

## **bruises (i keep calling out to you)**

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# **bruises (i keep calling out to you)**

by [serendipitous\\_theodosia](#)

## Summary

“Looks like your soulmate is a warrior, Kiddo.”

## Notes

yall ur welcome for this lmao, you better go out and post more for kidstar or i'm RIOTING. anyways, tiny mention of self harm in the beginning there (so pls b careful of that), this might be the tiniest bit melodramatic idk, pls tell me ALL of your thoughts in the comments. also if you have OCD tell me if i did anything wrong cause i'll fix it. no beta we die like men, having said that i might change a bunch of crap once i finish the next chapter lol. hope you enjoy!!

edit: I fixed the formatting for this story cause it was giving me hives lol, and I'm working on the second part as we speak. thank you for all the kind comments and hopefully I'll be finished with it soon!

# escalation

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was clear to him, even from the very beginning, that his soulmate was a massive idiot.

Not only was pale skin always marred with a conglomeration of yellows, purples, and reds, but the heathen — whoever they may be — had no regard for symmetry. The bruises and cuts would bloom haphazardly, one on the left side of his cheek, or on the right side of his leg, an ugly and grotesque display of the idiocy of his counterpart.

They never hurt, no, only acted as a form of mockery to Kid. He felt a familiar itchiness come on when a new one appeared, the desire to make a similar mark to match, plaguing his brain and drowning out everything and everyone around him with static before he finally caved. His lip curled with sick satisfaction, even as the pain of his self-inflicted wounds ricocheted off his nerves. At least this way he could make his partner's carelessness beautiful. At least this way he didn't look at his body and see shame.

(And perhaps his soulmate would be reassured by the presence of his wounds on their body. Perhaps they traced the outline of the hurts they shared, and felt a little less lonely in the wake of their connection. Perhaps they both stared at the laughing moon, thoughts eclipsed into the night sky and heightened by pale starlight.

He had always loved the stars.)

It took Kid a while to realise the rare instances he got hurt, a similar injury would appear reflected on his body. It was years after they started appearing. He noticed after a rather brutal training session, which led to a thin gash below his eye. He tried to ignore it for as long as he could, avoiding mirrors and digging his nails into his hands to keep from touching it.

But he relented after a few hours. He tried to prepare for the inevitable bile, the screaming scathing voices shaming him, the inevitable tension of his arms and shoulders as he peeks hesitantly into the mirror and—

Oh.

There were two gashes now, perfectly reflected and the new one made with such precision and care, Kid felt his golden eyes prickle and burn. A warmth filled in his chest, burning out

the loneliness of an empty and cold house and replacing it with a weightlessness he had never known to be possible. He touched the gash, and was met with wetness, salty tears curling into his nimble fingers. He let out a breathless laugh. Perhaps his soulmate wasn't as hopeless as he once believed.

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*“Oh my, what happened to you, Kiddo?” His father asked the first time the bruises had appeared, cocking his head to the side in a quizzlike manner. Kid’s gaze hyper fixated on his mask, wondered if it was .01 millimeters off center or if it was just his imagination.*

*He cleared his throat, looked up at his father’s hat — which was most definitely asymmetrical — before looking down at the smooth concrete of the Death Room’s floor, “I’m not sure where they came from. I have not gotten hurt in any of my training, and I have not done anything reckless.” His teeth worried at his lip, as his brows furrowed, “They came out of nowhere!”*

*His father hummed, taking in the weight of his son’s words. His mask stayed impassive and blank, as was customary. Kid wondered if his father’s expression ever changed. If he would become as blank and expressionless when he became a shinigami. He pushed away the thought before he could ponder it further, and contented himself with tracing the outline of the mark, feeling oddly comforted.*

*“Do you know what a soulmate is?”*

*Kid’s face scrunched up at the word, buried in the depths of his memory. He vaguely recalled one of his tutor’s prattling on about the subject, but found he couldn’t keep his attention off the skewed tie she wore. Regardless, he cobbled up a response based on the few sentences he remembered, “An ideal partner, correct?”*

*His father nodded, and Kid was inclined to imagine a smile, “That’s right, son.” He said, voice filled with tints of acclamation, “Think of them as your other half. Everyone is said to have one, and the bond is meant to transcend even death. They are your perfect match, complementary in every way. ”*

*He stood tall at the praise, but worried his lip even more as the gears in his head turned, “But what does that have to do with the bruises?”*

*“It’s the same concept as Soul Resonance, but with a twist. Soulmates have their soul*

*wavelengths connected at all times, creating this unbreakable bond. Because the connection is so strong, it manifests itself physically, thus causing the bruises you see now."*

*"So, you're saying that the injuries they get will show up on my body and any I get will show up on theirs?" He asked, realisation hitting him hard as he reconsidered one of the marks on his left arm, before latching his gaze onto into the dark voids of his father's eyes.*

*The swirling darkness of the sockets seemed to laugh at him, as the god said, "It looks like your soulmate is a warrior, Kiddo."*

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As Kid grew older, the bruises became less frequent, supposedly as his counterpart became more competent in their abilities. He had wondered over the years what they would be like, if they were really so reckless to put themselves in needless danger, or if they were just inadequate at fighting. His cheeks would redden as he imagined guiding their movements, showing them different fighting positions and meticulously fixing their stance.

At least they had the decency to heal quickly, and make their hurts as symmetrical as possible when they did appear. Perhaps they would be more tolerable than he once believed.

Either way, his life became fuller with the addition of Patty and Liz, two perfectly symmetrical weapons with a certain tenacity and grace. They filled the empty corridors of Gallows Mansion, as they partook in missions deemed too difficult for the students at his father's academy.

The DWMA. His father hadn't enrolled him, brushing it off as trivial and unnecessary. Kid cocked his head at his father's insistence to keep his head in his study, but decided ultimately that perhaps it wasn't worth his time. He was a Shinigami after all, and his plight to build a perfect world was not dependent on the attendance to a school meant for training Meisters and Weapons.

And yet, he found himself in the Deathroom, shoulders tense and fingers twitching with an overwhelming urge to help those four hopeless students. They seemed rather ordinary, perhaps less so because of their mandatory remedial lessons. He surveyed them, a blonde with her hair swooped into pigtails, green eyes blazing with anger as she yelled at a boy. The boy, presumably her partner, bared sharp teeth at her, messing with the cream headband which hung low on his forehead. His eyes then drifted to another girl, tall, and azure gaze leading to—

Oh.

“Black☆Star’s soul wavelength is astonishingly great—” He heard his father say, and his fingers curled into the golden arms of his chair. His gaze lingered on the younger boy, this “Black☆Star” and swallowed, mouth suddenly dry. His breathing became shallower, and he tore his gaze away to refocus his attention on his father, “— he’s a genius at using direct soul attack against an opponent.”

There was something in his voice that put Kid on edge, gripping the chair hard enough to feel it bend. A cold shiver snaked its way down his spine. He switched gears and tapped his fingers in sync on both sides, counting to eight for each one. Waiting for the other foot to drop.

“— it won’t do him much good in this fight.”

He choked silently on the little air coming into his lungs, and shrunk at the weight of his words. His skin prickled, and his tapping became erratic (imperfect) after catching a glimpse of Stein zapping the poor boy with his soul wavelength. He got up abruptly, tearing his eyes off the mirror.

His screams rattled in Kid’s brains as he gritted out, “This is too much. They need help. Let’s go.” The responses of his weapons fell on deaf ears, but his father’s sharp words pierced through.

“You can’t get involved.” Images of Black☆Star’s eyes rolling to the back of his head, veins popping out of his skin, “You’re not a student that goes here.”

He pressed his lips together in impatience, stopped walking only to say, “In that case, as of this moment, consider me enrolled.” Before starting again (left foot always left foot first, and make sure the strides aren’t too big), he inhaled for eight seconds before exhaling for another eight.

He was going to save him.

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He did not save him.

Instead, he felt his legs become lead, as those whispering doubts slithered back into his mind again. He refused to stop before his step count reached an even number, and tried to blink out the blur invading the corners of his vision. Oh god, he forgot to fold the toilet paper, didn't he? Of course he did, he was trash not worthy of taking over his father's position, he wasn't even capable of remembering the toilet paper! He swallowed down the bile and pushed his tongue forcefully on the back of his teeth. He could hear Patty's laughter, and tried to register what Liz was saying over all the voices screaming of his incompetence. That damned toilet paper.

"If you don't snap out of it those kids are gonna die." And he knew that, felt that more intrinsically than he could possibly explain. But the images of the boy beaten and battered and covered in blood were not enough to overpower the static (the toilet paper isn't folded properly in a triangle), the hole in his stomach (how could he forget about the toilet paper?), the pressure on his chest (he needed to fix the toilet paper). He needed to check the toilet paper, felt himself choking at the idea of not. This was serious he needed to make sure everything was ok, how could Liz not realise this he needed to check—

It'll only take a minute, he reasoned with himself. The weight loosened as he gave in to the urge, and rushed back to Gallows Mansion to make sure the toilet paper was folded into perfectly symmetrical triangles.

Yet a minute turned into two turned into five turned into the entire day, as Kid flitted about the house and made sure the pictures were perfectly aligned with the ground as well as each other. He found himself spending hours on one frame, even though he knew it wouldn't move if he walked away. But that didn't stop him from pulling out the measuring tape again and again, counting and recounting, biting his lip until he tasted blood. It was perfect, it had been even before he checked and yet his inner voice insisted it wasn't.

Even as he crawled into bed, the itch driving him completely satiated, he felt cold. Black☆Star slithered back into his mind, and while the boy was more welcome than self loathing, Kid could not help the guilt that pooled in his stomach. They could be badly injured, or even dead. His father would stop things before they got too out of hand right? He wouldn't let his own students die right? Kid swallowed down the guilt and checked to make sure his timer was set to eight am. He was to join the DWMA tomorrow. He lulled himself to sleep by counting.

He did not notice the bruises on his forehead looked a lot like electricity.

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It had taken him three hours to make sure that the house was orderly enough to leave. The

candles were burned down the right amount, the picture frames were perfectly aligned, and the toilet paper was in fact folded into triangles. Absolutely perfect.

He felt a certain level of peace as he traversed the long cobbled roads of Death City. Everything was neat and orderly, exactly as it should be. So, he entertained himself with idle chatter between him and his adoptive sisters, smiling softly at Patty's antics and Liz's ability to indulge her. His thoughts flashed back to the kids from yesterday and his smile faltered, before he walked faster. Today he would see what had happened to them, and his peace was disturbed by a lump of guilt forming in his throat.

*What type of Shinigami was he?*

Either way, he was at the DWMA before he knew it, and was blown away by the beautiful symmetry of the building. Leave it to his father to construct something as awe-inspiring and wonderful as this. This was the vision that he would take up after he took over, this echoed of the balanced world Kid so desperately wanted to create. Absolutely perfect.

"Hey. Are you the new kid we've been hearing so much about?"

His head snapped to the source of the noise. A boy sitting (asymmetrically) against the school, white hair stark against his eerily red eyes. Kid attributed him to one of the weapons who faced Stein, and felt the tension ease out of his body. He was clearly not dead. Asymmetrical, but not dead. And the likelihood of him being alive while the others had perished was significantly low. Kid stuffed his hands in his pockets and tried not to focus on the boy's — Soul, if he remembered correctly — hair, and instead crafted a response, "This is my first day. Are you here to show me around?"

Soul laughed at him (rather rudely) and then proceeded to invoke one of Kid's tirades on symmetry by mentioning school started at seven (and rightfully so, seven was a heinous number, no balance whatsoever!)

He snapped out of it at the sound of crackling. He turned just in time to see the tip of the left cone break off, and a kid flailing as they fell to the ground. He felt a scream bubble in his throat (oh god, it was perfect why'd he have to go and ruin it, it was perfect—) as that familiar itchiness burned deep into his veins.

He was shorter in person. This Black☆Star, with his hair spiked up in a hideously asymmetrical haircut, which was so close to being perfect if it was only two centimeters to the left, tanned skin housing a star scar on his right shoulder but not on his left, and worse of all the buttons of his shirt being slightly askew. He felt his hands twitch, tried to summon anger and disgust for this boy who should, objectively, be ugly.



But he could see constellations eclipsed in the gaps of this annoying boy's smile, swallowed thickly at the arrogant curve of his neck, and the crinkles underneath his eyes. (And oh, his eyes were a lot prettier up close, various shades of blue and green meshing into a teal, pupils small, yet sharp as he analysed Kid, a cold calculating glint masked behind fire. Kid looked down to hide the raging red that overtook his cheeks, and let himself be scrutinised. He was supposed to be angry, where was that anger?)

“Disgusting pig.” He spat out. Yet he was surprised that the words fell flat in his mouth, that the syllables tasted wrong on his tongue. However. No matter the feelings Black☆Star evoked, or the weird relief Kid felt that he was alive and safe, he must pay for his transgressions.

There were many instances where he could have struck, and ended this pitiful duel, but he found the antics of these two boys relatively amusing. He was above them both in relative skill, and he had his weapons while the two of them were woefully out of sync. His gaze would slide to Black☆Star, the perpetrator of this fight, nerves grated by his noisy bravado. He really should not have been this smug, considering Kid had dealt blows to his ankle, stomach, and head, and he had not returned the favour. But he could not help being the slightest bit intrigued by the shorter boy, by his boisterous claims of surpassing god, and the utter confidence oozing out of every pore on his body. He did not see Kid as above him, did not see this fight as pointless, or something that he could never win. He did not see a Shinigami in training, or a footnote in his father's legacy.

He saw an opponent he truly believed he could crush.

It was nice. Filled Kid with a warmth he could not explain. He's only known Black☆Star for ten minutes and ascertained he was an arrogant, cocky, asymmetrical bastard who had improbable, illogical dreams that he decided to barrel towards no matter what. He proclaimed he would surpass god, eyes burning with such a deep self-confidence and passion, that despite how ludicrous his goal sounded—

Kid believed him.

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Kid washed the blood out of his mouth, and tried not to think of him. Instead, he focused on his bangs (dammit Soul!) and what he was going to do with them. His hand subconsciously reached for the scissors, as he tried to swallow the bile snaking up his throat. It made him nauseous, looking at it. It was a marvel he lasted this long without spitting up more blood.

He measured out how much hair he needed to trim in order for it to be even (oh god, they're so uneven) before his eyes locked onto the bruise at the center of his forehead. A small, circular bruise.

A bruise that looked exactly like the shape and diameter of his bullets.

The scissors clattered against the pristine marble sink. He quickly (sloppily) unbuttoned his shirt, revealing a slightly red patch of skin right in the middle of his stomach. His breath slammed into the back of his throat, as he checked his ankle, only to find what he already knew was there.

*"Your soulmate is a warrior, Kiddo."*

*An idiotic, egotistical one*, he thought ruefully, betraying the hammering heart in his chest and the delicate rouge on his cheekbones, his hideous fringe forgotten.

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Despite beating the duo to a pulp, Kid found himself becoming fast friends with the four teens. He was surprised initially at how well he complemented the group dynamic, and by how quickly the boys were able to accept him. Either way, he quickly became acquainted to the earnest, honourable Maka, her reserved, good-natured scythe (and boyfriend as soon as they stopped denying their feelings for each other) Soul, the kind and pure hearted multi-faceted weapon, Tsubaki and—

Well, Black☆Star.

It was rare for him to spend one on one time with any of them however, as they were all swamped with schoolwork, and his father still sent him on special missions on par with his skills. So in the rare downtime he possessed, he indulged himself on a little side quest.

The Legendary Sword Excalibur, said to bring untold glory to one who was worthy. Kid wasn't aware of how he first heard of it, perhaps whispered in the halls of the academy somewhere, but curiosity wiggled its way into his mind (this weapon was said to be symmetrical after all), and he found himself walking towards the library. As luck would have it, Black☆Star was there as well, sitting atop the very book he had wanted, laughter bubbling out of his lips. He seemed to be invested in one of those silly comics, and unaware of anything around him. Kid hesitated, stopping (at an odd number no less!). He tried to process

the warmth settling in his stomach. (Why did he want to make him laugh like that? Why did he want to see his smile more?)

He swallowed, before shaking it off and walking towards the other boy.

“Keep it down, will you? You’re in a library.”

The boy stilled, eyes connecting with his golden ones. His smile widened into a crooked grin (was it socially acceptable to fix it with his fingers?), and he furrowed his eyebrows in embarrassment, “Yeah, sorry.” Black☆Star cocked his head to the side, straightening his back, “What are you doing here, Kid? Are you being punished too?”

Kid assessed him, taking in every aspect of the boy’s appearance. He was always so vibrant, movements loud and exaggerated. How was it possible for someone so short to have that much energy teeming in their veins? (He wondered why the universe dictated them to be a perfect pair. He was everything Kid was not, brash and uncouth, possessing a certain coarseness that flitted into his every interaction. He got under his skin in a way Kid never knew was possible. Yet even so, he could not summon annoyance when Black☆Star struggled to say Excalibur, only fond exasperation. Black☆Star’s eyes filled with curiosity then as he leaned into his personal space eagerly. His gaze slid from the innocent wonder of his eyes to the lone star on his shoulder. He could not stop the tightness that grew in his throat the longer he stared at it. His soulmate was asymmetrical.

Imperfect.)

Before he knew it, they were on a quest for Excalibur, Kid for the sake of symmetry and Black☆Star for the sake of victory and glory. He had left Black☆Star at the base of the hill because he knew the younger boy would find any way to catch up to him (and he couldn’t hold two people on Beelzebub without it being woefully imbalanced). Either way, he found amusement in his shouts of annoyance.

That is before he noticed the stream of water running through the cave.

“I can’t go down there. My pants will get wet.” He said, keeping his voice as even as possible. He looked into the swirling water below, imagined all the little life forms teeming in the seemingly calm waters. He gagged, and instead latched his attention onto Black☆Star. He stared at Kid, disbelief clear in his posture. Kid could feel his bones become heavy and weight settle onto his chest. (The water looks absolutely disgusting please don’t make him go in there.)

He has expected Black☆Star to leave him there, forgo this quest and thus not have to deal with Kid's antics. (He knew the effect that his "neurotic tendencies" had on those close to him, their vexation surfacing as tense shoulders and sighs of pity. He was a burden like this, and he had almost gotten the girls and himself killed on multiple occasions. It was only likely that Black☆Star would follow that pattern, see him for the hindrance he was.)

But Black☆Star only tsked before bending his knees and patting his back, "Hop on."

Any heaviness residing in Kid's chest vanished, replaced with an unfamiliar warmth settling in his stomach. He bit back a smile, and abided Black☆Star's request.

"Such a terrible obstacle so early on the quest. Our chosen path is truly a cruel one. I'll ward off the water from above and you can handle the water from below." An apology as well as gratitude. Kid tightened his grip on the black umbrella keeping his eyes off the water (oh god there are so many germs in there aren't there), "We'll work together. It's a good thing there are two of us, this would be impossible alone."

"You're kind of a useless idiot aren't you?" Black☆Star sighed, but continued to walk towards the holy sword. (His voice wasn't filled with the impatience and irritation he was used to, that buzzed in Liz's words whenever he was being difficult or Patty's laughter whenever he was rendered paralysed in his anxiety. It wasn't even filled with his father's indifference. Kid squinted at the back of Black☆Star's head, preparing himself for malice and derogatory words that they never came.

He was the only person thus far to not make fun of Kid's neurotic tendencies.)

Kid could not help but laugh at the ridiculousness of Excalibur, and how easily he was able to rile up his companion. This whole quest had been a bust, and yet he couldn't help but smile to himself as they made their way towards the exit. (Kid told himself it was because of how symmetrical Excalibur was, despite everything else. But as he held tightly onto Black☆Star's chest and leaned in closer to make sure he didn't fall off, arm covering the star, so he didn't fixate on it, he found himself thinking this whole experience would have been way less enjoyable without him.)

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The hallways of the DWMA seemed shadowed against the weight of Soul's injury.

Of course, everyone acted the same when visiting him, all cheery eyed and goofy

shenanigans. But the moment they crossed the threshold of the infirmary into the hallway, the smiles slipped off their faces, and they looked at each other, eyes dark with concern. (Kid had tried to be as helpful as possible by keeping the medicine perfectly symmetrical in the cabinet. If Soul was stuck here for a long period of time, he might as well be comfortable.)

Maka of course was taking the brunt of the sadness. Her eyes glazed over in class and in conversation, her brows furrowed. She would worry her lip until it bled, and would not notice until hours later. (She glided across the floor, most of a spectre than a girl, haunting not the school but her own torment. Kid could not help but think she was the one who was injured most.)

It all comes to ahead when he saw ash hair curtained over small knees. He paused in the hallway, ears honing in on the snivelling noises. (He tried not to focus on the fact that her breathing was erratic and unpredictable, bit his lip before telling her something brash. He may not be the best at the emotions, but he knew that would only make everything worse.)

“Maka?”

The girl lifted her head, rivers pouring from her eyes. She furiously wiped them away with her sleeve, voice hoarse and cold as she looked away, “What are you doing here?”

Kid blinked at her, stepping towards her gingerly, hands up as if as a gesture of peace (which was irrational she’s not even looking at him), “I was going home after a meeting with my father. But then I thought Soul might appreciate a visit.” His fingers twitched, “I have the faintest suspicion that the box on the top shelf is the slightest bit to the left.”

That got Maka’s attention (of course it would who wouldn’t be worried about such a heinous occurrence) and Kid was able to see the red rims around her eyes (wait ok but was the box in the right place when he left it last?).

He swallowed, and stopped himself from going inside the infirmary (the box is definitely off center) because his friend needed him (the box the box the box the box the box-)

“Will you excuse me for one moment?” Before briskly entering and realigning the box. There. Perfect.

“Sorry about that.” Kid said when he came back out. Maka only stared, eyes glinting with the same unamused glimmer Liz and Patty wore when he was like this. He hunched his shoulders and focused on the (perfectly squared) floor tiles, “Why are you upset?”

“My weapon almost died, why wouldn’t I be upset?”

He peered at her, eyes narrow and searching, “.... He’s more than your weapon, isn’t he?”

Eyes burning, tears pouring faster, “Do you know what it’s like? Waking up and seeing that scar etched into your skin? Being constantly haunted by the fact that you’re not only a bad meister, you’re a bad partner?” She blinked rapidly, putting her head back on her knees, “He’s stuck with a weakling like me who can’t even protect him. That demon sword could have killed him, and it would have been my fault--”

She hiccupped, stopping the words from cascading out. Kid’s hand landed on her shoulder, patting it awkwardly. He tried murmuring words of comfort, a few “there there”s here and “it’s okay”s. But the tears wouldn’t stop and her body was trembling with effort and he knew he was way out of his depth. (Was it socially acceptable to phone Liz in this situation and ask for help? Or Tsubaki? They were much more adept at this than he, and he felt his insides turn cold at the thought of making Maka feel worse.)

“But he didn’t.” Kid said quietly, as if the volume would make her less likely to hit him if he misspoke, “He’s still alive, and you still have time with him.” Kid found himself sitting next to her, approximately eight inches away with a hand still on her shoulder, “You can make it up to him.”

Maka sniffed, still tightly wrapped around herself. Her trembling stopped. So did the muffled cries of anguish. She lifted her head to meet his gaze, green eyes (not the right shade) hard, cheeks wet and glistening. Her voice was low, sotto voce tones barely reaching his ears, “You’re right.”

He forced his lips up into some semblance of a smile. He handed her a spare handkerchief, which she took gratefully and used to wipe her face. A terse silence befell them, any and all words he tried to conjure up dying in his throat.

“Do you know who yours is?” Maka asked, breaking the silence at the expense of the air becoming heavier. He flinched despite himself, took his hand away as if she had burned him. He could feel the muscles in his back tensing up, envisioned wide curious eyes, crooked smiles. A bullet sized bruise, a piggy back ride, innocence and asymmetry. His heart ached (one, two, three, four...) and he found himself looking to the direction of his dorm.

He knew she understood.

“Does he know?” Her voice got louder with each word. He shook his head. The fabric of the snow white handkerchief twisted on her fingertips, “You need to tell him.”

He did not meet her eyes, instead counted the (perfect) brown squares lining the bottom of the hallways. (His throat grew tighter and his chest grew heavy, but it was not his surroundings that bothered him.)

“You need to tell him. Before something like this happens to you.” She stifled a laugh, tone more teasing than expected, “He’s way more of an idiot than Soul is. Keep him close to you and love him while you still have the chance.”

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He squeezed his hands into fists and felt blood curl on the edges of his nails when Black☆Star said he was leaving. Kid smiled at him, lips taut and uncomfortable, Maka’s words echoing hollowly in his brain. A taunt. (An unwelcome reminder.)

He told him to stay alive.

Bruises littered his body as the days went by, in such rapid succession Kid wondered if he was stuck in a hail storm. Or if that idiot was dumb enough to fall on his head 18 times. (At least the number was even at least most of it was in the middle of his body at least the bruises meant he was still breathing—)

He attributed the worry to something logical, normal, but did not hold his breath when he saw Tsubaki enter that cursed sword. Did not feel the same stone of dread lodged in his throat or tautness in his legs as when he saw those villagers pummel Black☆Star with rocks and stones. His own scalp tingled at the sight, grateful his hair was long enough to conceal the bond that manifested across his skin. That etched Black☆Star’s name into his soul.

He tried to ascertain the numbness in his body or the shaking of his bones to something he could quantify, something he could understand. But in that week, when he started walking (right foot first and with strides too long) he heard the name of the feeling creeping up his skin.

Fear.

It was fear.

As a Shinigami in training, he had only known fear as a concept, an emotion ascribed to humans that was so irrational and unnecessary it drove people to madness. (He felt that madness, tasted its nectar as he stood in the Death Room, face blank, pretending nothing was wrong. He did not count the footsteps it took to get here, or comment on the bruise blooming on his right shoulder. He stayed rooted to his spot, eyes never leaving the mirror.

The snacks they brought tasted like ash on his tongue.)

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They came back after three days.

Black☆Star with his hands behind his head and signature beaming smile. Tsubaki trailing after him.

His friends swarmed the pair, girls suffocating Tsubaki in a bear hug (Liz seemed to hold her just a little tighter) and Soul enveloping Black☆Star in a side hug. Kid felt the tension rush out of his body, as he strode towards the boys (left foot first of course) and flanked Black☆Star's left side. He looked up at him with that crooked smile, and all Kid could think about was how the curve of his mouth reminded him of the stars.

“The problem child finally redeems himself.” Kid said, (and hoped he could recognise the relief in his eyes, the slight tremor of his words sighing welcome home).

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*The Kishin next to us...*

Kid fought the stormy look that threatened to take over his features, and pushed down the bubbling disgust that churned in his stomach.

There was a Kishin underneath the DWMA.

He had known his father was prone to keeping secrets, for the purpose of preserving peace, order, symmetry. But how the hell did he expect anything to stay peaceful when there is a *Kishin underneath the DWMA?*



How could Kid be so naive? Is this what it meant to be a Shinigami? Hiding behind smoke and mirrors and burying your mistakes so far deep others would never see it?

How could he endorse his father keeping such dangerous things hidden?

They were having a party, dammit! (and the food wasn't split evenly on the table, the curtain on the left was three centimeters away from where it should be, the amount of people in the room made the space cramped and suffocating and Kid didn't even want to think about all the germs.)

He bit back his anger, swallowed his pride and spoke the words his father proved too incompetent to speak.

And of course Black☆Star decided he wanted to be the center of attention while he was talking, of course he had no regard for anything or anyone around him, of course he was causing chaos and making the curtains look worse. Dammit! (what's worse is that Black☆Star was incapable of wearing a suit properly. He looked atrocious, tie askew, one side of his shirt tucked in but not the other, and food all over his mouth! The gall! So yes, he did get into a little wrestling match with his stupid excuse of a soulmate and, no, he was NOT in the wrong.)

He tried to relieve his stress by dancing with Liz and Patty, instructing them to kick their legs at a perfect sixty degree angle. They were approximately three degrees off and Patty was lagging behind by ten seconds and it was doing nothing for Kid except giving him hives.

So he dismissed his weapons and told them to go have fun, while he contented himself with glaring daggers into the floor. (Not before seeing Liz reach a hand out to Tsubaki, and Maka making a beeline for Soul. They were not subtle at all.)

"I dunno what the floor did to you, but I don't think it's gonna fight you." A voice chortled (obnoxiously), accompanied by a tanned hand landing on his (right) shoulder.

Kid flinched and backed away from the touch, redirecting his glare to Black☆Star (of course) whose suit was still hideous in every sense of the word. He didn't even try to stop his hands from smoothing out his collar and rearranging his tux into something semi presentable. Black☆Star squirmed at his preening, but Kid only became more forceful, biting out the words, "If you're going to be such a nuisance at least let me fix the mess you've made of yourself!"

He scoffed at Kid and crossed his arms (to Kid's ever-growing dismay), "You're not my mother! Besides the great Black☆Star doesn't need your fussing to look good."

Kid glowered at the shorter boy, meeting his gaze head on. His grip on Black☆Star's collar became tighter and tighter, as he dared the younger boy to argue with him. Black☆Star's gaze flitted one of his eyes to another, and the boy's stare became less heated. He looked away and dropped his arms in a huff. Kid stood straighter and smirked, smoothing out the wrinkles his fingers made.

It took a while before Kid deemed his attire satisfactory enough. He tied and retied his bow eight times (it wasn't even enough the first seven times), straightened his shirt sixteen times (he could have sworn that it was tilting slightly to the side), and readjusted his jacket twenty-four times (the fabric didn't feel smooth enough, was he sure that looked good maybe eight more times—)

Black☆Star, to his surprise, stayed relatively still during this. He did not complain, or call him an idiot, or ridicule his obsessive behaviour. He did not push him away or rush him, or do any number of things Kid was used to. He merely stared at the boy, grumbling occasionally, with the smallest pout on his lips. (Black☆Star's eyes weren't smoldering, or cold either. The crow's feet at the sides of his eyes softened, became less of a bold and more of an italicised, as those tender verdant irises swirled with something akin to... curiosity.

He didn't know it was possible for him to look so soft.)

Only when Kid pulled out the handkerchief and started scrubbing away the crumbs on his face with a bit too much vigour did Black☆Star say, "You ok, Kid? You're kinda attacking my face."

He paused, retracting his hand. He bit his lip, and looked off to the side, "Sorry."

"It's fine, something like that couldn't throw me off!" Black☆Star cocked his head, scrutinising Kid, "Are you good? You seem more uptight than usual."

His hands tightened around his handkerchief, nails digging into the little embroidered skulls, "Really? I'm surprised you noticed. I could have sworn you had the emotional intelligence of a toothpick."

Black☆Star just shook his head at him, "Awww come on, Kid, don't be like that!" He looked away, and Kid followed his gaze, onto the dance floor.

A mischievous glint twinkled in his eye as Black☆Star said, “Dance with me!”

Kid snorted, incredulous but intrigued. He stepped towards the boy, “Do you even know how to?”

“Of course I do! I can do anything. Don’t underestimate me, Kid, I’ll dance so well I’ll leave you in the dust!” He replied, grandiose words and syllables barraging out of his mouth as he pulled Kid onto the open floor.

Kid rolled his eyes, but felt the irritation that has been drilling into the side of his brain for the better half of the evening subside. He wrinkled his nose at Black☆Star’s grip on his shirt (that would most definitely leave creases), but decided to indulge him. Kid let himself be dragged, if only to see the boy’s words fall apart the moment they got onto the dance floor.

He had chosen a spot in the middle (of course he did, he loved attention) but where there was enough space to make sure they didn’t bump into anyone. (Kid wondered if it was a conscious decision, if Black☆Star knew he would complain about the germs that came from being suffocated by other people. He also wondered why the thought brought a blush to his cheek.)

He straightened his cuffs, placed a hand on his waist, patient but firm and said, “I’ll lead.”

Black☆Star’s pout was akin to a child, but to Kid’s surprise (delight), he acquiesced and placed his hand on Kid’s shoulder. Their fingers intertwined, an air of hesitance suspended between them.

The warmth of Black☆Star’s hand seeped into Kid’s cold ones, a shiver slithering down his spine. They adjusted themselves accordingly, until there was a reasonable amount of space between them, and their stances felt comfortable.

Then, Kid took the first step.

(Kid fell into the old ballroom training, stepping in perfect time with the music. He guided with authority, subconsciously directing his partner by putting pressure on his waist. Each stride was poised, refined, and purposeful. Planning ahead for the next step and the next, fine-tuning the speed, the pace. Hyper aware of Black☆Star.

And Black☆Star, *oh*, Black☆Star. He danced how he fought, all brute strength and confidence oozing with every step he took, sure and powerful. Flames licked at Black☆Star’s

dress shoes, intensity engrossing him like a whirlwind. He followed with fervour, easily keeping pace with Kid, challenging him to go faster, faster.

Each place their skin touched prickled. Kid could feel his heat on his shoulder, through his suit, and found himself wanting to draw closer.

Their presence took over the dance floor, demanding attention and respect. It did not feel like Kid was leading, or Black☆Star was following. It felt as though they were walking together, side by side as control seemed shared by both of them. They were equals. Their movements were perfect.

Precise.

Direct.

Passionate.

They were a force to be reckoned with, souls resonating at neck breaking velocity. They commanded the floor, a steadfast congruity binding them together, energy and hearts thrumming in unison, and Kid concluded this was the closest he had come to godhood.

And it felt so *right*, the two of them *together* like this.)

“You don’t have to tell me.” Kid blinked and refocused his attention on the shorter boy, “What’s wrong that is. Just know your good buddy, Black☆Star, is always here if you wanna talk.” He gave Kid a lopsided smile, sending a tingling sensation into his stomach. He furrowed his brow and inclined his head, trying to process the words. (It felt like he had been given a piece of an elaborate puzzle. Of course a part of him knew that Black☆Star was more than a bombastic, ambitious, arrogant figurehead. Of course he knew he had depth. But it was different to see it, lining his fingers, jaw, brow bone. It was different to see him shining not with brashness, but a calm attentiveness, all directed towards Kid.)

Any residue worry and anger melted away as Kid felt the corner of his lip quirk up ever so slightly, “Thanks.”

They stayed silent for a while, wrapped up in the feeling of power they emitted. Kid had locked onto their feet for the duration of the dance, still focused on the technicalities, the intricate fine details to look up. (Their feet complemented each other, and they always followed in each other’s steps.) Only when he felt the pair functioned well enough without his scrutiny did he look up to his companion.

(They were closer than he remembered when did they get closer? Kid could see the deep line etched between his brow, the little freckles dotted on the gentle slope of his nose from too much sun, the wisps of blue hair asunder and framing each detail of his face. His head was spinning, as he tried to squash the thought of counting each strand, each freckle. Would Black☆Star let him? Would he have that same aching patience he had when Kid fixed his suit?)

“I’m surprised you’re able to keep up with me!” Black☆Star said brashly, jolting Kid out of his thoughts.

He suppressed a shaky sigh, calling upon all his wit before replying with, “You do realise I’m the one in control, correct?” and his voice could barely keep the sarcasm in his tone, instead sounding way more breathless than intended. (His heart ran marathons in his chest, a dizzying fog clouding everything with him he could feel his breathing against his cheek even and perfect—)

“Even if I’m the lady, I’m still a star! You of all people should know that, Kiddo.” And there’s something more in his teasing tone that Kid could dwell on, but he felt pulled into the present by mention of his nickname.

His demeanour become colder, bit his lip and he willed away the fire that flared back up in his stomach, “Only my father calls me that”

Black☆Star merely blinked before smirking at him, eyes wrought with mischief, “I’m way cooler than him! If he gets to, I should too.”

Kid rolled his eyes, but noted the anger subsided yet again.

He pondered the boy’s request while looking at his eyes, and realised in them he saw the night sky, “Only if I get to call you Star.” (Of *course* they would end up like this, of *course* he reminded Kid of pale moonlight, *of course* he fit the second half of his namesake.)

Kid held his breath as Black☆Star paused, the air around him stilling in the wake of his choice. But his face cracked into one of his signature, blazing smiles, light outpouring in every crevice of his body as he said, “Of course! That’s the only thing that fits me anyway!” And he laughed, loud and boisterous, but there is red colouring his cheeks and Black☆Star is blushing, *Star is blushing*.

“Alright then, Star it is.” And Kid could feel the corners of his mouth peel into a (real) smile, one he hadn’t worn in so long and yet this idiot pulled it out of him. Star softened, and

they're looking at each other, and he couldn't stop the smile from spreading or his eyes flitting to his lips, and Kid wondered if he knew if he needed to tell him he wanted to tell him

---

Then the weight of all his father's mistakes culminated at that moment. That. Damn. Kishin.

(Kid hand tightened on Black☆Star's waist, before they broke away.)

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The combination of the anger swirling in his gut and the hideously arranged bombs blocking the pathway made him sick. It was as if the enemy was mocking him specifically, and unfortunately they were doing a pretty good job of it. Kid could barely stand to look at the bombs, waves of nausea striking him relentlessly. (Nothing about it was symmetrical, nothing was perfect, and the knowledge that Kid couldn't fix it made his ribs cave into his heart. He was a worthless, hopeless, *waste* of a Shinigami—

He tried not to feel the tendrils of dread sneaking up his sides when he remembered he was tasked with fixing his father's mistakes.)

In the end, Patty's scolding was what got Kid past those disgusting, heinous bombs. Kid swallowed, but took great pleasure in seeing that revolting arrangement destroyed. He gritted his teeth, nails digging into the cool metal for some semblance of grounding. This mission paralleled that of a colossal failure even before they landed in those abominable coffins.

(He imagined a skull mask, perfectly symmetrical with unfeeling voids as eyes and scowled. Vitriol made a home in his ribs, eating away at his lungs and heart at such a speed he wondered if he'd be consumed in wrath before insanity.)

“We can't stop here! Are you having a reaction?”

He hadn't even realised he had stopped before Liz mentioned it. (What else had his father kept from him in the name of peace? How many lies, how many deceptions, how many people would get hurt because of his carelessness? The Kishin's madness threaded through the air, braiding into the folds of Kid's mind, whispering and coalescing with thoughts of his father until he could only see red. He could not hyperfocus on the mess, did not hear the voices that plagued his mind since birth. All he knew, all he was was the smoldering, white tendrils of suffocating rage.)

Liz's voice cut through the sea of crimson, snapping Kid out of his thoughts as the room

came back into focus, “Are you alright?”

He swallowed, hyper aware of the sweat trickling down his forehead (did he bring his handkerchief with him?), “Yeah... It’s just this pressure. I’ve never felt anything like this before.”

Somehow he ended up reciting the tale of his father’s transgressions, of this Kishin Asura (something in him stirred at the name, a shadow of a memory) to the girls. He focused on their mental connection, closed his eyes against the madness that etched on the sides of his vision.( He was swimming in a pool of tar, the black muck consuming him the more he tried to struggle against it. What even was the point of balance anyway—)

The blast of a projectile rattled his teeth, searing heat a little too close for comfort. God, his head was spinning, thoughts divesting into a series of pictures and ruminations that were not about the fact *he almost died he needed to focus on his opponent.*

He needed to breathe (one, two three, four...) he needed to stay *present* (five, six, seven, eight.)

The projectile came from the immortal, who proved to be more taxing than he imagined. Of course, it did not help that he became increasingly aware of his surroundings (the room was so damn messy), eyes scanning the walls in search of a vantage point (that pillar was broken where’s the other piece, why is there a weird looking pig, who decorated this place???)

The entire battle was a blur, a tangle of dodging attacks (the pillar), fruitless shooting (the statue), and the impossibility of progressing any further (bad dream this had to be a bad dream). The odds became worse and worse, as his skin became itchy, and his fingers started to twitch, his insides ripping apart and rearranging. He fell back into one of his older habits, scratching his head faster and faster (he needed to regain control, this was a way to regain control, he can’t fix the room but he can control this he can control this oh god everything is spiralling out of contr—).

A solid weight barreled into him, knocking him into the ground. Cackling filled the air, along with a familiar suffocating egotism. Kid felt the anger bubble up against his skin yet again, but found it was easier for him to breathe. He could feel the scolding words drip out of his mouth before his brain even processed what had happened, “Moron! The one we want is further ahead!”

Black☆Star cocked his head, eyes wide, “Really? Then what are you standing around here for?”

Kid panted, the whorls of mania and irritation subsiding. (His vision became sharper, all his focus flooding back to him in a matter of seconds. They had a mission to complete, this was not the time to be so overcome by emotion.  
Was this the effect of the Kishin's madness?)

With Black☆Star here, Liz and Patty were able to redirect his attention to their opponent.

With Black☆Star here, he was able to see through the immortal's trick quickly.

With Black☆Star here, they were able to advance. (Even though he's such an idiot, Kid felt his grip on his weapons loosen. As Black☆Star, placed a hand on his shoulder, sheepish grin on his lips, he held the slightest bit of hope.)

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(When he became weightless, stubby fingers furled against the hilt of his enchanted blade, shadows playing against the meat of his cheek and the corners of his eyes, licking at his heels in an ardor akin to his likeness, Kid saw stardust twirling in the field of his vision and wondered if today was the day Black☆Star would surpass god.

It was not.)

\*\*\*\*

“We failed.”

The scent of burning skin sizzled and polluted the air in plumes, and Kid could feel himself drowning in smoke and bone marrow, sickness residing in the folds of his stomach, throat tearing apart when his name left his lips and Black☆Star's body hit the ground. The last thing he remembered was throwing himself at the Kishin, retribution powering his legs and

falling

falling

falling.



(He dreamed of constellations and prayed to his father that when he woke up, Maka's words wouldn't be the only thing his eyes opened to.)

\*\*\*\*

They were alive.

Somehow.

They had survived the rancor of the Kishin, bruises and hurts the only thing they had to show for the battle. Defeat sat heavily in the air, shrouding all of Death City in a density analogous to despair.

They had failed, after all.

(His father's eyes churned when Kid came to the Death Room, voids boring down at him. Judgement and exhaustion danced in them, relentless and cold even as they passed over Kid's, and by extension Black☆Star's, wounds. This was a scolding, a pledge of silent disappointment casted onto Kid's frame. Before, Kid would have broken eye contact, gaze at the clouds brushing his feet while his shoulders hunched. Before, Kid would have let the voices take over, self loathing clawing at every inch of his skin, picking apart each imperfection and each fault that resided in his body. Before, when his feet traced these same steps and he cowered under this cruel gaze, Kid only knew what it meant to be a disappointment to his father.

Instead, he levelled his eyes to this impassable god's, fists clenched to his sides, and *snarled*.)

The group had converged to the basketball court, shooting hoops and chasing some semblance of peace in air that teemed with chaos, willfully ignoring the uncertain future that lay before them. (Here there was no failure, only the fierce competitive nature of his friends and a kinship. He saw it in Maka's clumsy dribbling, Tsubaki's patient smile, Patty's carefree laughter, and Soul's "cool" demeanour.

Black☆Star's ambitious eyes and lopsided simper.

They were his family.

Kid swallowed back a grin, and let a soothing warmth overtake his limbs in security.

It was the last time he would feel secure in months.)

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The onslaught of Death Scythes made the DWMA suffocating. The oppressive atmosphere clung to their physique as they trudged solemnly through the school. The Kishin was a death sentence, and Lord Death with his scythes was the perfect executioner. (While walking through the halls, his feet always took the path furthest from the Death Room.)

With them came chaos, the group being split up and sent to do various different tasks. Arachne proved to be a growing threat to the academy, and Kid was continuously tasked to receive “magic tools”. (He refused to look Lord Death in his eyes, let his lips form the word “understood” despite the friction on his tongue and soot between his teeth.)

With the influx of new enemies and trials, the cards became increasingly stacked against them; they were becoming stronger, but they were still just children playing at war in an adult game, stakes too deadly to warrant being subjugated on the battlefield.

They kept *losing*.

The ideals of balance resided deep in Kid’s ribs since childhood, an intrinsic belief in the ever tilting scales of order and madness, life and death, good and evil forever oscillating in order to keep the world whole. He wanted to believe that this was a minor setback, that Arachne would only make miniscule progress before being offset and deterred by the DWMA. That somehow, no matter how illogical and hopeless it seemed, they would come out on top. He desperately clung to this, mouth remaining dry while knots coiled at the base of his spine. (He ignored the sick crackling of his foundations breaking, closed his eyes against the decimated pieces of his world plummeting down around him. Balance and symmetry laid in his hands, cutting into his palms as he gripped them tighter and tighter to counteract the chalky smell of asphalt. His father had been his role model for the duration of his life, the god he aspired to be and yet...

Who was Eibon? Why was Lord Death’s name on a magic tool? Why did the DWMA hunt witches?

Were they the good guys? Was Lord Death—?)

He hadn't seen Black☆Star in weeks.

He manifested himself as splotches on Kid's skin, in olive, sanguine, mulberry. They were numerous but small, peppered onto plains of ivory flesh. His usual attire was enough to cover it, but peeling back the layers of clothing at the end of the day became a painful reminder. (Black☆Star had the uncanny ability to occupy space without being anywhere near him. He materialised in the nooks and crannies of Kid's life, in rooms that were a little too quiet, a little too empty, mocking him. It was as if the absence of him made him more present. Kid was acutely aware of the numbness lining his stomach and crusting crudely over his heart. How the lingering bleakness seemed all the more vibrant.

For the first time, Kid traced the bruises and was plagued with images of a big empty house ringing with deafening silence. Childhood tasted bitter on his tongue.)

\*\*\*\*

When he did see Black☆Star, it was in the infirmary. Maka had gotten hurt from Arachne's soldiers, finding herself in the same bed Soul inhabited merely months before. (The irony was thick. She was apparently incapable of following her own advice. Weird sexual tension permeated the air around them, and Soul refused to leave her side. Kid may have been oblivious when faced with another's emotions, but anyone could see they fancied each other. Still, they appeared locked in a stalemate, forever circling around the other until someone was pushed over the edge.

Not unlike his situation, Kid supposed.)

Black☆Star came armed with a black sharpie and a toothy grin, branding Maka's forehead with his signature (which was three centimetres off centred) with a good natured chortle. Voice soft, fingers brushing against the skin of Maka's forehead.

(He didn't look at Kid. Kid fixated on perfecting the medicine cabinets to quell sharp pangs in his stomach.)

Sid sauntered into the small room, beckoning Nagius out to talk about important matters. (What no one else noticed was that Black☆Star's eyes followed them, that he slipped out of the room moments after the adults left. His assassination skills had gotten better.)

He sniffed, grip tightening on his pencil. He tried to focus on the lesson, on Stein's voice droning on about soul resonance. But his eyes kept trailing back to the two empty seats next

to Soul, gut squirming. (He worried about this boy too damn much. Why was he cursed with a soulmate who was incapable of taking care of himself?)

Black☆Star seemed off, before he disappeared. His smile was a little dimmer, the lines on his face hard and cold. Kid had hoped it was just general sadness from seeing Maka in such a state. But a gnawing feeling broiled in his gut, taunting him.

Something was wrong.

\*\*\*\*

After another tedious meeting with Lord Death, Kid stalked down the hallway, syncing the click of his heels to cater to his perfect strides. It was soothing, medical salve applied to his grated nerves. Comfort was hard to come by these days in the wake of the shadowed halls. Indulging in one of his compulsions for limited relief seemed to be the only source of calm. How ironic.

He would be home soon. It would take about five minutes to get there on Beelzebub (if he was slow he could stretch it out to eight.... tempting), but perhaps he could —

He glanced upward and faltered.

The younger boy was lingering at the edge of the hall, staring at the door of the infirmary. Sunlight gushed from the window, draping Black☆Star's (perfectly centred) beanie in flecks of gold. The sinewy muscles of his back were rigid under his yellow sweatshirt, tremors wracking his frame. Half of his face was obscured by ripples of darkness, the only discernible feature the sharp corners of his mouth, drawn back into a heavy frown. Tsubaki was nowhere to be found.

“Black☆Star—” The words crumbled on his tongue (one cheek was adorned with a bandage).

Black☆Star turned frantically (there's no bandage on the other cheek), hunching in on himself as he glared at Kid. His mouth pulled back into a snarl (how could he not realise the symmetry of his face has been compromised?), eyes bright and hazy with shame of being caught, (he was so careless the bandage—) before recognition flashed in them. Tension seeped out of his bones. His face became blank, carefully guarded against Kid's watchful gaze (the bandage the bandage the bandage, why was Black☆Star acting so weird, the bandage).

The silence settled on both of them, Kid choking on the mountains of questions building up behind his teeth. (His heart was pounding in his ears, drumming to the beat of an erratic, cacophonous melody. He was right there, less than four feet away, and all Kid could think about were the damn bandage. It had been so long since they had talked, too long, this was not the time for his stupid obsessions to take over. He placed his hands in his pockets to calm himself, tapped his fingers, one two three four five six seven eight. It was taking all his willpower to stay, to be still and focus on the person he had wanted to see more than anyone else. Who was littered with cuts and marks, who's eyes...)

Black☆Star's glower bored into him, fingers relaxing at his sides (Kid imagined flecks of blood sprinkled on his fingernails, how could Black☆Star be okay with being asymmetrical?). He cobbled up some semblance of a smile, wide and awkward on his cheeks as he said, "Whatcha starin' at Kid? Admiring the view?"

Kid opened his mouth before clamping it shut, unsure of how to funnel his concern and confusion and bafflement into coherent phrases (he's imperfect he's imperfect the bandage keeps him from being perfect—). His tongue sat firmly on the roof of his mouth rolling syllables and consonants against it.

Black☆Star's focus flicked to his mouth, lingered and intensified on his left cheek, before dragging back to his eyes, "What is it, cat got your tongue?" He was slipping back into his usual bravado, sentences so like him, and yet they didn't sound right. Nothing about this was right, "As much as I like the attention, I've got stuff to do. You know how it is."

He walked past him, brushing his side as he went. Tension clung to his body, his footsteps leadened against the floor. The alarm bells blared in Kid's head, screaming say something do something. (Something was wrong, he was acting strangely. His shoulders sagged under the weight of the world, scabs glinting and taunting. Kid was unaware of the events prior to this meeting, but everything pointed to the simple fact that Black☆Star *needed* him.)

"Wait." Kid heard himself say, blinking against the fuzzy edges of his vision (he could do this, it was fine there was only one bandage).

He heard the footsteps behind him stutter, as if hoping for salvation, giving one last chance for redemption. He allowed himself to breathe, strung sentences around the static stuffed in his brain. He connected the worry, the weight, the emptiness, this impalpable and unfathomable connection that made butterflies flutter in his stomach, harmonious symphonies ring in his ears, sweetness linger on his tongue.

He cared for this boy, had been fretting over his absence for months, this was *not the time*—

“You have a bandage on your left cheek but not your right. You have to add another one for it to be symmetrical.”

Damn it.

There must have been cotton in his ears, Black☆Star’s voice sounded miles away. His chuckle was humourless, “Gotcha. See you around, Kid.”

(He didn’t know why this felt like a goodbye.)

\*\*\*\*

The cut on his cheek (the same place, the same *damn* place) and the rising lacerations on his stomach, wrists, and chest echoed the gashes hidden by Black☆Star’s sweater. He looked in the mirror and traced them, throat constricted, blocked by a hot ball of dread and regret. His fist clenched and he covered his reflection with a blanket before that dull itch could settle properly underneath his skin.

\*\*\*\*

He should have stepped in when he had the chance.

Brew.

Enchanted Sword.

The bruises.

Mifune.

The losses kept piling up, a bitter tally score signifying more and more defeat.

Black☆Star wasn’t made for defeat. The boy guarded himself behind iron walls masked as fake smiles and fist bumps. It was unnerving, watching a chasm grow steadily between him and their friends, one made of his own volition. He hid his unraveling in distance, distance which caused an ache in Kid’s heart. (He saw it in his eyes that day, burning rage coiling and

twisting darkly in the shadows of his irises. Toxic and vile self loathing polluting that thick skull of his with negative thoughts and affirmations. Kid could hear them, taste the song of self disgust on his tongue, smell the sharp tang of static in his nostrils. He had gazed into Black☆Star's eyes and saw himself.)

## Chapter End Notes

the dance scene is my favourite part so far lmao. tell me whatcha think, scream at me in the comments i'm down lmao. luv u mwah. also if you want a fic commission or just to support me, go here: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/serendipitous>

thank you all for your support <3

# suspension

## Chapter Notes

..... hey lol.

i TOLD yall i would post another chapter. is it a year and a few months late,,,,, yes, buuuut hey we are rockin w it, we are vibing, it's a good time here lol. on a serious note, i'm sorry it took so long, life got in the way and totally blindsided me. also, this project is WAYYY longer than i intended it to be, like i thought it 15k words was the vibe but NOPE. i'm already a slow writer too so it mad everything worst ahhh. but thank you for sticking w me, the last part actually shouldn't take as long cause i REFUSE to add more scenes. slight tw for the first scene, Kid is rlly going through it so his OCD is way worse. i suggest going back n rereading the first chapter and i hope yall enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The discontented buzz rippling through his skin grew more and more prominent as the days went on.

Paranoia became a constant, showing up in the illusion of uneven candles, portraits two centimeters off centre and miniscule aspects of his friend's appearance. Somehow the compulsions were louder, more demanding, stark and vivid against the chaos of his surroundings. (It was somehow more of a nuisance, disrupting his life and breaking down his ability to function properly. He was drowning in white noise, the constant buzz furrowed deep within the folds of his brain. He could hardly move without being barraged with how uneven his steps were, how imperfect his breathing was, how utterly *inept* everything around him tended to be.

His hands had been shaking for weeks. Was the path to perfection as destructive as the Kishin's madness?)

Dark circles acted as a permanent addition to his skin while stress crinkled the corners of his eyes. Everything was somehow becoming worse, and any semblance of control dripped slowly from his fingers, a bitter wine.



His friends' eyes lingered on him a little longer than usual, tracking the slight tremor of his fingers, or hard set of his jaw. "I'm fine" was uttered at least once a day, paired with "It's okay". If Kid was feeling really radical, he'd throw in a "everything will work out fine", just to spice things up. There was no room for their concern, not when weariness was already etched so deeply into their bodies, not when they couldn't afford to divest their energy on anything other than securing victory. His health and wellbeing were a small price to pay if it would ensure Death City remained safe. (they couldn't fail again, he couldn't fail them. The fate of the world rested heavily on his shoulders, but Lord Death never taught him how to be Atlas.)

Even if the heavy mist clouding his skull got worse the harder he pushed himself, even if he could hear blood rushing in his ears, he would shove it down for the sake of those around him. It was second nature anyway, swallowing fear and hurt and anger and dread down in service of a blank face. Playing at godhood, playing at calm even as tempestuous torrents congealed and consumed him, tore delicately at his resolve, expressed in microexpressions and stiffened joints. He had to be a leader, he had to be responsible, had to stay steadfast and firm in the wake of such trying times. (The sword wounds from Black☆Star's fight with Mifune had long since scabbed over. They hadn't talked since that day in the hallway. Walking into the Death Room caused goosebumps to bubble his skin. The air was thinner there, and Kid couldn't stand to look in the god's eyes. The mirrors in his room stayed covered.)

So he worked and he worked and he worked and he worked, until the world became blurry, until words fuzzed over and his brain refused to process more. He worked and ignored, worked and suppressed, worked and indulged his compulsions. (He wound himself up so tightly with expectations, with improper self care tactics, with shame that was always a little too thick to swallow, a little too present to forget.)

Despite everything, he made time to clean the mansion (eight times, sixteen times, twenty four times over) until every crack and crevice glimmered with a perfection the rest of his life couldn't emulate. If everything else was to fall apart at the seams, at least he could control that, at least he could make a sanctuary out of symmetry, make a home out of wide arches and everything being precisely where it's meant to be. No matter how hectic and ugly and grim the world outside was, at least he had this, at least he could make something beautiful. (Don't think about Black☆Star. Don't think about his smile, or his laugh, or how the brilliance he exuded would be a balm against his grated nerves. Don't think about how beauty was etched into every facet of his being, even when unsymmetrical. Don't think about aching patience, don't think about how Kid's name sounded on his tongue. Don't think about how he felt like home, how everything would be so much more bearable with him by Kid's side. Don't think about him. Not when he was a reminder how everything Kid touched was destined to crumble.)

The girls agreed to help him maintain the cleanliness in the house, restricted their messier habits in the name of order. (He came to them, head bowed and vulnerability dripping from his tongue as he begged for them to aid him. They had placed their trembling hands on his shoulders, Liz's mouth a thin line, Patty's eyes starry with worry. Kid swallowed a stubborn lump in his throat. Gritted his teeth against the roiling pit in his stomach and cobbled up all the sanity he had left to focus on them.

"We're with you, Kid," Liz had said, voice grave and wobbly, "We've always been."

The lump in his throat disappeared.)

Kid managed to keep the mansion clean for three weeks. Three weeks where entering into the long hallways was akin to resurfacing after drowning for hours, where safety and comfort eased the ball of tension and strain braided into his nerves. Three weeks where air filled his lungs properly, where the weight on his shoulders was a little less noticeable.

Until he found shoes haphazardly strewn next to the mansion entrance.

(The tightrope frayed, the strings thinned, the spring compressed. A lump forming in his throat, making the air thin again. They weren't *even*, there's no *care* or *thought how could this happen?* His heart was wrenched out of his ribs, mirroring the buzzing chaos of his mind, the swarm of unrest skittering beneath his skin, nestled into bone marrow. It's so *ugly*, how could anyone mar the peace he made with such *ugliness?* He was swept up in noise, in fuzziness in why why why's everything was perfect for once *why—* )

His mouth moved before he was aware of it, words tearing out against his will, "Liz! Patty!"

Footsteps echoed down the perfectly curved staircases of the house. They fell upon deaf ears, Kid engrossed in the grey lining the corners of his vision, the growing tension in his shoulders, legs, and hands. (He had tried *so hard* to make something salvageable, to find success in the smallest and most manageable thing and yet it all went to *ruin—*)

"—something, Kid?"

“Why are these shoes not in their proper place?” He asked, voice flat. He could feel their eyes on his back, assessing and probing (judging, how *dare* they judge him. They should *know* what this meant to him, they had been with him for years, far longer than anyone else. They should know and yet—)

“Oh yeah! Sorry ‘bout that, Kid, we forgot—” The honey sweet tones of Patty’s voice curled into the tattered fibres of the tightrope and *pulled*.

“You *forgot*?” Kid asked, the sound of snapping loud in his ears, loud enough that his own voice remained muffled. (How could he have been so *stupid*? He should have known. They had discredited his malady for *years*, whispered “overreaction” and “burden” in his ears even as he gave them the world. They had placed their hands on his shoulders, murmured reassurances and comfort and for a *second* he ached to believe they... they...)

Patty flinched, moving ever so slightly back (her steps were uneven her steps were uneven can they do anything right the shoes—). She furrowed her brow, concern in the creases of her tanned skin, which did nothing except ignite his blood, engulfing him in *rage*.

“I’m sorry, Kid, we can move them—“

“Why were they there in the first place? Must you be so dirty? Is it so difficult for you to follow simple instructions?” (He learned scathing words in the same halls they stood in, turned them on himself from the moment he could speak. He knew how to hurt, and the poisonous wrath tingling underneath his skin demanded him to deliver.)

“Hey, Kid, knock it off! It’s not that big of a deal, we can clean it up,” Liz snarled, voice hard as she moved in front of Patty (one arm up not the other one arm—).

Of course Liz’s first reaction was to defend, of course he’s the bad guy the one messing everything up, of course in the end he would always be the outcast—

(His brain was still on fire and he shook, the shoes the shoes her arm the *shoes*)

“I apologise if it’s hard for you to grasp the enormity of the situation,” He replied coolly, voice even and low as he glared at the two girls, “I apologise if your incompetence has prevented you from understanding even that.”

Patty’s eyes became stony, any ounce of concern draining from her face. A sick satisfaction coiled at the base of his neck, unhinged and acidic in how good it felt to cut (if he was to be bad, the shoes the shoes).

Liz advanced on him, invading his space. Danger twinkled in her eyes (after all these years they still didn’t care, they still didn’t *try* to... It was the same story it always had been. He thought of turquoise strands, brilliant smiles. Bitterness was gasoline to the fire in his veins.), “You’re out of control! What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with me?” he repeated, words hushed. He bit his tongue to swallow back his laughter, felt the mask that suspiciously resembled Lord Death’s crumble with his control, “What’s *wrong* with me?! I’m not exactly sure, *Liz*, perhaps the fact that we are fighting a war and *losing*? That the lives of millions are resting on the DWMA’s shoulders? That I asked you to do one simple thing? *One* thing for the benefit of my sanity and you couldn’t do it. It was simple! How *dare* you soil the house I *let* you inhabit!”

The silence was palpable. The girls seized up, Liz backing away from him. Even when confronted with their blank expressions, he knew their distress resided in their raised shoulders (he knew he understood why couldn’t they? The shoes the shoes imbalance the shoes)

If the static was a little less pronounced, if his body wasn’t made of live wire, if he wasn’t shaking, guilt would have consumed him. The small part of his body that wasn’t screaming sunk slowly in quicksand, cold and resigned and remorseful. (The control he’d been groomed to keep slipped so quickly from his fingers, shinigami mask crumbled and blood covered next to the foundations he’d been taught to maintain. Nothing was left of the lessons he’d been taught. But anger was easier than emptiness, and he was still the son of a death god. Executions were innate to him, execution was his legacy.

Kid dug his fingers into the years of emotions he’d been suppressing and *pulled*.)

“Do you know how hard it is?” Kid inquired softly, killing blow resting passively on his tongue (he was *tired*. He would make them *understand*), “Every day my brain is on fire, constantly pinging, constantly pointing out every little thing that’s out of place. It isn’t some *game*, I have to live with this *disease* every day of my life, and you guys treat it as a *joke*. I am stressed enough as it is, I don’t need constant reminders that I’m a failure of a shinigami!” His last words reverberated throughout the house, stinging his cheeks. (The truth had roiled in his stomach for so long now, black tar eating him from the inside out. He expelled it in all of its ugly, asymmetrical, chaotic glory. It was out, and his body was cleansed, yet he felt horribly horribly exposed.)

The tremors in his body were still active even as the wrath subsided. He shook as silence settled back in the hall. He shook as the sisters shared a glance.

He shook as Patty spoke grimly, “You’re not a failure. Sorry, Kid, we didn’t know you felt that way and we’re your weapons. We didn’t mean to... To make you feel like we weren’t taking you seriously. We’re with you. You don’t have to go through this alone.”

Liz nodded. Kid didn’t say anything, exhaustion quickly settled into his bones. He tore his gaze away from the earnest sympathy radiating from them. The words *too far* and *too weak* rattled in his mind (somehow overwhelming the subtle shoe chant), which made looking at them a bit too much to bear.

*(You said that before. You said that before and yet here we are.)*

He nodded. He straightened the shoes. He shook, and walked to his room.

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Kid stared at the high ceiling, bundled securely in four blankets (it was too hot to do eight). The semi soft mattress soothed him, as well as the moonlight filtering through his windowsill. He ran his hands against the side of his arms and shut his eyes tightly.

It had been hours since his fight with the sisters. The guilt was eating at him properly now, congealed with shame and embarrassment. How did he allow himself to lose control? How did he allow himself to descend that far? (His body was angled away from the covered mirrors in his room.)

A soft knock (eight raps precisely) bounced off the wood of his door. Despite himself, he softly called, "Come in" before wondering vaguely which sister was visiting him. (He would know if it was the both. He could recognise the sound of two pairs of footfalls against shiny mahogany floors.)

Liz came in, armed with a cup. She eyed the mirrors before hovering hesitantly at the side of his bed. He swallowed down the guilt that resurfaced and made room for her (careful to not disturb any of the blankets of course, he wasn't a heathen.) She gave him a wobbly smile, sat down gingerly and handed him the mug. (It's his favourite one. Decorated with skulls and stars, each perfectly symmetrical and on exactly the same side. He should know, he checked multiple times).

Kid took it, whispered thanks. His hands didn't shake. The gnawing paranoia was a distant murmur, yet having her so close left him with a gaping hole. He clenched his cup tighter against it.

Staring at the hot chocolate, he tried to string together a coherent apology. (Yet another thing his father didn't teach him). Before he could find the right words, Liz caught his gaze, "What else is going on?"

Kid shrugged. Bit his lip. A subtle buzz of anxiety worked its way down his spine .

"Kid." He looked at her. The creases on the sides of her eyes were deep, pupils glistening, "talk to me."

*(Will you leave me again? Will I always be a burden to you?)*

He shrunk in on himself, vulnerability a foreign weight on his shoulders. He could say no, push her away and maintain a safe distance of plausible deniability. Blame his irrational tendencies and say he took it a little too far. Laugh at his own unraveling in order to minimise it and pacify her.

But...

“I’m stressed,” Kid gritted out.

Liz snorted, “Well yeah, no shit.”

Kid glared at her as she smiled coyly, mirth twinkling in her eyes and mingling with concern, “Seriously though, I understand. There's a lot going on and you might feel better if you just talk about it. I’m all ears.” she turned to him, attentive, *present* in a way that Kid wasn’t used to. He gripped his arms (symmetrically of course) and forced himself to speak.

“We are losing against Arachne. The DWMA is not properly prepared to handle her forces as well as the Kishin’s madness. We don’t know where the Kishin is, and the fact that he was released means untold disaster for the entirety of Death City.” His hold tightened (his fault his fault), “The fate of my city, my school, and my friends rests on my shoulders, yet even as I work myself to the bone, I fear it is futile. I am a failure in the highest regard.” A chuckle wrenched from his lips, grotesque and critical, “I can never seem to live up to my father even when he’s...”

He slammed his mouth shut, the rest of the sentence bouncing off of his teeth and back into his throat. Two hands landed on each of his shoulders (perfectly symmetrical, weight distribution wonderfully similar) dragged his attention back to her (when did he look down?). Her eyes were hard, jaw clenched as she asked, “You don't actually think you’re a failure, right?”

He glanced to the side, unease skirting through his veins at the intensity of her scrutiny. He tried not to shrink from her touch, tried not to debase himself further in the span of one night. (Is this how the future shinigami chose to act? Is this how easily he decomposed? Bile sat, thick and heavy in his windpipes. He was destined to hold the world in his hands, and yet they were unsteady under the weight of the academy.)

Kid remained silent. Liz’s face fell, “Kid...”

She squeezed his shoulders, lips thin, “We’re a part of a team now, so all of us are in this together. You don’t have to do everything alone. Soul and Maka have been really worried

about you! Tsubaki has been asking about how you've been and what your favourite tea is. And even though Black☆Star is keeping to himself more, he still cares—”

Despite himself, he becomes rigid (weak). Kid stared into the swirling black liquid in his mug, willing away the static creeping at the edges of his vision. Liz narrowed her eyes, removing her hands from his shoulders (even if she didn't know him she knew *this*).

“...What's going on with you and Black☆Star?”

Kid traced the stars with his pinky finger as the numbness grows, “He is pulling away from the group.” The skin on his hands spasmed (how many germs were on them right now), as he shifted away from her. He gritted his teeth, shaking away thoughts of a yellow sweater and a beanie (his hands felt dirty). A bandage (so incredibly dirty).

Liz's suspicion wafted between them, cumbersome and unwieldy, “I asked what's happening between the two of you, not with the group.”

(One two three four five six seven eight). Liz's tone softened, “It's ok to let other people support you sometimes, Kid. It's also ok to break down. But you've gotta tell me what's wrong so I can help.”

He sipped his hot chocolate, finding comfort in the heat scalding his tongue. He could tell it was made to perfection, considering how symmetrical the marshmallows were in the liquid. But as he drank more, he only tasted ash (one two three four—), “We... had an encounter. I could tell something was wrong but I failed to express my concern for him. I feel responsible for not saying something when I had the chance. I fear...”

Fingers tightened around the cup, voice low (small, one two—), “I fear I may have lost him.”

Liz frowned, corners of her mouth sharp and prominent against her cheeks. She squinted and sighed out, “You know how Black☆Star is. He wants to be the best and outshine everyone around him. He's stubborn and stupid, so even if you said something to him I doubt he would be willing to listen then.” She tilted her head and shrugged, “don't take it too personally. He's



just gotta work through his stuff in a way that makes sense to him. And besides, if he gets too far into his head, Tsubaki will be there to bring him back.”

Kid startled against the creeping jealousy that clamped down on his throat, the sour tange of it addicting and sudden (the overwhelming chorus of voices declaring that even if Black☆Star wasn't his, fate still binded them, red strings suffocating pinkies and declaring destiny. Black☆Star was not his, and yet the thought of someone capturing him made Kid's blood boil).

He scowled at his initial reaction, pushed it down and focused on Liz, the curve of her lip, the soft creases under her eyes, the wistful gaze that only seemed to appear whenever Tsubaki was mentioned...

“Is Tsubaki your soulmate?” Kid asked, syllables tumbling out of his mouth after careful deliberation.

Liz flushed, jerked back and looked away, “That's none of your business!”

He smirked, recalled the way Liz doted on her at the party, how she seemed to glow under the other girl's scrutiny. (The envy and voices subsided, protective instincts settling to a simmer underneath his skin. Part of him wondered if his elation was genuine or tinted with relief.)

“I understand why you're worried,” Liz started, deflection obvious, “But everything will turn out okay. You always say good and evil have to be in perfect balance, right? So things will balance out again, I'm sure of it.”

He drew the cup to his lips, used it to shield himself from the skepticism flowering in his stomach. Silence imprinted itself in the walls of his room, as he struggled to digest the comfort Liz tried to gift him. (Good and evil, evil and good, two sides of the same coin that must always be in eternal balance. But... were they good? Was the god who kept his subjects shrouded in ignorance and demonised people who were different ultimately good? What made witches inherently evil? Kid was born to become the next judge, the next executioner, the next guardian. But if the legacy of godhood was drenched in blood, how can he be sure their side was pure?)

“I’m sorry for the way I treated you,” Kid said, catching the tender blue of Liz’s eyes, “It was unbecoming of me to lash out, even in my anger. I hope you can forgive me.”

She sighed, and Kid noticed the bags under her eyes (oddly symmetrical in nature) and the lines marring her forehead, aging her significantly and paralleling when they first met (a gun to his throat, an opportunity). Her presence seemed heavy on his bed, burdened by an emotion suspiciously close to guilt, “Thanks for apologising. But... I get why you were mad.” She hugged her arms to her chest and bit her lip, “We... I didn’t really think about how insensitive we were being. I guess I didn’t think it was as bad as it was and you were just being dramatic.” She grimaced, pain etched into the line of her mouth, “I don’t want you to feel like I don’t care about you. You’re the best thing that ever happened to me and Patty, and I’m sorry I didn’t make that clear.”

She hesitated before drawing him into a quick hug, grip tight and comforting and warm. Kid tensed up, unsure of how to reciprocate this sudden affection (he could count on one hand the times he had been hugged, remembered childhood tears were met with tilted heads and voids in place of eyes. He thought of small hands, imperfection, staring at families and affection, believing it was only for humanity.)

He tentatively placed his arms around Liz’s shoulders, leaning into her embrace that tasted of the summer sun.

(He closed his eyes, and for a singular moment, the empty house that had haunted him for the better half of his life felt like home.)

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The silence paired with the lack of things out of place allowed him a strange sort of peace he hadn’t felt in months. He ruminated on the feelings he pushed aside before, attempting to understand and fix the wreckage that had become his world.

The ideals he had been brought up on didn’t mesh with reality. Lord Death was not the shinigami Kid thought him to be. Yet he was still expected to perpetuate his father’s legacy.

His father, who kept secrets. His father who endangered the entirety of Death City. His father, who said witches were the enemy and yet had his name on a magic tool. His father who had

taught him the beauty in order and peace, yet would rather shroud everyone in ignorance and false security than prepare against the grim truth. Who'd let children act as pawns on his chess board, who'd let children play at war.

Kid faltered at the idea of following in his footsteps.

(The space where his glass foundations had been built were wiped clean. In its place laid a stone slab, cut from conviction and determination, even as cracks of uncertainty marred its shape. It wasn't much, but a knot loosened in his chest. Even though he didn't know how order and peace and symmetry would fit into his godhood, he could always rebuild.)

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At eight am, Kid arose to a marvellously orderly house. The picture frames were perfectly centered, the candles were burning at the same height, and the shoes, oh the shoes. Not a single thing was out of place, somehow more perfect than before. A cloying tranquility clung to his bones.

And Patty stood, fidgeting under the weight of his awe, a nervous smile across her lips, "I know how much you like things to be neat and tidy so I fixed everything for you!" She scratched her head sheepishly, "It's not as good as when you do it, but hopefully you're all better now!"

Warmth burned in his core, genuine gratitude radiating from his pores as he smiled at her (maybe, just maybe...), "Thank you Patty."

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As Black☆Star hurdled towards the ground at full speed, agitation coiled in his limbs and aggression between his teeth, Kid's heart leaped into his throat, morose images of a bruise blossoming on his forehead plaguing him. Words tore at his esophagus, through the encroaching static blurring his perception as he stopped himself from reaching forward (reaching, never touching, reaching, never keeping—), "What are you doing?!"

Instead, contusions tumified against the tender skin of his knuckles, wrathful vermillion against ivory echoing an injury that must have been agony. Relief blew through Kid, battering against the confusion and irritation propagating throughout his bloodstream. (Two minutes into their first meeting in weeks and Black☆Star insisted on heightening his anxiety. Was he unable to exhibit anything other than recklessness?)

He had come into class twenty minutes late, the contours of his muscles thrumming with tension. He leaned away, frame stark and singular, a quality of him untethered. (Alone.) Glimmering green eyes trained onto the three white lines in Kid's hair, virulence in the wrinkles next to his mouth. Tsubaki was nowhere to be found.

Time seemed to slow then, as Kid failed to stop himself from drinking in the curve of Black☆Star's cheek, the plains of his teeth. Weeks of wisps of him apparating in silent spaces, of seeing him in solitude, of hearing his laugh in the wake of his own spiraling all culminating to this, him mere feet away as shadows toyed with his facial features (a bandage, a bandage... And Kid tried to suppress the well of sudden emotion, gagged and stifled profound joy at seeing him *here* and in one piece. Shinigami expectation clashed with human ecstasy, Kid faced with who he was destined to become jarred against what was imposed on him.)

"You finally showed up. Do you know what time it is?" Kid asked, and winced. Two seconds in and Kid was already scolding.

Black☆Star's eyes flickered, tracing the contours of Kid's face (right, left, right, left). "I came for you, Kid," he replied, mouth drawn in a straight line, "step outside for a second."

His breath stayed stuck in his throat as he assessed the boy in front of him. (God he couldn't stop *looking* at him. The tilt in his hair was still there, the star on one shoulder was still there, imperfection was *still there* . but all Kid could do was glance at his mouth, his hands, his teeth, his skin, his *eyes* . He took up space so divinely, it would only be fitting for him to reach his ultimate goal.)

Suspicion embroidered the edges of his joy, as he followed in Black☆Star's footsteps (a dance, one two, one two, one two, one two). Ration whispered in his ear, demanding the reason for Black☆Star's sudden reappearance. He had been secluding himself for weeks, only now approaching with ominous mysticism. It was too good to be true (he's here he's *here* ), there must have been a reason (he's tangible, he's *real* ).

And now they were here, a sickening sense of *deja vu* heavy on Kid's shoulders as the tip of the (left, always the left) cone came tumbling off, Black☆Star landing expertly mere feet away. He felt disquiet bubble and fizz in the back of his brain, crescendoing and overriding

any other emotion (oh god, it was perfect, why did he destroy it once again, he knew how Kid would feel, why would he do this?).

The words dribbled down his chin out of pure reflex, chastising as his voice got louder to pair with his simmering rage. Black☆Star's eyes only bored into him, bright and piercing through his tirade. He stayed silent, eerie and still against the expanse of the courtyard. Hunched. Hands in his pockets. (Small).

“Come on down here, Kid,” he interrupted, volume abated, muscles tensing further, “Let’s fight about it.”

Kid narrowed his eyes, sentiment and elation transmogrified into an ugly conglomeration of acrimony and bitter revelation (imperfection, imbalance, purposeful, calculated, a bandage a bandage the cone the cone), “What?”

And now, they were here, in front of the DWMA (the cone). Black☆Star tilted his head, his figure composed of harsh lines and angles, shadows clouding every groove. Kid grimaced in reply, nails sinking into pale flesh (the cone the cone the cone). The anxious tittering of their friends simulated background noise, smothered by crescendoing murmurs of indistinct thoughts and years of bubbling antipathy all concentrated to a single point (the cone the cone *the cone theconethecone hiseyesthecone* ).

“You brought this on yourself Black☆Star,” Kid gritted out (he knew he *knew* the *cone* ),  
 “You knew damn well how I would react if the academy’s symmetry was destroyed.”

Black☆Star continued leering (dissecting? Probing? The cone?) a small frown marring the planes of his cheeks (no movement, hunched and still, achingly achingly alone the cone the cone). Kid's displeasure mounted, tension thrumming through his appendages. (The divinity in his blood was hungry for repentance, called for punishment even as pieces of his soul were tied to Black☆Star's with crimson thread. The detached sanctity, the essence of death, of balance, of perfection taunted him, fuelled the human emotion of hurt and honed it into something *biting* , something with claws and teeth that seeped comfortably into the folds of his brain. The vitriol was better, the vitriol was impersonal, the vitriol meant he didn't have to confront the fragments of his heart *cracking* with the cone the cone *the cone* .)

“There’s no helping it. I’ll have to beat you to a pulp very quickly so I can immediately see to the necessary repairs.” Kid straightened, allowed the anger in his bones to harden. His specialty was long range attacks, but martial arts had been ingrained into his tendons from the moment he was conceived. He was going to defeat Black☆Star. (Even if this building was a garish display of everything his father was, he would not let it stay so unruly and imbalanced. Even if a small part of him hesitated, he must bring his soulmate to his knees. Even if Black☆Star’s eyes were so *dull*, he would always be an executioner first.)

Kid jumped, foot millimetres away from connecting with Black☆Star’s nose. Black☆Star chortled, used his momentum to spring up, kicking into Kid’s block (the cone the cone a dance one two three four one two three four). All while his hands were snugly in his pockets.

Kid snarled (the cone), “You going to take your hands out of your pockets?” (What was the point of this if he was regarded as a joke? Why must the parts of him that laid bare to Black☆Star be used in order to provoke him? The vulnerability a blade to his throat in the name of someone else’s selfishness?)

He only smirked, wide and cringing and so very barbed. The segment of Kid that yearned to give clemency smothered by icy contempt (the cone the cone push and pull push and pull), “Are you trying to win this thing without using your hands?”

“Maybe I am.” An empty response followed by a fist to his arm and a hand to his gut. Kid tensed, prepared himself for a debilitating blow and electric bruises on his sternum. But all that came was a push and distance between them. (Distance, bitter bitter distance that had led to hurt, that had led to spiralling. And yet such an overwhelming part of him was still happy to see his face, to interact, even if it was only through a fight, even if it was an exploitation of his neurotic tendencies, even if it was only because of that *damn cone* .)

Kid looked up, confusion cutting through his animosity induced mania (madness seemed so inherent in divinity the cone). His expression was mirrored by Black☆Star, a thin fog clouding his eyes as he murmured, “What was that?”

Kid looked at his hands, noticed the faint tremor, noticed the deeply creased brow, noticed, now as he searched, the white noise, the constant buzz, the ineptitude that had infected him was trapped within Black☆Star’s smallness, Black☆Star’s silence. (Black☆Star’s aloneness.)

And it clicked.

(How could he have been so blind? How did he miss the signs that were so deeply intertwined in his own psyche?

Soulmates were analogous in more than just bruises.)

“Black☆Star.”

He turned, and Kid caught his gaze, analysed the layers of self loathing, the desperate clinging to shards of self confidence he cannot truly tap into. Kid allowed the desire to give clemency erode the frozen pit of holy fury entrenched in his core. He allowed humanity to boil him, to make him attempt at some semblance of softness, “Do you remember the first time we met?”

Black☆Star faltered, mask of indifference and disdain broken, if only for a moment (it was enough).

“We fought in this exact place.” Vibrancy, constellations, an absurd dream and secret belief, “Since then you've improved your fighting technique significantly. You’ve got more style.”

But I have to say...” Kid narrowed his eyes, a flicker of callousness oozing through, the savage desire to hurt back seizing him, “You’ve gotten a bit weak.”

The effect was instantaneous. Black☆Star gnashed his teeth and launched himself at Kid. Having lost the upper hand, Kid dodged easily. Sidestep, parry, strike. Parry, dodge, sidestep, strike. Black☆Star was still a formidable opponent, even when shaken up, acrimony and passionate fervour guiding his steps (one two three four a dance a soul resonance). Kid countered with precision, poised and tempered attacks clashing against the whirlwind that was Black☆Star. (And yet all Kid could focus on was the insecurity, the hesitance in his punches that was never there before. He lashed out, he raved, he turmoilled. The fervent grasp for control.

Black☆Star's fights were like Kid's compulsions.)

Sid's rambles filled the space between Kid's realisations, observations of paralysing self doubt, praises that Black☆Star was probably never told, the root to his rage, a reminder of their losing streak (calm down calm down one two three four five six seven eight), Mifune (a bandage a bandage, absence, numbing absence), the connection that Kid was so *blind* to (how did he not see? They were on a parallel axis, destined to tread each other's steps for all eternity. They would always reflect, always mirror, triumphs and demises shared as intimately as they shared bruises. How did he not see...?).

The more the words poured out of Sid's mouth, the harder the punches got. The more reckless and aggressive Black☆Star became. His face contorted. His eyes became wild as he let out a guttural scream. Kid watched, boiling... boiling.

"You're quiet," Kid commented when Black☆Star settled, "would you like to tell me what's on your mind?" ( *Would you like to tell me the words you berate yourself with? Would you like to tell me in what ways you think you are a failure? Would you like to tell me what you obsess over? Would you like to tell me what makes you bleed?*  )

"What's on my mind? Just that I'm surrounded by morons!" He spat, baring his teeth, darkness embedded on the plains of his neck. (Kid could feel Black☆Star's soul trembling, those crimson strings tugging, pleading, praying... Vulnerability he was not equipped to handle, his doubts and fears hidden behind untouchability, a mask the shape of a star instead of a skull. He trembled, and Kid understood.)

Yet Sid kept talking, bringing in paths and destiny and past and future, only adding fuel to the fire, cornering a wounded dog. Black☆Star bit back, yellow stars in his eyes, soul still trembling yet Sid's first inclination was to attribute him to a monster. (A self-fulfilling prophecy, an expectation born and based on blood, on lineage, on generational trauma. The likeness to their fathers haunting the recesses of their memories in different ways, cumbersome legacy itching to be perpetuated. Three asymmetrical white lines and one asymmetrical star forever etched into their physicality. The objective, indifferent god and the power-hungry, cannibalistic assassin.)



“Black☆Star!” He trembled and Kid made his decision, “Let’s forget about the broken cone. Just walk away!” (Lord Death made him with three incomplete ivory lines rupturing inky black and yet implored him to detest asymmetry. How can a god lord over humanity if one sees imperfection as a sin? Was symmetry worth it? Would it ever be worth it if this was the price? Black☆Star bled in front of him and the only thing given to him was ridicule. This had to stop one way or another. Black☆Star would not become a demon.)

He chuckled darkly, eyeing Kid with a telltale disappointment and malice that made him flinch. His smile was more akin to a snarl, his hands curled into fists as if to scold Kid. As if he should have already known what to expect. Turquoise eyes flashed scarlet and wild as he said, “I can’t walk away now! And I’ll kill you before I let you walk away either!”

Kid sighed, heart heavy (he would have to pass judgement after all). He attacked Black☆Star, breaking his stance and beating him into the ground. When he refused to stay down, he kicked him in the neck, denting the surrounding bricks. Only when Black☆Star stopped moving completely did Kid back off. He collapsed near him, elbows on his knees as he muttered, “What happened to you Black☆Star? Who are you?”

He dug his nails into his palms and squeezed his eyes shut, a deep melancholy washing through him as he thought back to Black☆Star’s declaration, his vibrance, the constellations in his smile (how much they had fallen since then, how much their world views had been challenged), “Your dream... I thought you wanted to surpass god.”

As Black☆Star was carted off to the infirmary and their friends returned back to their classes, Kid sat in the circle of destruction he created, and heaved a weary sigh (was it worth it?). He stayed, alone, replaying that encounter in the hall, the descent of his soulmate's behaviour, the chasm of silence (how much would have been different if Kid had said something? How much could have been salvaged if he had chosen not to be alone?).

The bruises his other half sustained weren’t supposed to hurt, but the back of his neck *burned*.

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The melodious clank of the hammer against the nail distracted Kid from the tempest of thoughts cycling through his head. There was something soothing in the monotony, mindless

work done to perfection untangling his jangled nerves. (This was where he thrived, this was where the stifling need to be useful and to fix could be easily satiated.)

The sound of footsteps broke Kid from his trance, and a flood of images from earlier barraged him as the person approached. He swallowed a sigh and ignored the added burden on his bones (his hackles raised with every step she took, unconsciously preparing for confrontation). Tsubaki stopped a few feet behind him. Kid continued hammering.

“There’s no need to apologise,” Kid stated, attempting to cut through the mounting tension, “this isn’t the last time it’s going to happen. It’s who he is.”

Tsubaki shifted behind him, words weary, “I know.”

Kid tensed, gritting his teeth as he fought to keep his hands steady. (Acid curdled in his lungs, an unfair and grotesquely human part of him whispering of her incompetence as a partner, of royal blue eyes and straight onyx hair being a threat, that the lines of soft pale hands only carry competition. He closed his eyes against it in disgust, tried to shut it off, and remind his brain that this was *Tsubaki*, this was *his friend*, this was his weapon’s *soulmate*. There was no reason to stare at her lithe frame and see danger.)

He squeezed the handle, back of his neck buzzing, “The important thing is what happens next.” The rhythm of his hammering was disturbed, Black☆Star face down haloed by cracked gravel shrouding Kid (the fire that fuelled Black☆Star would so quickly scorch him if he’s not careful, char him if he stood alone. God, he stood alone, heart in his hands, stars in his eyes, and yet he was labelled as a demon, and yet he was labelled as his father), “Can he really keep living like this?”

“He’s doing better now. I think he’ll be alright.” Her soft voice affirmed, “He just has a few things left to learn, that’s all.”

Kid stopped and let her words sink in. Black☆Star had launched himself into excellence by force, relentless drive for more, for better bolstering his progress and making himself stronger. His goal to defy his humanity and ascend to godhood (to him to him) so baffling yet so undeniably him, so carved into his life path. He had caught Kid’s attention that day in Lord Death’s mirror room. If given the right support he could... he could (Black☆Star needed Tsubaki. He needed her to stand by him with concern and balanced support. The threads connecting their souls weren’t red, but they were there, and that was beautiful in

itself. Kid tried to reconcile those facts with the unwarranted jealousy, affirmed to himself he wasn't losing, wasn't useless).

Kid smiled and continued his hammering, "Yeah. I hope you're right."

"You should go to him." She propositioned, voice airily but firm. He turned to her and furrowed a brow. She cocked her head, a tiny grin gracing her lips, "There's a reason why he had to fight you, you know."

His breath caught in his throat. He set down the hammer and shifted his gaze in the direction of the infirmary. Tsubaki kept smiling, inclined her head as her eyes glimmered. Kid mimicked the movement and found his feet walking in the direction of his partner.

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Kid stood at the door of the infirmary and bit his lip. The amount of time he had spent here his past year was honestly ridiculous. His friends all seemed to have a streak of recklessness ingrained in them, a penchant for attracting danger. Honestly, it was a miracle he hadn't ended up underneath those blinding white sheets himself. (Maka next to him, dried tears on her face and sharp words in her mouth. It had been a while since he thought about that encounter, so wrapped up in the world's imbalance. But her parting words wafted in the air again as the back of his neck continued to burn... burn...)

He stared at the wood, willing himself to go in. But his feet refused to cooperate as thick sludge coated his nerves and constricted his chest. He dug his nails into his palms, pulse reverberating in his throat (Black☆Star didn't want to see him, he hated him, Kid was an obstacle to his ultimate goal, Black☆Star could never—)

He swallowed around an ever growing lump in his throat. Tapped his fingers eight times on each side. This anxiety was unbecoming of him. Tsubaki was the one who implied Black☆Star would benefit from this meeting, and she would never espouse what she didn't believe. (Was he really going to abandon him again, leave him alone because of his own tumultuous roiling emotions, repeat the consequences of a bandage, a bandage, imperfection, a bandage?)

*"Keep him close and love him while you still have the chance." )*

Kid took a deep breath and opened the door. He was greeted with Black☆Star in the bed next to the window, streams of light painting the contours of his features. Sun starbursts illuminated specks of his eyes, liquid gold turning the teal turquoise. His mouth was drawn down into a diminutive frown, brows knitted. His hand was over his sternum, exactly where he punched Kid a few hours earlier.

“You actually came,” Black☆Star murmured, gaze still locked on the windowsill.

Kid shivered, unconsciously straightening his posture, “Of course I did.”

Black☆Star turned to him, eyes scrutinising his frame and hands before widening and looking away. Kid ignored the urge to fidget and drew closer, acidic solicitude bubbling in his chest cavity. (He didn’t think Kid would come, he didn’t think Kid would care, a bandage a ban—)

“Are you... alright?” Kid asked, mentally kicking himself for asking such a *stupid* question.

“Of course I am!” He countered a little too quickly, head still lowered, “Never been better.” He chuckled and plastered a big grin on his face, “Just you wait, next time we fight I’m gonna kick your ass.”

Kid narrowed his eyes, taking in the boy in front of him, the caricature of that blazing smirk which captivated him countless times alluding to a falsehood acting as a mask. (The remnants of a soul resonance tugged at his mind, Black☆Star’s hands cradling his chest, fingers sticky, for he was still bleeding... bleeding.)

“Tell me how you’re really feeling, Black☆Star,” Kid said, gentle authority embedded into his tone. Concern seeped into his voice in the ways it didn’t so many months ago. He came to the side of the bed, hands aching to reach out. (*Show me who you really were. Tell me what made you bleed.*)

Black☆Star paused, smirk sliding off his face as he gripped the sea of white sheets. He worried his lip, hunching in on himself and drawing his knees to his chest. Kid grimaced, fought the urge to turn away, to come closer. (To run, to connect, to build walls, to inspire closeness, to do *something* so that Kid wouldn't have to see him so small. So alone.)

"I've always got something to prove. I mean that's what I should expect, being the big guy I am." He chortled, bitterness embossed in his voice, knuckles white as the sheets (bravado in the face of impossibility, feigned indifference in the face of derision), "But that damned zombie was right. I keep losing." He hissed, curling in on himself more, "Maybe I was born at the wrong time."

Kid gave into the compulsion to touch, gingerly placing both hands on his respective shoulders. Black☆Star jumped ever so slightly before settling incrementally into the contact, still looking away. Kid yearned to tilt his chin up, to fix that frown into a smile with his fingers, to see something other than defeat indented in every muscle of his face, "That's not the thinking of the almighty Black☆Star, is it?" He could feel himself softening, tracking the slight movements of Black☆Star's cheeks and jaws as he susurrated, "I know you. Even if it wasn't your time, you would make it, no matter what."

He stirred slightly, fist loosening on the sheets incrementally. Kid squeezed his shoulders and continued, "Snivelling in bed won't get you anywhere, and neither will this self doubt." He smirked, "you still have to beat me after all."

Black☆Star's head snapped up at that, indignation barrelling out of his mouth, "Hey! I beat you the first time we fought!"

"Only because you messed with my symmetry." He sniffed, haughtiness undercut with the desire to snicker.

"It still counts, asshole!" He countered, the corner of his lip quirking up. Kid scoffed, rolling his eyes and removing his hands, "Whatever helps you sleep at night."

That drew a chuckle out of him, features brightening ever so slightly as he let go of the sheets. He sat up slowly, bones cracking into place. Kid watched, lump in his throat minutely dissolving. (The nooks and crannies left so long with only idle memories teemed to life with

every inhale he took, every imperceptible shift. Black☆Star seemed to solidify the longer they were together, lines that had blurred in the weeks of silence acuminated through crimson thread and splotchy skin.)

“Do you feel better?”

“Well obviously! I can’t let a little thing like that crush a big thing like me.” He locked eyes with Kid, intense and smouldering, “I still have to surpass god!”

Warmth blossomed in Kid’s stomach. “I’m glad to hear it.”

An amicable silence fell upon them. (Suspension, a little glimpse of bliss, a moment encased and frozen in time and space. Kid’s hands stilled and the black tar layered on his nerves dissipating. A respite forged in hushed words and gripped shoulders opposing the months of compulsions and asymmetry and imperfection. For the first time in months, turmoil fell away from his limbs. For the first time in months, he could actually breathe.)

“Black☆Star?” Kid found himself saying. His attention focused on Kid again (and oh, how he lived up to his namesake, that twinkle in his eyes, lighting up the verdant of his iris and overflowing to his pupils. How was it that a human could be so luminescent, so similar to the incandescent constellations up above), “You will surpass god.”

He blinked, corners of his lips slowly spreading, lopsided in nature. It was modest, miniscule in comparison to his usual simper. But the dying ember of dusk formed a halo and bathed him in a warm glow. He was in awe of *him* and how the air around him *bended* and Kid’s breath hitched as Black☆Star, no, *Star* said, “Thanks, Kiddo.”

When Kid left the infirmary, closing the door quietly behind him, he realised that his eyes didn’t linger upon the star on his shoulder, or the tilt in his hair.

*(He’s more important to me than symmetry.)*

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(Soft padding against mahogany floors filled the room just as much as pale starlight. Bony, ivory hands grasped the blanket on the mirror and delicately pulled it off. Dark eyebags, gaunt features, and an assortment of bruises that were not his greeted Kid. He swallowed, folded the blanket into a perfectly symmetrical square, and went back to his bed, the sound of the moon's laughter penetrating the silence as he drifted back to sleep.)

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In the following weeks, Star proliferated every aspect of his life. After class, he would rush up to Kid, throw an arm around his shoulder, and complain about how boring the lecture was. In the cafeteria, he would insist on sitting by Kid, intent on showing him a new comic or badgering him to pronounce bigger words. After school, Star would offer to walk him back to Gallows Mansion, mindless banter intertwining the two as their shoulders brushed ever so slightly. Kid pretended the newfound attention was bothersome, scoffing at the asinine rhetorical questions he posed, chastising him on his blockheadedness. But Star would just chortle and change subjects, dimpled cheeks making Kid feel like he was dying. Where there once was cold stares and silence, there were now solid touches and comradery.

And god, it should have been annoying that he was hovering like this, that every time he glanced around, Star was close by and armed with interjections, anecdotes, or physical affection. With Arachne looming overhead, doom spelled out in the teachers' sallow skin and Stein's growing madness, he was sure this incessant pestering would drive him up the wall. But his presence was a balm, a drop of liquid gold happiness combatting the gloom hanging low over the academy. When Kid felt the creeping doubt, the swarming static, the overwhelming whispers, Star would be there, absentmindedly interweaving their hands.

Kid found himself waiting for him to catch up after class. He left Beelzebub on his desk drawer. The comic section was rarely used in his mansion, but he perused it more, bringing the ones Star chatted endlessly about for him to borrow. After a rampage about rice crackers, a bag of them was diligently placed in the middle of his tray every day (symmetrically, of course). When Star complained about his test grades, Kid offered to help him study, the silence that usually permeated the kitchen cut through by frustrated scoffs and aggravated patience. (And at the end of the day, Star's head would land on Kid's shoulder absentmindedly, unerring trust latent in every inhale he took. Kid hoped the erratic thumping of his heart wouldn't rouse him.)

On some days, Star would take his hand and drag them on some silly side adventure, pointing out sides of the city Kid had never seen, buying impractical trinkets and endless snacks. Other days, when his fists were clenched and his jaw was tight, Kid squeezed his shoulder and brought him to his favourite hiding spots, sometimes a nook in the library, sometimes under a sky full of stars.

(Sometimes, when the angle was just right, and the contours of his body were perfectly aligned, whether his mouth was stuffed with rice crackers or his nose was buried in a comic or his eyebrows scrunched together in puzzlement over a particularly difficult problem, Kid would stiffen at the sight of his friend, reaction recklessly and so hopelessly terribly human.)

The tender caress of the summer night breeze and the warm embrace of delicate grass stalks held the two of them as they gazed at the winking stars above. The heat radiating from his soulmate's body grounded him, engulfing him where their shoulders touched. Star's hair caught stray beams of light, steady hue prominent against his forehead. Kid sighed, content forging a haven in the space between his ribs.

"You're kinda cool." Star said as he reached towards the endless yawning abyss of the twilight sky, fingers curling into the air as if to grasp it. They had come to this particular spot more frequently, mainly because he insisted it was easier to touch the stars here. Who was Kid to deny him, deny himself the chance to see the lambent gaps between his teeth.

"Oh?" Kid exhaled. He fought the smile that tried to grow on his lips, "How profound of you."

Star snorted, shoving Kid with his shoulder, "Shut up!" He grumbled and rolled his eyes (adorable), "What does that even mean?" Kid gave up fighting and grinned at the pouty boy. Being the benevolent shinigami he was, he decided to throw Star a bone.

"It's like being wise."

"Psh, I'm Black☆Star!" he declared, syllables flippantly confident as they weaved through the spaces between them. Star crossed his arms, furrowing his brow, "I can be pro... pro..." He struggled, new word fumbling on his tongue.

"Profound?" Kid interjected gently.

Star glanced at him, maroon dusting the apples of his cheeks. He beamed, lopsided, grateful, and so aggressively affectionate (patience and understanding filled their fissures, sealant



against their distinctive quirks and imperfections. In their faults lay individuality, in their differences lay unity), “Yeah, that.”

Kid hummed, “Alright then. What makes me ‘kind of cool?’”

He shrugged, lips pursed in ponderance, “Well like... you’re smart and stuff. And you’re good at fighting. Not better than me of course, but still pretty good.”

Kid scoffed, ire creeping into his tone subconsciously, “I never thought I’d see the day you admitted someone else was a good fighter. I’m honoured, truly.”

“Not my fault people can’t keep up with me!” Star proclaimed, lines of his body pressing into the lines of Kid’s. He scooted, huddling closer as the air became cooler, “But shut up, I’m not done.”

Kid shook his head fondly, slowly (hesitantly) moving his arm around Star’s shoulders, “Right, continue.”

“Hmm what was I saying?” he murmured, placing his head on Kid’s shoulder (solid presence on his side, conjoined in the easy intimacy), “Oh yeah! People get so freaked out cause you’re a death god or whatever, but honestly? You’re just a huge dork. You try to hide it for whatever reason, but it’s so obvious!”

Kid wrinkled his nose, jostling his friend’s head by jerking his arm away. Star yelped before cracking up and shuffling to a more secure position, “See, like that! You’re doing your “I’m gonna kill you face” but you’re still enjoying being here with me. Which makes sense, ’cause of how awesome I am! But you’ve got more to you than just being a death god.”

“I believe the better half of the population would disagree with you.” Kid’s voice betrayed none of the trepidation icing over his skin, light and airy on his words even as they ate at him, “It’s a nice sentiment though.”

Star frowned, placing a hand on his back and skirting it over tense muscles, “Well then they’re all dumb, ‘cause I’m right!”

He snorted, relaxing against the warm touch (he never knew affection could be as natural as breathing, that skin could be so healing). He feigned detached sentiment, silently praying his pulse would settle under Star’s knuckles, “Alright. What else is there to me?”

“You’re like... big but in a quiet way, which is opposite to me being big in a loud way!”

“Oh?” Kid responded, engrossed by how blue locks curled into the fabric of his shirt, twisted against the expanse of his chest, brushed exquisitely against his dimpled cheeks and faint freckles. (There was a certain elegance to him like this, a fragility suspended in the angle of his jaw and the resonance of his soul. So much of him had been brashness, so much of him had been blinding intensity and reckless drive. To find such tenderness, such a gentle glow in the wake of a harsh blaze... He ached. Oh how he ached.)

“Yeah, ‘cause....” He paused, squinted his eyes as he grasped for words to convey his message, “You’re quiet, but powerful. You keep things together.”

He pulled away and turned to Kid, locking their eyes as a small smile donned his lips, “You’re kinda like the night sky. You make stars like me shine.”

The sentences ensnared Kid’s soul and squeezed, ardour and fervour seizing him in equal measure. His chest grew heavy, not in the same way as before, no, not how he felt under the weight his namesake held. This held the very depths of his elation, this persisting concealment of divine contentment and euphoria Kid seldom felt. This boy, this warrior, this piece of his *heart* smiled at him, lips carving serenity out of war, a home out of the desolation that had been so imbued in Kid’s psyche. The ice that had infested his bloodstream since childhood thawed at the heat in those teeth, coiling purification a baptism of fire akin to a perfectly reflecting scar on his cheek, a gift from his soulmate, from *Star*. All the darkness, all the compulsions, all the numbing loneliness, all the constantly demanding voices quieted, and the only thing Kid knew was utter completion. For the first time since asymmetrical ivory lines cut through the ink of his hair, he was utterly seen, utterly known, and utterly reassured of two simple facts.

Black☆Star was the other half of his soul.

And Kid was in love with him.

## Chapter End Notes

tehe ;p. i'm doing commissions! if you want a fic, or if you just want to donate to me, please do. college has been kicking my ass so i gotta make sum money^^; don't feel pressured, but here is the link if you're interesteddddd:  
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