought of something. How does he know that we they orphans?

Mitsuru frowned, oblivious of my internal thoughts. "I could make sure that an agent of mine keeps track of their Persona usage..."

Minako started jumping up and down. "Oh, oh, I could do that."

Mitsuru glance at her before before she nodded. "Very well, then Ari—Minako, I mean, here will make sure you don't abuse your Personas."

Nanjo had a more critical look at Minako, but didn't say anything.

Mitsuru then cleared her thoat.

"First, Sakura-san, your situation is far more...dire and concerning than others', with you being homeless. I could make sure that an agent lf our becomes your guardian, but for that you would have to leave Mitakihara, and I am not sure you would want that," stated Misturu as she looked at Kyoko.

"Yeah, I kinda don't wanna leave..." replied Kyoko.

Mitsuru frowned. "In that case, I will look into who would be willing to be stationed here for the duration of your schooling..." she trailed off while looked down on her tablet.

Ken threw a look at Minako. "Minako, why don't you and Shinjiro take guardianship of Sakura-san? That way no other agent would need to be reasigned here."

Minako froze, and Mitsuru also looked up at that. Finally, after a few seconds Minako responded, "I...am not opposed, and I doubt Shinji would be that either, butt..."

Mitsuru turned to look Minako. "Minako, I would be more than willing help you with this if you have any issues."

"Yeah, nah, Shinji would not like that. I'll talk with him about this tomorrow, in the meantime I would like to talk to Kyoko-chan."

The girl in question straightened up. "Yeah, okay. So, I'll be staying with you and pretty boy?"

"Plus my husband. Depending on of course if he agrees, but I doubt he will not," said Minako.

"Mama, can Homura stay with us?" asked Madoka innocently.

Aunt Junko shared a look with Uncle Tomohisa. She had an uncertain look in her eyes while my uncle looked more agreeable.

Madoka threw a puppy dog look at her mom, who instantly folded. "Fine, Homura-chan can stay with us, but she'll no longer be sleeping in your room, we do have a spare bedroom after all. Also, since you will be staying with us, Homura-chan, you will also be grounded."

Homura looked uncertainly between Madoka and Aunt Junk before she nodded. "I understand, thank you for allowing me to stay."

Madoka threw her fists up with small gleeful squeak while Sayak chuckled. "Wow, Madoka, when did you become so manipulative? Where did the innocent little girl go?"

"She went away as soon as she laid eyes on Homura-chan!" stated Madoka with a sly smirk.

Homura face looked like it was on fire as Madoka hugged her. "Ma—Ma—Madoka!"

"What's wrong, Homura-chan, do you not want this?" asked Madoka as she hugged her tighter to herself.

Homura started to stammer out some things, which nobody was able to understand, as her face got even redder.

I chuckled at that and nudged her. "Alright, Madoka, can you please cut it a bit with the flirting."

She pouted in response, but did as I asked.

The only one left was Mami who looked a bit hurt. Alice noticed this and sent her Father puppy dog eyes.

Naoya shared a look with Elly before he sighed aloud, then he looked at Mami. "Tomoe-chan, I know that we don't really know each other, but Alice told us quite a bit about you."

"All good things, I hope," she joked. And he chuckled a bit at that.

"Yes, anyway, I am not sure how you feel about all this, but Eriko and I are willing to become your guardian."

Alice let out as suprised squeak.

Naoya turned to look at her. "You wouldn't be opposed to it, Alice?"

"No. No. It was just surprising...Mami is a great friend, so I don't have a problem with it."

Naoya attention then turned back to the girl in question.

Mami frowned. "I wouldn't want to be a be a burden..."

"**Of course**, you wouldn't be, Kei said that he'd compensate us for looking after you, so you shouldn't feel like one," replied Elly as she looked at Nanjo. "Isn't that right, Kei?"

The man looked at her in the eyes. "Yes, as long you are the guardian. I will also sweeten this deal a bit more," he then turned to the three girls. "When you are finished with your university education there will be a bank account with 5 Million Yen set up for you in trust to help you on your way to wherever you want to go."

Kyoko's eyes widened a bit. 5 Million Yen was not as much as it would have been in Dollars or Euros, but it was still quite a bit of money.

Mami, however, looked even more apprehensive before she let out a sigh. "Very well, then...I agree with this arrangement."

Alice's face lit up as she hugged the blonde girl, and she hugged Alice back. "This is great, we can do so many amazing things, how about we got tomorrow to—"

"I think you're forgetting something, Alice," said Elly, cutting her off, "you will be grounded for for as long as your friend is, that is only fair, wouldn't you say?"

Alice groaned at that in despair as she looked at her Father to intervene; however, Naoya shook his head at her.

I laughed a little at them and then I got a feeling that things were looking up for us.

Chapter 14

"Happy birthday, Mami!", "Happy birthday, Mami-senpai!" they gathered in Ken's apartment to celebrate Mami's birthday and her and Ken's graduation to High School.

Mami was smilingly brightly with some happy tears in her eyes. Even though she was feeling a bit sad about the fact that she'll not see them for a whole year, she was still happy to have got so many amazing friends, and that she had reconnected with Kyoko.

A year ago she couldn't even imagine having more than 3 friends at most, but now there were 9 people who were her friends or more in one case.

Around a month after they were able to overcome Walpurgisnacht, Ken had confessed to her.

At first she didn't know what to do with it, so she asked to think about it, and when he left she confided in Kyoko and Madoka.

They gave her a bit different suggestions, with Madoka suggesting that Mami should think about her feelings towards him, and base her decision on that.

Kyoko, on the other hand, said that Ken is an alright guy, so if she liked him, then she should accept it.

So, after Mami thought about it for some time, she called up Ken and asked him to meet. And there she ended up accepting his confession.

Ken was probably the ideal boyfriend, he was vert attentive, very kind and was always very early for their dates.

He was also really sweet and tried to do his best in dates with her, something which while she did appreciate, could also be a bit annoying at times, thankfully those cases were few and far between.

And almost everything in the team had started to date. so Ken and her could go on quite avfew double dates with her friends.

Now that I am thinking about it, Alice-chan, Takashi-kun and Naoki-kun are the only part of our little group who are not dating. Well...Takashi-kun is maybe dating that green haired friend of Madoka-chan, so that leaves just those two.

They would look good together... Mami shook her head. *No I can't try to play matchmaker just because I think they would look cute together...though if one of them were to ask for help, I'd certainly help them.*

She mostly meant Alice in that case, as Naoki wasn't quite close enough to her to be considered by him, but she was sure that Madoka and Homura would also help the boy if he asked help from them, which was more likely than him asking help from Mami.

Kyoko didn't think this would be how it felt like to be adopted. Minako and Shinjiro were far more relaxed than she would have expected them to be.

And Ken, outside of Persona and Shadow Operative business, was far more easy going than what Kyoko expected him to be.

And honestly, the fact that he and Mami were dating was also helping her see him in a more positive light, even though she still couldn't quite tell how exactly it happened.

Mami just one day suddenly asked her what to do if someone confessed to her; it took a put of prying to get her to admit whom she was talking about, but when she did, Kyoko advised her to accept it if she liked him back.

So, she guessed that she had some influence in the formation of their relationship, but Kyoko was sure that Mami would have accepted that confession even with Kyoko's advise.

Anyway, good for them, Mami needed someone who would care for her and about her, and Amada Ken fit that role really well.

Back to the the topic of being adopted; she didn't know at first what to do around

Minako was especially really fixated on the little clothes she owned. Therefore, she took Kyoko out a few times to go shopping with her.

And the woman and her hit it right off, she was just up Kyoko's alley.

Her husband, Shinjiro, also had started to teach her how to cook in the kitchen after he saw what type of food she was regularly eating.

She was a bit annoyed by his focus on her eating healthy, but at the same time she was glad that he was teaching her something useful like that.

Outside of that all, she also had to learn how to take care of Koromaru, something which was quite easy given the fact how intelligent he was.

She also had to go on a quite few dates with Kyosuke and Sayaka. To this day, she still had no idea how they were able to make this relationship work.

Maybe due to the fact that they both cared very much for their blue haired girlfriend, but Kyoko had to admit that Kyosuke wasn't the worst person, despite her prior thoughts about him when Sayaka told Kyoko what her wish was.

And he is quite a good kisser, so there is that as well, and well I guess he is also really good looking as well.

Sayaka wasn't sure if this was how she expected her future to end up, but it was really good future. She, unfortunately, had to stay in a hospital after the Walpurgisnacht fight for a few days.

While she was there, the others routinely visited her (when the could that is, most of them were still grounded, thankfully they were allowed her to visit her once everyday).

During her stay there, she managed to work out her feelings for the two Kyos, and one day when two of them visited her, she asked to speak them some more to clear up their relationship.

They did as she asked and after a twenty minute talk, they managed to clear up most of it. Honestly, Sayaka didn't expect it to get that smoothly, but both of them seemed to want to want to date her, and they didn't seem like they hated the concept of the three of dating at the same time, so things worked out well.

The others in the team were supportive, although, Sayaka could tell that a few of them were a bit weirded out by it, thankfully no one said anything, so Sayaka ignored it for the most part.

The only obstacle now were her parents, and Satoko cringed when she imagined what their reaction to it would be.

Eh...I'll cross that bridge when I get there...Perhaps Kyosuke and I could pretend to be in a normal boy to girl relationship. No I don't want to so that to Kyoko!

So, she was stuck in the moment on what to do. Thankfully, she had a bit of time to think things through before she was released.

Speaking about being released. She still had no idea what the Shadow Operatives fed her parents in regards to why she is in hospital again.

Thankfully, they didn't notice that she wasn't in the shelter, something that also raised some red flags with the Shadow Operatives (the fact that Kyosuke's parents also didn't notice also raised a few red flags), but Sayaka couldn't care less about it.

Just two more day...just two more.

Homura was certain that this was not how she imagined everything going after they dealt with Walpurgisnacht.

Nevertheless, she couldn't be happier.

by how everything turned out. Madoka and her were dating, she was also living with her—well now she was no longer staying in Madoka's room, but her own.

She was very grateful to the Kanames about the fact that they allowed her to stay with them, she was also somewhat grateful for that man, Nanjo for giving them that trust.

All her Yakuza money had, unfortunately, been confiscated by the Shadow Operatives, due to it being well...Yakuza money.

They didn't do anything more than that, and thankfully she was allowed to keep things she bought with that money. She also got a good stipend after that, so that was a plus.

And not to mention all her friends were happy and not wasting their lives away with being Magical Girls.

Sayaka and her even started to get along with her, which was not something Homura had never expected to happen.

Alice, Naoki, Kyoko, and Takashi were still her closest friendships in the group by far.

They had hung out a lot together, going to various different places around Mitakihara as a group like Kareoke; hopefully fot the last time, she would almost certainly stab her ears out if she heard Naoki's got awful singing voice one more time.

They had even organized some trips outside of Mitakihara, mostly to neighboring cities like Kazamino, all in all, things have been going well for everyone.

Hitomi also started to hang out with them more, Homura didn't know how she got enough free time, but the green haired girl seemed to have got some more independence from her parents.

She and Takashi also had seemed to have hit it off quite well, Homura wasn't sure if they were dating, but they spent a lot of time around each other after Kyosuke told her that he and Sayaka were dating (something which Madoka suggested he do).

Everything was going well for her—too well she thought sometimes—that being till Madoka convinced her that she deserved being as happy as she is now.

I really have an amazing girlfriend.

She also had started going to therapy, at first she was hesitant on it, mostly because she doubted that most if any therapist would believe what she had experiences, thankfully Alice's Mom and Dad knew someone who was a therapist and Persona user, so she reluctantly agreed to go there.

And it felt liberating to be able to talk about what she had gone through in all her loops with someone who wasn't Madoka.

Sonomura Maki, her therapist, was a very understanding woman, even after Homura revealed that all the things she had done throughout her loops to keep Madoka safe.

And she was working her way through everything that had happened in the loops.

Madoka was just glad that everything turned out alright in the end. Homura-chan no longer had to repeat those loops anymore, and she could finally be happy.

Things have been going quite well for them, she was also glad that Magical Girls no longer had to worry about turning into Witches, especially her friends.

She also made sure that Homura knew how special she was, something the others helped her in.

Sometimes, Homura still had nightmares about being stuck in time loop, and it broke Madoka's heart to hear her cry lile that.

Thankfully, after she started to going to that therapist, who Alice's parents recommended, she started to have them less.

Naoki anf the Shadow Operatives also revealed quite a lot of info about those Mental Shutdowns cases—nothing that Madoka didn't already know from Naoki himself—but it was shocking to the rest of the group.

This was compounded by the fact that Naoki's and **Ken's** Father is one in the same, and that he is the one most likely behind the Mental Shutdowns.

While Madoka and Homura were aware of who his Father was, they weren't aware that that man was also Ken's Father. Madoka didn't quite know how she should react to that revelation.

Ken said that their relationship didn't change at all from this, but she was a bit skeptical about his claim.

Thankfully, the relationship with the others hasn't changed after the revelation, even if Madoka wished that in some instances it did.

Sayaka and Homura still didn't get along as well as Madoka hoped they would, not to mention due to his busy schedule Kyosuke couldn't always be there on important events.

Nevertheless, she was fairly happy with how this situation resolved itself, and with the Shadow Operatives working on the Mental Shutdown case, Madoka was sure that that problem would also resolve itself in no time.

To say that everything was going well after the defeat of Walpurgisnacht would not be totally accurate.

First, the amount of Mental Shutdown and Psychotic Breakdown cases have increased drastically, the news weren't saying much about them—probably due to Shido's influence—but even that has started to change recently.

Nonetheless, things were going well for most of us, and we even started to interact more with the Shadow Operatives and the Investigation Team as we were admitted as Reserve Members of the Shadow Operatives.

I had to also go through quite a lot of tests, the ones about testing my Persona, which Aunt Junko insisted on, returned nothing suspicious, thankfully.

The results of the other test confirmed what the Crawling Chaos told me about **him** being my father. Honestly, at least, I gained something from it in the form of getting Ken as my brother, something which was a bit of shock to everyone in the group.

I still didn't know the why, mainly why Shido even had sexual relationship with my mother. Uncle Tomohisa couldn't help me with that much.

Apparently, my Mother kept who my Father was a secret from her and they, as a result, got into a huge argument, which caused her to run away from home.

So, that explained a few things to me, but I still didn't know how Shido and her met, so I'll have to do some reasearch into that fact.

Though, I doubt that I would be able find anything of note as my Mother wasn't an organized person and even if she had anything before, it most likely vanished before I even got to Mitakihara.

That being said, Shido might have not remembered my Mother, so that could work in my favor, though, I doubt that I would get that lucky.

That's something I will have to deal with on the future, but the question is how I'd go about it...

I shook my head. I should not be thinking about things like that at the moment, for the now I had something I needed to attend.

We all gathered at the theater, waiting for Kyosuke to start his violin performance.

Honestly, I to this day still haven't figured out how the relationship between Kyosuke, Kyoko and Sayaka turned out like this, but good for them.

Though honestly, it's really something that I should have expected from them given how obviously in love with Sayaka both of them were, and—

Alice then nudged me, bringing me out of my thoughts, I then listened to Kyosuke's performance with a small smile on my face.

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