

Title: *Endless Loop Book 2: Blood and Sacrifice*

Author: Apollymi (Eternal SailorM), apollymi@gmail.com

Website: DarkMagick.net, [Apollymi's Grimoire](#)

Length: 25,719 words

Stats: June 2005 – March 2006

Genre: Fan fiction, alternate universe, supernatural, paranormal, slash

Pairing: Bakura/Yami, Malik/Jounouchi/Marik, Seth/Kaiba

Rating: FRM for language and violence

This is so not how I pictured myself killing time till my doctor's appointment. Not that I haven't been here more than a few times before today, but it still is a little unnerving to be standing here with noise-reducing ear muffs on watching Yami blow the hell out of a target. He's only been practicing since a day or two after the Tokyo Incident, but these little exercises have been a regular occurrence. I just usually try to avoid them, since frankly, he's a little scary when he's at it.

I have to wonder where all this determination came from. I know he was a little steamed about one of Pegasus' goons tagging him back then, but that's been two months ago. Even I'd have dropped it by now, at least for a little something like that. On its own, one of my hands moves to touch the section of the bandages that's below my right eye. Forgiving something like this is a bit harder. No one's seen hide or hair of Takeshi in that time, and I'm almost okay with that. If the bastard was going to send that particular goon after us again, he would have done it by now, so I guess I'm going to agree with the popular assumption that Takeshi was the man Yuugi saw being torn apart. I'm glad I'm still a little fuzzy on that part of the story.

Still, why the hell is Yami so hell bent and determined to be a crack shot? I think that's the right term. Until a little over a month ago, when I got home from the hospital, my knowledge of guns was rather limited (See shotgun. Shells go here. Pump. Pull trigger. See blood and guts.), till Yami started a second weapons collection. First it was swords, and now it's guns, mostly of the handgun variety. It's not like we have to be any good with them, since Seto hired bodyguards.

Speaking of tall, blonde, leggy, and able to benchpress a truck... I glance over my shoulder. Yep, I'd say she's just as bored as I am, but she's doing a good job of keeping an eye out from trouble. I have to say that I like Kujaku Mai; she takes her job seriously. I would too, after the introduction Seto gave us: "Kujaku, this is Bakura. You'll be guarding him for the rest of his life." Nice enough gesture on Seto's part, since it serves the dual purpose of helping me out with the Oyaji problem and of getting at least one Were a decent job. Mai told me that before Seto hired her, she was working as a blackjack dealer and bouncer at some kind of sleazy casino. It's my understanding she spent more time getting groped than working her table, though.

She glances back at me as if sensing my eyes on her, and she taps her wrist where a watch would be sitting if she were wearing one. I glance down at my own (which is actually Yami's but I... commandeered it) and wince. We're going to be pushing it to make it to the doctor's on time. Damn.

"Hey, Pharaoh!" I yell to be heard over the shots and his ear muffs. "Time to go!"

I could almost swear he didn't hear me or he's ignoring me as he fires off another two shots and start to yell at him again when the chamber clicks forward, empty, and he pulls his muffs down. I pull mine off to hear him ask, "It's time already?"

"We've been here over an hour already." I just barely manage to keep the whining out of that. "Isn't the recoil getting to you yet?"

He shakes his head, getting another clip in and a bullet in the chamber. "Not really."

I feel a smirk touching my lips. "Liar. Your arms are shaking." He scowls; he hates getting caught. "Besides, I'm getting these damn bandages off today and-"

"And you're going nuts waiting," he finishes, clicking the safety on. The gun disappears into Leather Space. Seriously, I have no idea how he does it. Leather Space, like some kind of anime character, is my best explanation. It's either that or he's learning more than how to control his abilities from Mahaado, and the idea of my nutty little Yami learning magick is more alarming than him giving that target hell.

Even if almost all the bullets went through what would be its heart.

"You'll have to take it easy a while."

I try not to fidget as the doctor speaks and removes the bandages. As often as I've been here in the last month, we ought to be on a closer basis. One of the reasons we're not is sitting (or more likely pacing or prowling, knowing him) in the waiting room; the guy is thoroughly cowed by Yami, Seto, and their money. "I've been taking it easy. How much longer? I'm starting to go stir-crazy."

"Just a couple more weeks, to be safe." The last piece of bandage comes off, and he sits back. "I don't need to ask if you still have plenty of the medicine I prescribed, do I?" I shake my head, and he nods as if pleased then hands me a flyer from the counter. "This is some information for you from that plastic surgeon friend of mine I mentioned before, if you change your mind on it."

You'd almost think he's being nice, but I did my research two weeks ago when he first started talking plastic surgery: his 'friend' pays him a pretty hefty fee for every referral. He may be intimidated by Mutou and Kaiba money, but that's not stopping him from trying to glean a bit extra. Have I ever mentioned how much I hate false people, like this guy and Bitch Queen Mazaki, aka Yami's personal stalker? I'm told the new Were guards have a pool going on who can toss that bitch the furthest every time she tries to sneak on the grounds of Kaiba Mansion.

Still, the idea of another scar doesn't really bother me too much. What I can see of the ones on my back are much worse. What's on the back is something that can be hidden, though; this is going to be glaring right out at people. I don't want my little brother to keep feeling guilty over this, especially since it wasn't his fault. I blame one person and one person alone: that bastard who spawned us. He's the one who's going to feel my wrath one of these nights, when he least expects the knife I'm going to stick in his guts. Maybe I've been around the Kaibas too long; I'm starting to get downright bloodthirsty.

All the same, I hop off the examination table and move over to the mirror on the back of the door, barely holding back wincing. Okay, maybe it's a little worse than I'd anticipated. I mean, it looks like Takeshi was trying to write the katakana for 'ki' on my face and had really bad penmanship. Great, now I have new bonding levels with Malik. I can just see it now...

I turn slightly and glare at the doctor over my shoulder. "I'm sure Kaiba Seto will mail you your check either way. Now get off my fucking case about it." There, said it. And much more polite than I'd planned. No threatened ghost callings, no shoving that stethoscope so far up his ass that it comes out his throat, no knives filleting him into tiny pieces, no calling my - *Yami* in here to shoot him up a bit, no ritual disembowelings... Yes, I've been thinking on this a while. I'd have Kitty, Seto, and Malik on that list, but they all might try to eat him then end up with food poisoning. You never know with Malik, after all.

Speaking of everyone's favorite nutball, I need to remember to call him. I don't exactly need an inside source at Kaiba Corp anymore. Maybe I can mention he needs to stop stalking Kitty too. That'll go over famously, rather like a lead balloon.

"Bakura-san!" Hmph, the idiot can't pull off that offended tone half as well as Yami or a third as well as Ryou. As good as a reason as any to flip him off as I walk out the door.

And hey, look, I was right: Yami is pacing/prowling the waiting room. He barely seems to be touching the floor as he goes back and forth. Just to be sure, I stare at his feet a second or two: yeah, he's still earthbound, for now. You never know with him. It's only been two months since the Tokyo Incident, and even Mahaado has no idea the extent of what he can do. I don't know if we're ever going to find out his limitations, and I'm not sure I want to. Something tells me it won't be pretty.

I open my mouth to say something to him in greeting, but he looks up first and grins faintly. "How'd it go?" He glances over me, wincing slightly at the scar. "No blood. Didn't feel like killing him this time?"

I have to smirk in response. "I couldn't decide on a method. You walked a hole in the carpet again."

He pouts faintly. I might think it was real if I couldn't see the light in his eyes that tells me he's holding back laughter. "Well, if you'd let me back there with you..."

"It's the last time I need to be here, anyway. It's a bit of a moot point now. Besides, you just want back there to do perverted things on the table."

He laughs. Not one of those 'ha-ha, I one-upped you' ones he loves so much, but a real laugh. I like hearing these a lot more. "Maybe so."

Despite the teasing, we haven't really gotten that far. I know. Shocking, isn't it? Well, it's sort of been one thing after another after another. Between his training with Mahaado and my doctor visits - after finally being released from the hospital, mind you - and Ryou's mothering and Yami and Seto's arguments and everything else, including the occasional attempt on my life, it's been too crazy around here. Not to mention, of course, the fact we both have our many and assorted hang-ups, which don't help matters any either. I might be laying one of mine to rest soon though: he didn't react too badly to this scar, so maybe the others won't be too big a deal either. I hope anyway.

"You wish," I return. I can tell by his eyes he knows I've been thinking too hard again and it worries him. He has a completely perfect poker face, but his eyes are distressingly easy to read, at least for me.

"Let's get out of here, hmm?" he offers, holding a hand out to me. Yami likes little stuff like holding hands. I... don't dislike it, and so reach out to take his.

"Let's go home."

Home, surprising enough, has come to mean the section of the mansion Seto divvied up for us. Ryou and I lived in the apartment two years, and it was still just that, the apartment. Less than two months, and already I feel at home where we live now. Sure, it probably puts the 'fun' in 'dysfunctional', but it's home and I think I may have adopted the other inhabitants as a sort of weird extended family. Maybe the same applies for Yami too, but I haven't really gotten around to asking.

We step out the door, both holding back a shudder as the cool air from inside contrasts against the warmer May evening air outside. I sense, rather than see, Mai fall in step behind us. She's on the phone, no doubt calling one of the cars to come get us (that's something I've yet to get used to, by the by, but it was Seto and Yami's idea, not mine). If I look over my shoulder, I'm sure I can see the revolver she always seems to have on her. Why she wears it when she can benchpress a truck, I'll never know. I guess it makes sense to her because it fails to do so for me.

"What's the plan for now then?"

"I don't care as long as I don't have to go back in there. Mai? Anywhere you want to go?" I ask, glancing over my shoulder at her. Yep, there's the revolver.

She looks thoughtful a moment then shakes her head. "Nope, I'm good." Thank goodness. This lady can shop the hell out of any man, even a gay one. I guess that's where I fit, after all, given the fact I'm

provisionally dating Yami and he's definitely a guy.

Speaking of Yami, he lets out a sigh of relief, I guess at the fact he won't be carrying around bags and boxes tonight. "Then let's head home, please. I've got a bad feeling."

"Thank you, Yami Solo." I get a bit of a glare. He hates *Star Wars* references, especially concerning himself. "I was only feeling mildly paranoid till now. Thanks so much for clearing that-"

And... I'm kissing the fucking pavement again. Damn it, did Mai really have to shove me that hard? Oh yeah, she's a Were. I forgot. Maybe I should take a little comfort that she shoved Yami down too. Still, this is the third time this week alone. It's no damn fair. Why is it always me getting shot at? What did I ever do to deserve this, except rescue my little brother from our father, thereby causing Oyaji to lose his heir? That's not so much, really!

A bullet grazes off the pavement near my face, and I'm yanked back against a familiar body. I'd almost swear Yami's behind these attacks so he can get his quality grope time in, especially given Kitty's been crashing in my room as of late... well, since I got out of the hospital anyway. He and Seto are off, is my understanding, not that it really matters at this moment because, holy fuck, their aim is getting better! Mind on the bullets, now!

And why couldn't I have gotten a useful ability if I had to have one, like telekinesis or something? Something that stops bullets would be really nice right about now. I feel a shudder go through me, not unlike when we came outside earlier but yet wholly different at once, there is a shrill scream like the damned, and there is silence.

For all of three seconds.

"Kura?"

"Are you okay, Bakura?"

Have I ever mentioned how annoying it is to have two people talking to you at once? It happens to me way too often. "I'm fine," I grind out. I slowly sit up and take stock on myself. Some scrapes and bruises (one or two of which may be Yami-shaped, as tightly as he was holding me), but nothing worse than Tuesday's attack. Of course, it's only Thursday; they have the whole weekend to score a mark on me. It's getting really fucking annoying though. "Can't I go through one week without some shitheads trying to kill me anymore?"

And there goes the shudder, as the spirit goes back to wherever I yanked it from to make the bullets stop. Come to think of it, that happened Sunday also, when that guy tried to run us down with the delivery van, which sucked quite a bit. Of course, I think it sucked more for him when Mai turned the van upside down, shook him out, and tried to beat a confession out of his already dying ass. It didn't work, but at least she tried.

I think this makes attempt number twelve on my life since I got out of the hospital. And I'm counting the one car from last week that tried playing chicken with the driver Seto sent us in there. Needless to say, we won.

And speaking of the wheels man, there is a faint screeching of brakes, and Akito's here too. A few minutes late, as always, but better late than never, I guess. Besides, I halfway think sometimes that he has an ability like ours, only his is the talent of pushing people off the road. I just hope he doesn't get it in his head any time soon to teach Ryou or Kitty how to drive.

Before I know it, he's shuffled all three of us in the car, Yami and me in the backseat and Mai up front with him, and we're headed back towards the mansion at a speed just slightly slower than sound. And stoplights are apparently for wusses the way Akito ignores them. I make myself sink back into the seat

and think of anything but the fact I think we just cut off a jet.

"You okay?"

Yami looks about as shaken as I feel. Can't say I blame him; he's been present on every attempt thus far. Time number nine, they came closer to hitting him than hitting me. We both got off lucky this time with nothing worse than scrapes and bruises really.

"I'm good," I mutter. I think I left my stomach at the top of that last hill. I also think Akito's aiming to prove he can get to the mansion from any point in the city in five minutes or less. "I'm just getting a little tired of all this: getting shot at, attempted hit-and-runs, the idiot with the flamethrower..."

"You'd think they'd have stopped by now, since their would-be assassins aren't coming home," continues Yami.

I feel a smirk touch my face. "We are getting good at body disposal, aren't we? Not as good as them," I nod at the two in the front seat, "but we're getting better."

"We shouldn't have to keep doing this." Why's he complaining? It's not him whose father's trying to do him in. "They're getting better too, and I'm not losing you."

And... Assassins, meet Yami's number one hang-up: he's terrified of being abandoned. How the hell did he end up with me then? I might as well have a bull's-eye painted on my back as of late. I'm probably the worst person he could have ended up deciding to like. And why is this on my mind now? Probably because I was thinking about how Seto and Kitty are now officially no longer an item. Turned out Seto's power was calling to Kitty the entire time, instead of there being any real attraction. I guess I don't want Yami and me turning out the same way, realizing we made a mistake or something. Oh, don't get me wrong - they're still friends and all, but as a couple, they're over.

Akito makes a sharp, near-ninety degree left turn that was probably originally intended to make little old ladies piss themselves, I don't even see the gate open, and we're home. I resist the urge to jump out of the car and kiss the ground. I think I've already met my quota on that today.

I give myself a moment to recollect my stomach then step out of the car and onto the front steps as I speak over my shoulder to Yami. "Short of killing Oyaji, I don't see what we can do to stop it. I mean, we're still not a hundred percent sure how he tracked me down."

"Someone must have ratted us out on Pegasus' end." He's still a bit pissed about that. Hell, so am I for that matter. I understood my visit there wasn't going to get back to Oyaji, yet a week later, he sends one of his goons to kidnap and torture me. It's more than a bit suspicious if you ask me.

"It looks that way," I admit. While I'm here on the front stoop with the light on, I take a moment to see how back we're going to be looking. Yami's left arm is scraped to the elbow but not too bad; that was obviously where he landed when Mai shoved us; and his right hand is scraped a bit on the palm. I've got a scrape on the heels of both hands, and there will probably be one on my knee from when I landed. I swear, one of these days I'm going to give up and start wearing leather like Yami and Kitty; it cuts down on the road burn. "We got off easy this time."

"Let's hope it's the last time."

"The last time for what?" And I'd been wondering where Kitty'd disappeared to, since he was gone when I got up this morning. "What the hell happened to you two?"

"Got shot at," I reply.

"Again," Yami deadpans.

I can see the confusion draining into his face. "What? Wait. Shot at? Again? The hell?"

And I guess Kitty didn't know. I guess that's why he's been so low-key about the whole thing. Still, just to be sure... "You didn't know?"

"Hell, no! How long?"

I actually have to think back. "Since I got out of the hospital pretty much. Not every day or anything, though."

"They *have* been getting a lot more frequent lately," Yami reminds me. He leans closer to pull something out of my hair, holding it out for me to see what it is: a small piece of the sidewalk. "And they're getting better."

Hmm, I'd say Kitty's pissed. It's another of those things you can watch happen. It builds, slowly at first then a rush to consume his entire face. His posture changes, and it's easy to see he's *just* holding himself back. "Why didn't anyone tell me about this?" All Yami and I can do is shrug; we're a little out of the loop on this one as well. "Mai-san?"

I'd say she shrugs, but that's too inelegant a description for the delicate lifting of one shoulder she does. Mai has to be pretty about everything she does, after all. "I was under the impression you already knew."

There's a flash of black hair hurrying by, and when Kitty stops it, it's Mokuba. The half-pint's wired like the time he tried putting espresso in his blood, I can see that just looking at him now. But he stills under the hard look on Kitty's face. "Did you know Dorobou's getting shot at?" And that was pretty much more a growl than actual words. I hope the half-pint understood it. I wonder if Kitty has kitty teeth right now. I'm not getting close enough to find out, though.

Gigantic grey eyes turn to me. "You've been getting shot at, Bakura-san?"

"It's not like they've succeeded or come that close or anything." Somehow the half-pint's a lot like Yuugi: you know, kryptonite. It's hard to be mean to him and just as hard to see him threaten to cry. If he's able to keep this up over time, he'll be a dangerous little vamp for years to come. Of course, he'll also be just short of sixteen for the rest of time. Kind of a sobering thought: Yami, Ryou, and I are the only ones of this crew who aren't either immortal or damn near it. Even the half-pint here's going to outlive us. Not mentioning that now though, since Kitty's close enough to rabid as it is.

Kitty turn on his heel, muttering something that sounds like "He's treating me like his little brother" under his breath. The explosion is coming, just give it a second... "Kaiba!" And there goes Volcano Kitty, as he stomps back towards Seto's home office. "Kaiba!"

Mokuba winces. "I think we got niisama in trouble."

"Sounds like it," Yami comments. He sounds proud of that fact.

Even from where we stand, I can hear Seto's office door slam open. The half-pint grins. "I'm going to go watch! Bye!" He takes off like they're giving away free porn or something in that office.

And on that note... "I need to call Malik," I remind myself aloud. I hope my cell didn't get crushed when Mai shoved us down, though I guess it'd have stabbed me by now if it had. Pulling it out of my jeans pocket, I'm relieved to see it seems to be all right.

"Why Malik?" Yami asks as I punch in the nutball's speed dial number.

"I don't need an inside source at Kaiba Corp anymore."

He arches an eyebrow elegantly. How did he end up with someone like me again? "How'd you convince them to hire him?" Apparently, everyone knows about Malik.

"Don't ask me. I'm still trying to figure out how he got past that dragon of a personnel manager Treeboy has."

"Malik's Taxidermy. You snuff it, we stuff it."

For a long second, I have to hold the phone away from my ear and stare at it like it just declared itself emperor. "You're so weird," I finally get out, putting it back to my ear.

"Bakura!" He always sounds so cheerful when I call. It's a little cute, in a psychotic kind of way. "Where have you been? Why haven't you call me? I've been bored!"

I shake my head slowly. So strange indeed. "I need to talk to you."

"Over the phone or in person?" Sudden shift to serious. I'm still talking to Malik, though. That's good at least.

"In person," I reply. He's probably going to have a fit that I didn't tell him till now, and I'd rather not end up with innocent bystander ghosts - or blank spots if Marik gets a hold of them.

"I'll be there in three minutes." Now that I notice it, I can hear his motorcycle in the background, as well as wind and faint snatches of other people's conversations. He must be using the headset inside his helmet.

"We're not at the apartment anymore." We still have it, I think. I seem to recall seeing its rent as part of one Seto's monthly expense spreadsheets. I guess we can use it for storage or a hideout or something... or we'll have it to fall back on if Seto ever kicks us out.

"I know. I'm about three blocks away from the Kaiba Mansion."

Somehow I should have known he'd already know where we are without me telling him. "I'll call down to the gate and have them let you in."

"Do I knock or let myself in?" Sometimes I forget Malik's rather intelligent. Still there was a reason, when he showed up here in Domino not too long after we got here, I got him to go undercover at Kaiba Corp. He's smart but so much that he stands out, and that worked out well for Kaiba Corp, the dragon lady, and my plans at that time. Then, of course, there's Marik, but that's a whole other story altogether.

"Knock and someone'll let you in." If he doesn't manage to scare off the maids or anything.

"See you soon then, Boss."

I jinxed myself. I never should have even thought of the more psychotic side of the nutball. "See you soon, Marik."

Yami's eyes are wide as I snap the phone shut. "Malik's coming here?"

I shrug. "Might be Malik, might be Marik. We'll see in a few." I was trying for nonchalance with those words before calling down to the gate with Malik's description and the orders to just let him in - and if the horrified look on his face is any indication, I'm succeeding - but the difference between Malik and Marik is enough to make even me nervous. I mean, Malik's just a little fruity, but Marik... yeesh. Oh, and that's another thing I recall as I hang up the house phone from saving a few poor Weres' lives if they'd tried to stop Malik. "Have any idea where your Mini-Me is?"

His eyes go soft and unfocussed a moment. Standing between him and the stairs, I can feel a sliver of power go through me and towards the second story of the mansion. Yami tends to use his abilities in a very linear way. When he's trying to find a spirit, usually Yuugi, he follows doors, stairs, and hallways, instead of skipping ahead and going through walls or ceilings. "Upstairs playing video games against Ryou-kun on the big screen."

I nod. That's acceptable. "Tell him to stay up there till Ishtar's gone, just in case." He sends me a curious look as he bleeds back into his own mind, and I elaborate, "Malik's fine for him to be around, but Marik might be a little dangerous."

"Why?" That's my Yami, more curious than the cat. Where it concerns Yuugi, he's especially curious, and being an older brother myself (we think), I can understand why. I would, have, and will do anything in my power - legal, safe, moral, or none of the above - to keep Ryou safe. I've taken the blame for his mistakes, I've taken his beatings, I've let assholes carve in my flesh to hide his location, and I've left my home behind and moved to a new city - Domino, to be exact - to keep Oyaji from doing a thing to him. Yeah, I know where Yami's coming from with little brother protection.

"Marik's an *ahmet*." The confusion remains on his face. "A soul-eater."

"Marik's an *ahmet*. A soul-eater."

Yami goes completely white. It'd be amusing to see if this wasn't my - well, him. That, and we're talking about Malik's darker half devouring Yami's little brother's soul. And I do mean 'little' brother. Yuugi might look closer to seventeen than fourteen now, which we have yet to explain the hows of, by the by, but he's still a shrimp. The only one here shorter than him is Seto's Mini-Me, after all, and I seriously doubt either of them are getting any taller any time soon.

"What about Malik?" He seems to be as casual as I was pretending to be, but his eyes reveal otherwise. He's nervous, so he's plotting to cover all the contingencies. It's a good strategy. It keeps a body from getting too worked up - and gives you plenty of plans to fall back on for later. "What is he?"

I shrug. "Completely human, as far as they've ever told me. I used to run with them back in Tokyo, before the brat and I came to Domino."

The sad thing is, Yami or I could very easily separate them. Since there's such a clear line between the two, it'd be easy to do. It'd be like cutting along the dotted lined. Damn thing is, it'd be the wrong thing to do - and probably the last thing we ever did. They'd kill us then break down beyond all repair. They've coexisted like they are so long that they wouldn't be able to handle being separated. They're like... symbiotes, I suppose, intertwined to the point that removing one would kill the other. And Ishtar is the best guy I've ever had work for me, all strangeness aside. I'll probably be the one to kill him, but I won't enjoy it and the only way it'll be soon is if his kitty stalking turns dangerous or he does something to Yuugi, which in turn means he does something to Yami. So, all in all, I hope he behaves because I'd hate to have to kill them.

"I'm going to tell Aibou to barricade himself in Ryou-kun's room," Yami mutters as he starts past me.

I hesitate a second, not sure how to communicate what I need to say, then reach out and touch Yami's arm, pausing him. "He'll be fine. As long as Malik and I are around, we can keep Marik held back."

That clearly does little to alleviate his worries. "All the same..."

I nod, releasing his arm. "Go see about your brother. I'll be here."

"How long till Malik gets here?"

I glance down at the watch I 'borrowed' off him. "Probably about five." Even though I told them to let him in, the Weres watching the gate are too cautious to *not* check a person as strange as Malik coming here. Hells, they didn't want to let Mahaado in here the first two or three times, to say of nothing of Mana. They still don't want to let her come in when she and the brat are having one of their marathons, and she shows up already hyped up on caffeine. I shudder to think. But they should stop Malik if they stop those two. Although it is after dark now, so the vamp guards'll be out. I like the Were ones better; they're more thorough. I'm waiting for the day they check me - or even better, Seth. Wait a minute. What was I saying again? Oh yeah, Malik. Where's my mind going lately? "It might take a little longer, though, because he has get by security."

"I'm just going to check on him a second, then I'll be back down."

I can barely nod before he's up the stairs, rather reminiscent of Mokuba tearing after Kitty, and I can only chuckle at his enthusiasm when it comes to Ghost Mini-Me. I have to distinguish between Mini-Mes now: we have Ghost Mini-Me, Yuugi, and Vampire Mini-Me, Noa, now after all.

So it looks like I've got a little time to myself for once. That doesn't exactly happen often anymore, since I ended up in the hospital. I park it on one of the steps of the inside staircase and lean against the banister. The scrapes on the heels of my hands catches my attention again and I glance down at them. Nothing too terribly bad this time, not like a couple of months ago. If I look hard, I can see tiny lines running along my left hand: scars from pieces of glass that exploded out at me. Gods, those were a miserable couple of days, though I can't say they were all bad, since they did give me time to get to know Yami better. I mean, till then he was just my boss's spoiled grandson. Now, though...

A knock on the door breaks my trail of thought before I can get off into dangerous territory. It *sounds* like the nutcase's particular knock, anyway. The wolves' paranoia is starting to get to me, I think. I'm going to be starting to jump at shadows soon at the rate I'm going. Anyway, Sara's answering the door. Now she's one of the few non-Kaiba vampires in this house I approve of. To me, she's old, turned around the same time as Noa (but physically a good ten years older) and she's strong as shit, but she has no power to back up that strength. She's nearly as strong as a Were, but she'll never be anything in the vampire hierarchy - and that seems to suit her just fine. She's content, it appears, to baby every single one of the Kaibas and their houseguests. Being English herself, she's even helping Ryou with his English language homework, so I like her. I just wish I knew more about her, but it's not like I know that much about the other vampires in this house, excluding Mokuba now, except that Seth and Noa *cannot* be Japanese. Mokuba, the reason I think I now know as much about him as the other Kaibas do, likes to babble. A lot.

And, yep, it's Malik. He breezes right by her and does one of those running-flying leaps of his that, frankly, terrify the shit out of me. I have half a second to see him coming, debate trying to get out of his way, realize there's no way I can avoid him at this range, and brace myself for the impact. I could have used some more time to prepare. How does a skinny kid from Egypt - who's a vegetarian, at that! - get so heavy on Japanese food. "Bakura!" Oww, that crack was my back hitting one of the stairs. Am I - Nope, I can still feel my toes. Please don't let Yami get down here till I get Malik off me.

"Kura?" The gods hate me. It's a fact; they hate me. God damn it. "What's going on down here?"

I glance up and watch upside down as Yami comes down the steps before bracing myself and giving Malik a hard shove off me. "Getting attacked by an overenthusiastic nutcase. You know, the usual."

Malik, damn him, lands on his feet with hardly a stumble. I swear, he's more of a cat than Kitty sometimes. "That was mean, Bakura. I haven't seen you in forever, and you're shoving me around."

I sit up slowly, wincing as muscles make it known that I did hit them and they are going to be mad at me for a while. Yami extends a hand down to me and pulls me the rest of the way to my feet when I take it. He doesn't let go, but something tells me that this time that's so I can't get away. Not that I'd make a strategic retreat and leave him alone with Malik, but I sure as hell might try to avoid the confrontation

we're no doubt going to have once the nutball's gone.

"And that's different from normal how?" I shoot back at said nutcase. I swear that has to be a good portion of the reason he likes me: I don't run in terror from him and I don't take any shit from him. I just wish he'd quit jumping me like that. "Anyway, we need to talk."

"So you said on the phone." Instant wariness, have to love it. "What about?"

I glance past him to the woman still standing at the door. Sara's watching Malik like a hawk watches its prey - and I'm pretty sure her eyes are glowing blue. Not a good sign, means she's going to go all Super Dragon Lady Kisara on him soon. What can I say; she's good at getting rid of threats and people don't see her coming because she's this little dainty white-haired thing in a maid uniform. Hmm, I guess we should take this away from her. "Let's get out of the hall first."

...And Malik's staring at me like I've grown another head or something. It doesn't take him long to put his thoughts into words either. "What the fuck, Bakura? You move in with Kaiba and start fucking a Mutou," he's gesturing wildly, somehow managing to get the entire front hall in the 'with Kaiba', as well as nearly smacking Yami when he mentions him, "and suddenly you're domesticated?!" And he's shrieking. He sounds like a cat with a chair on its tail.

Yami's bristling and, hell, I'm rapidly moving towards pissed. "Malik?"

"Hmm?"

"Piss off."

A smile breaks across his face. Seriously, you'd think I just told him he won the lottery or something. "Not too domesticated, I see. The Tokyo street punk I remember is still in there."

"Fuck you, Malik."

"I don't think Mutou there would like that much," he fires right back.

And the sad thing is, he's right. Yami's moving from bristling to growling, and I don't think that's exactly a good sign. In fact, I'm going to put it in a very bad category. I point at the door to the den and order, "Just get in there, nutball, before I sic the scarier dragon lady on you."

He saunters in there, smirking like he's a cat who just ate the canary, and I turn to Yami. "If he's getting on your nerves, you don't have to stay. He's good at that."

"He's also a little too good at molesting you." He squeezes my hand a little. "No one's getting a free shot at my boyfriend."

And there it is: one of those words we've been dancing around using these past few weeks. I guess this makes it official now. I also guess I was misreading him earlier. Maybe that was yet another possessive display or something. I wouldn't put it past him after all. I'm waiting to get marked one of these nights. Possessive, sweet bastard.

I squeeze his hand in return. "Let's get this over with and get the nutcase out of here." And with those words, we head into the living room, leaving the door open a bit so if Sara wants to listen in, she can. One of the best back-ups I can think of.

Why am I not surprised to see him going through everything he can get his hands on? Hmph, probably because Seto's TV remote is worth more than we could make in a month's worth of shoplifting and pick-pocketing back in Tokyo, to say nothing of the bottles of wine (never mind that no one in this house drinks) that are valued in the thousands. That's American dollars, by the by, not yen. The more I find out

about Goza-baka by living here, the more I dislike him. Like I said, I'm starting to adopt the Kaibas and I don't tolerate people hurting my family.

Still, I don't think Malik's nicked anything, yet, and I should probably try to keep it that way. "Anyway," he turns to face me, "the reason I called you here..."

"Yeah?" Looks like I've got his full attention, probably not a good thing, but oh well. "It sounded important on the phone."

"I guess it is. I called you here to say, I don't need an inside source at Kaiba Corp anymore."

"I don't have to work there anymore?" Any second now, he's going to start bouncing like a little kid in the candy store. I can just see it.

"What's the point? I mean, as you so delicately pointed out," I send him a glare that would probably make some of those creeps at Pegasus' place piss their pants, but it rolls right off him, "I live with Kaiba. If I need information, I can just put caffeine in his little brother's blood and I'll know about everyone that I can possibly use. Besides," I admit with a little regret, "I'm pretty much retired now anyway." Yami gives me a questioning look, which I'll wait to answer till we're alone, if such a time ever comes. "So yeah, you don't have to work at Kaiba Corp anymore."

And, as predicted, he's bouncing. Hells, it looks like he's on a pogo stick the way he's going. "Can I celebrate? Can I push my desk out the window? Can I torch the dragon lady? Can I? Can I? Can I celebrate in style?"

Dear God, I've unleashed a hyperactive monster on the streets of Domino. No one's safe. Board up the windows, lock the doors, hide all sharp and/or explosive objects, pick a deity and pray - because Malik's on the loose.

"Celebrate *after* you explain a few things to me, Ishtar." What the - Oh, Kitty. Good timing too. And wow, he does a pretty good Treeboy impression, all glacier-cold and annoyed.

Which, of course, rolls right off Malik too. "Hi, Katsuya," he cheerfully greets. At my side, Yami winces at Malik's forwardness. Me, I'm not too surprised. Malik's not Japanese, after all, and while I know he understands formality rules, he doesn't give a shit about them. "Did you find my present then?" Kid in a candy store indeed. Still, the fuck? Has he finally hit Stalking Phase Two? Weird presents that apparently piss Kitty off would indicate a yes. *Great...* I didn't want to have to kill him tonight.

"Present?" Kitty prompts. Oh, I know we're going to regret this. On so many levels, we're going to regret this conversation.

"The leopard kitten." Yep, going into regret right now. I wonder if he means two legs or four though.

Kitty sighs heavily. Malik does that to a person after all. "And just *why* did you make the kit wait outside?"

"I knew you'd want to find him yourself," Malik shrugs as he says with nonchalance the sane world can only dream of.

Kitty looks ready to spit nails, but I've got a question for Malik myself first. "Whoa, timeout," I call, even making the timeout signal like they do in sports. What I had a lot of time to kill in that hospital room for two and a half weeks, and the sports channel is twenty-four/seven. "By 'kitten', you don't mean a Werekitty younger than Kitty here, do you?" Please say you don't, Malik. Lie to me if you have to. Because if you say 'yes', Kitty may not get his chance to gut Hirutani because I'll beat him to it.

"The kit's not more than sixteen." I'm gutting Hirutani with a plastic spork, then I'm shooting his ass full of

lead. It won't kill him, but it'll hurt like hell. Then I'm going to carve him up like a turkey with a silver knife. And Kitty's still talking but now to Malik. "Just *where* did you find him?"

Another shrug from the nutball. "West side."

Please tell me you don't mean what I think you mean. "Please tell me that means 'west side of the mansion' or 'west side of the street'." Tell me you didn't pick up this kid on *that* side of town. If you do, I may have to go kill that bastard right now. Hell, we'll see what Mai does to him. He'd probably be begging me to torture and kill him when she's done... and Malik's shaking his head 'no'.

"West side of town, on a corner. *Working.*" He stresses the word so his meaning is unmistakable. What else would a kid be doing on that side of town anyway? Even some of the most hardened bastards I know won't set foot over there. "I didn't think Katsuya would approve," hell, *I* don't approve either, but that's beside the point right now, since Malik's still talking but now to Kitty, "so I - *ahem* - took care of his handler and brought him to you."

"Hirutani'll try to take him away," Kitty responds. Hmm, this could be good. He sounds like he's getting protective. It'll do the alpha cat in him good to have another actual leopard around. He sounds like he's preparing himself for a fight as is.

"You won't let that happen." And everyone but me looks so surprised to see a serious Malik. Then again, I'm the only one who's known him for any length of time; that I know him best out of our little menagerie is probably to be expected. And knowing him best, I bet he'd like to help me off that Hirutani asshole. Out of the corner of my eye, I note Yami doesn't look much happier than I feel and is probably about to make his displeasure known.

"You two stay out of this," Kitty cuts in, his voice a low growl. Surely, *surely*, he doesn't mean Yami and me as 'you two'. I'm in on this one, god damn it! "You've got enough on your hands, Dorobou." I am not sitting this one out! "I'll take care of this on my own."

Yami's hand squeezes mine a little tighter, tugging it back towards him lightly. It's clearly a 'back down' gesture, and even though I don't want to, I do. "At least tell Treeboy what's going on." That'll be my concession. If he can get this past Seto, I'll stay out of it. I won't be in the least bit happy about it, but I'll stay clear.

Kitty nods once sharply in response before turning towards the door. If I know him, and I do, he's going to head straight to Seto's office, walk in, and inform Treeboy flat out what he intends to do.

Suddenly things are happening very fast. Malik's eyes are changing subtly, a faint tightening and narrowing that lets anyone who knows to look - namely, me - that we're no longer dealing with Malik; this is Marik, and he's moving at speeds I usually attribute to vampires or Weres, crossing those few crucial feet to Kitty, grabbing a hold of his arm. Kitty turns, in time for Marik to use his other hand to grasp the back of Kitty's neck and pull him forward. Next thing any of us know, Marik is trying to eat Kitty's tonsils. And it looks like Kitty's kissing him back. I'll be damned. They seem to be enjoying themselves so maybe I won't have to kill anyone tonight. That'd be kind of nice. As much as I want to satisfy my curiosity on Malik's and Marik's mortality, I don't want to do it tonight.

Anyway, Marik, Kitty, tongue hockey. I think Kitty just tried to shove him away, but I can't be sure since Marik just turned whatever move Kitty made into a full-fledged grope. Hmm... I wonder if I should tell them to get a room. I wonder if Yami and I should just leave and let them have this one. That's starting to look like a really good idea, when Kitty finally shoves the nutball off, holding him at arms' length as he tries to get his breath back. Granted, Marik is still holding one of his arms and is looking way too proud of himself, but he is at arms' length nonetheless.

"What the *fuck*!?" Jounouchi growls, scrubbing at his mouth with his free hand. "Are you *completely* insane?!" Apparently, he's gone from Glacier Kitty to Volcano Kitty.

"You know you liked it." Does Marik have to sound so damn smug? Really!

"Marik," I draw out. "Quit messing with my cat." Let's hope he actually listens to me. It's been a long time since Tokyo, after all.

"Messing with Katsuya?" This isn't going to be good at all. He's feeling playful. "I haven't even warmed up yet."

I hold back the sigh that wants to emerge. "Don't make me kill you tonight." I doubt he'll listen at this point, so I hope I can get to Yami's gun in time to make a good headshot because otherwise I'm screwed. But wait, to my surprise, he drops Kitty's wrist. I'll ignore the lick he gives his hand. I'll also ignore Yami voicing my sigh of relief for me. "Better." And it looks like Kitty's beating a fast retreat for the door.

"I need to see to the kit and let Seto know what's going on, so I'll see you sometime that is not now," he gets out before he's gone, running like the dogs of war are hot on his trail. Can't say I blame him either.

"Way to go, Marik. You ran him off," I can't resist putting in. He turns that damnedable smirk on me, and I do my best to keep my face a blank. "I mean it, Marik. Don't mess with my cat, don't start one of your games with him, don't break his heart, or I *will* kill you in ways even you won't enjoy. Don't doubt it."

"If the suncat agrees though?" There's a question in there I'm not sure I want to know the answer to - or be the one to give the answer to.

"If he agrees and you swear on Malik's soul not to hurt him," I suck in a deep breath and slowly release it, regretting this already, "I'll stay out of the way."

"He'll agree before the week's out."

I feel my eyes narrow. "I'm serious, Marik. Jounouchi's not a game."

"No, of course he's not." He turns and heads towards the door Kitty left wide open. I hope the cat made good on his escape. Hand on the doorframe, he turns to look at me over his shoulder. "He's a challenge." And he's gone, right when I wanted to shoot him. A moment later, I hear the front door slam shut; good, Kisara didn't let him stick around.

"God, sometimes I hate that guy," I mutter under my breath, willing my body to untense.

"I thought he was your friend," Yami asks softly, moving closer to me. Probably just as well he stayed silent while the nutcase was in here; last thing I want is him in a row with my boyfriend.

"Malik's my friend, yeah. Marik's a sick, strange little fuck."

He makes a soft sound of agreement. "And they both seem to like Jounouchi-kun." That's my Yami, the master of understatement.

I'm pretty sure I'm about to go off on a rant, probably about how Malik and Marik never agree on anything, when Yami's hand touches my cheek lightly. I know this signal; a second later, he leans the rest of the way towards me, and our lips meet. God, I love the way he tastes: like sin, dark chocolate, and something else that is wholly Yami.

I don't care that we aren't getting very far very fast. I don't care how many hang-ups we have between the two of us. I don't care that we still have yet to figure out what kind of power he really has. I don't care if I die tomorrow... Because I enjoy our little times like these together.

Great, he's turning me into a sap.

Fuck. I hate it when the blinds are left open. The sunlight's streaming in, hitting me right in the eye. Good thing I'm not a vamp, is all I'm saying, as often as I forget to close the drapes; I'd be a crispy critter by now, like I think Seto was wanting to do to the last assassin. Not the one last night, but the one before it, the vampire mercenary dumb enough to take Oyaji's money. I never did find out what happened to that guy...

Still, the drapes are open and the light is blinding me. I don't think I'm getting up to deal with it any time soon though. For one, the window in my bedroom doesn't exactly face east. If the sun's streaming in like this, then it's well past noon. Guess that's what I get for hanging out with vampires. And well, for another, Yami's apparently still asleep and his arms are wrapped around me securely but not too tightly. We had another aborted bit of - as Kitty likes to call it - 'couple time' last night, which led to another night of just sleeping next to each other, both of us too tired for much more, but neither of us can get too mad at Mokuba for worrying about us. It looks like the half-pint and Jounouchi-kitty are perhaps the first to realize Yami and I aren't going to be living forever also.

No, Seth and Noa probably know too and just aren't saying anything. I forget sometimes how old those two are: that Noa's around eighty and Seth is pushing four hundred. They're probably more aware of our mortality than we are. Not that I really *want* Seto to figure it out any time soon. I've seen how overprotective the man can get watching him with Mokuba these past few months.

Still Mokuba was so damned concerned last night that someone was going to shoot me right there in the mansion, in the den with its front-facing windows. It took till nearly two in the morning to get him calmed down, and by then we were both ready to drop. We almost crashed in our separate rooms, but we got as far as mine and the discovery that my roommate of late - Kitty - was gone. I seem to vaguely recall reading a note from him also, something about sleeping in the room where his stuff is, Seto, Malik, and... space iguanas in penguin suits? Maybe I dreamed that last part, though. It's either that or what happened with Marik shook Jounouchi up more than he's admitting.

The warm weight behind me stirs as Yami starts to yawn himself awake. It's not that he's a deep sleeper, I don't think, compared to what I've seen of 'normal' people. It's more that, I've been in Domino about two and half years now, and I'm still jumpy. It's gotten worse since Oyaji's started sending goons after me. I don't know if even Kitty's noticed I rarely sleep more than four or five hours anymore; rather, it's an hour or so here, twenty minutes there. If there's anything I learned in those ten years with Oyaji, it was to hide whether I'm awake or not.

It's strange though. I sleep better like this, when Yami's with me, than I do any other time. Maybe it's not too strange. Maybe it just seems strange to me because all of this is still so new to me, this being in a relationship, caring for and worrying about another person who's not family. In a lot of ways, I'm used to only worrying about Ryou; Jounouchi can take care of himself. I guess Yami can too, and...

He's making a rather disgusted noise, one arm letting go of me to try and block the light. A morning person Yami is not, not by any stretch of the imagination. I like mornings better than Yami, and that's saying a lot. "Can I shoot the light?" he grumbles.

"It'd probably just make it worse," I return. Knowing our luck, after all. I roll so that I'm laying over him, supported on my elbows, and lean down to kiss him. "Good morning."

I can feel his hands move to the small of my back, just above my boxers. "It is now." He does say some of the sappiest things sometimes, but that's all right in my book, mainly because all of this is really new to me. I think I've mentioned that before though. I move my hand through his hair, quietly amazed that it's so soft but move it and it springs right back into place. "Kura..."

And there's a banging on the door, loud enough to make us both jump. "Bakura? Yami? You guys still in

there?"

I smack my head down on the pillow next to Yami's head with a sighed "God damn it". Really, I love Mai to pieces, but her timing is abysmal. To be fair, it could have been worse; she could have waited a few more minutes. Still... "Can I kill her?"

"Magnum would be pissed," he returns softly. All the same, I can hear the same frustration that I feel in his voice. This just seems to keep happening to us. It's like the gods are against us or something. If that's the case, though, give me a couple more of these starts and stops and I'll be finding a way to put those interfering bastards in their place. Anyway, moving on...

She knocks on the door again, hard enough that I can hear it rattle, and I have to resist the urge to try to brain myself with this pillow. "I can hear you in there. Get up. You've got to be in twenty minutes."

Huh? I lift my head and look at the door, so I'm not yelling directly in Yami's ear, and call back, "What're you talking about?"

"Cynthia-san just called. She's in Domino to see you two." She turns the door knob till I hear the lock catch then crunch before she pushes it the rest of the way open. The surprised expression on her face is almost - *almost!* - worth it, before it gives way to a smirk. "Am I interrupting something?"

Yami shifts beneath me, and something goes flying at her, which of course she dodges. At least it wasn't my alarm clock this time. "Out, Mai," he orders.

"We'll be down in a few," I finish.

She gives us a critical look at that but nod. "I'll have Akito bring the car around. Be ready in ten, you guys." She pulls the door closed behind her. For now, I'll pretend not to notice I'm going to need a new lock on that door now. This is getting a little old, though to be fair, it was Mokuba the time before this and Kitty the first time, both when I was still sleeping off the meds from the hospital. I think Seto's starting to tired of replacing it, and I know I'm tired of that overdramatic sigh he does every time I ask.

"What do you think she wants?" Yami asks.

"No time like the present to find out."

I hope Cynthia isn't expecting me to eat a lot, since I think my stomach got left at the last stoplight. But hey, we left five minutes later than we'd intended and we're still three minutes early to meet the human servant of the Master of Tokyo at a restaurant I'd have never been able to justify going to before. After all, a glass of soda here is probably equal to or more than what I paid for Ryou's school uniforms. I am so not picking up the tab for today's little excursion. My brother and I are currently living on Seto's good graces - and I'm not sure how far those extend. It's not like I've had a job in over two months also. Hmm, I wonder if -

"Bakura-kun! Yami-kun!" And right on cue, there's Cynthia. She even witchied down for this meeting, so that she looks like your average, everyday rich *gaijin*. If one ignores the fact there's still something otherworldly about her. We bypass the maitre'd completely and head over to her table, Mai trailing behind us. I can't even see anyone guarding her; surely, the tigers are supposed to watch her. I mean, yeah, she can't die till Pegasus does, but I'd imagine getting shot still hurts like hell. At least, that's my understanding of the whole master-human servant thing. I've been known to make mistakes from time to time.

And Yami's putting on his charming best. "It's good to see you again, Cynthia-san. You look very nice today," he compliments as he takes a seat at her table next to her. If I didn't know where his tastes lie, I'd

almost swear he's flirting and I should be jealous. Almost.

"Thank you. And how're you doing, Bakura-kun?" I swear she's beaming as I sink down in a chair as well. "You're looking a lot better."

"I *am* a lot better," I respond. Last time I saw her was right after I got out of the hospital though, so most anything's better than I was then. "They're letting me out of the house now," I pointedly glance over at Yami, "though I can't say for how much longer if people keep taking potshots at me."

He has the good grace to look a little ashamed. We had a bit of a row about me going outside after the first attempt. "I don't want anyone taking you away from me like that, Kura."

Cynthia's got that look in her eyes, like she's about to do the chick thing and start going 'aww'. Thankfully, she restrains herself and instead turns her next question to Yami. "How's your training going? Mahaado-kun isn't too hard a taskmaster, is he?"

I have bite back a snicker. Yami's got Mahaado wrapped around his finger, I swear. I think he gets out of training more than he goes. As far as I know, the only problem they have is Mahaado insists on calling him 'Atemu' and it drives Yami nuts. "Not too bad," he qualifies.

She smiles broadly. "He's driving you crazy, isn't he?"

"Out of my mind," he agrees.

She turns an easy smile to encompass me as well. "I ordered for you both. I hope you don't mind. The owner is a friend of Pegasus'."

Of course Tokyo gets the friendly, charismatic Master, and we end up with the one vampire who still has a tree up his ass. Though, seriously, I guess it could have been a lot worse than Seto. I mean, after all, he did take the brat and me in after I got out of the hospital; and as long as he likes us, we'll probably never have to pay for anything again; and he has at least been making the effort to be more social around the house, though of late something seems to be holding his efforts back, if not completely reversing them. Hmm... I wonder if Varon's ever treated cranky, antisocial master vampires before. Oh well, it'd be a good exercise for him, to try out new insults on us if nothing else. Yeah, Varon's cool in my book, even if he is an annoying little shit sometimes. I'd have liked to have had running with us back in my Tokyo days, if only to keep us patched up and in line. Maybe I'll mention that next time he's around. Probably won't be too long anyway. We're a danger-prone bunch.

"That's wonderful, Cynthia-san. Thank you." Yami's definitely the one with any manners whatsoever in this relationship. "How are things in Tokyo?" Small talk, how I hate it.

Her smile slips a little, and my interest is suddenly perked. Trouble in paradise? "We still think someone is passing on information to your father for these attempts on your life, Bakura-kun, but we've yet to find out who it is. Pegasus is... quite unhappy with the lack of progress."

If anything, I think Yami's frowning harder than I've ever seen, but something about it also tells me he's thinking a bit too hard. "Cynthia-san," he finally asks, "do you think it would help at all if we have Kaiba pass on some misinformation?"

"It's possible, but I can't see where that will help us track down the leak." She sighs, rubbing her forehead. Is it too odd for me to be wondering how long she's been using that gesture? I mean, she *looks* just about the same age or a little younger than my stepmother, but she's at least a hundred years old... and she's still human. "It has to be one of the vampires but not any of the ones Pegasus himself turned. I'd sooner suspect Yami-kun here of passing on the information than one of our tigers, and the vampires Pegasus made have sworn a blood oath to be loyal to him."

I wonder if Treeboy know to do that, not that he's turned anybody or shows any intention of doing so. Then again he never showed any indication he was going to move Ryou, Kitty, and me into his house either, so who knows. And I'm sure Seth will tell him all about it when the time comes, if the time ever comes. So long as he doesn't ever get it in that thick vampire skull of his to even think of practicing on me. Otherwise I might feel inclined to yank the tree out of his ass and stake him with it. I happen to enjoy my billing as one of the few humans in this little menagerie, even if I'm not completely 'normal'. See, I can admit it.

We are momentarily save from having to continue this conversation as the waitress arrives. Well, at least it's just drinks and some kind of soup. It can't be too bad, can it? It's not miso and it's not chicken noodle, and that's the extent of my knowledge on the matter because those are the only two kinds of soup the brat and Kitty ever care to make, and I'm still not allowed in the kitchen. According to one of Mokuba's caffeine-induced ramblings, the brat pass on word of the Toaster Incident. Also according to Mokuba, my Toaster Incident puts me even with Treeboy and the Popcorn Accident. Don't ask me; until that conversation, I never realized the potential of popcorn as a weapon or as suctioning materials. Now, granted, this was prior to Seto being turned, but there are still little black lumps attached to the ceiling!

Cynthia takes a small sip of her soup and returns to the small talk. "How's your brother, Bakura?"

I follow her lead and try a little. Not too bad indeed. "He's okay. Usually somewhere between worried sick and oblivious, thanks to his brother," I answer, nodding at Yami.

"And how is Yuugi-kun these days, Yami-kun?"

An honest-to-God grin breaks out over his face. Yuugi's always one of his favorite subjects of conversation. "He's enjoying all the attention. Kura can see him, Jounouchi-kun can scent him, and Ryou-kun hangs out with him."

So that's what they told him they're doing? Hanging out? Man, but are they keeping him in the dark. The brat did his best mile-a-minute babble at me, once I was home and coherent, and told me *all* about him and the Ghost Mini-Me. The logistics of it still confuses me, but as long as I don't get any details and they keep clearing their little 'conversations' off my laptop, I'm trying to be cool with it. I keep waiting on them to start asking to borrow Treeboy's laptop, though, because that thing has a battery life measured in days instead of hours. I'd love to know what he did to it to make it like that, as long as I don't have to sit through a techno-babble explanation. That's why I try to avoid asking Seto too many questions; the explanations end up going way over my head. And whoops, damn, I went way off track there, didn't I?

"And Seto-kun?" she's asking. I swear, every time we talk, even just on the phone, she asks about him. I think she is asking either because Pegasus is the one who turned him up as Domino's Master and they want to keep track of him (he *is* the next closest Master to them) or because she wants to mother him. If it's the latter, she might have to employ the 'swift kick in the pants' method of making him listen. But I again digress. "How is he adjusting? Is he taking care of himself?"

I can't resist snickering. "He doesn't have much of a choice. If he tries missing a meal, he gets held down and force-fed."

I don't have to look at Yami to know he's smirking around his food. He got quality blackmail pictures during one of those times. I know he's happy about that because he and Treeboy still don't get along worth a shit. I keep waiting for them to go from veiled threats and blackmail to outright warfare, because when they get to that point, I'm finding another place to be. Although with how Seto's been lately...

"I don't think he's been doing so great other than that though," I continue. Suddenly, both of their attention is focused on me, and I have to resist the urge to squirm in my seat and continue talking, covering my nervousness by twirling my soup spoon between my fingers. "I don't know. He seems really out of it sometimes. Most of the time, he's okay and acting like his normal prickly self, but from time to time-" I make myself stop. Cynthia's a nice woman and all that, but sometimes I forget she's Pegasus'

human servant. I don't want to tell her what I think in case she carries it back to the freaky, freaky man. Who knows what he'd do with it?

"From time to time'?" she prompts.

"It's probably not my place to say."

She smiles faintly. "I won't be repeating any of this back to my husband without your permission. You have my word on that." Damn, did she read my mind or something? And she *is* a witch; her word is bonding.

I give her a dirty look and set my spoon down to take a sip of my drink before answering. "From time to time, I don't think he knows who we are. I caught him talk in... I don't know. It sounded like English, but at the same time it didn't. And he looked through Mokuba like he wasn't even there!" I have to stop and take a deep breath before I start shrieking and get us thrown out, owner being a friend of Pegasus' or not. "It's not like that all the same time, though, just sometimes."

Cynthia takes a deep breath as well and releases it, a smile going over her face again. I'm so very damn confused. This is a good thing? "You had me worried there for a moment. Seto-kun will be fine in a few days. Give him a week - a month, tops - and he'll be back to normal."

"Cynthia-san," Yami interrupts, "you just lost me. Kaiba acting like a fruitcake is a... good thing?" My thoughts exactly.

"He's starting to get the memories of the previous Master." And this is a good thing?! Kaiba Gouzabourou was an asshole, a pervert, a bastard, and quite likely a pedophile. Seto might not be the nicest guy on the planet, but I wouldn't wish any of that on my worst enemy. "It happens to every Master. Don't worry about it."

"Don't worry about it? Cynthia, you knew Gouzabourou, right?" Deep breaths, Bakura. Don't scream at her.

The smile turns into a grimace. "Well enough to despise him. This won't turn Seto-kun into him."

I lean back in my chair and cross my arms over my stomach. "I'm not sure I like him having to see that." I don't like Seto very much sometimes, but like damn near everyone else in that house, he's mine. I've laid claim on him, as some kind of older brother who needs near-constant supervision for his own good.

"There's not anything-"

I'm already sitting up to retort when the glass behind her makes a quiet 'plink' sound, then I've got all of a second to realize the spiderwebbing crack in the window is from a bullet, before Mai has shoved Yami and me down. I hear Cynthia cry out before a stockish man that I only now recognize as one of the tigers drags her down to the ground as well. There's blood everywhere and I think most of it's Cynthia's, but if she's still screaming, I can't hear it over half the restaurant turning into really fucking huge tigers, the other half running in sheer blind terror, and the shrieking-buzzing in my own head.

/Kill maim torture destroy.../ the voice I hear loudest demands. It sounds so familiar, but last time I heard it, it was just a whisper. How has it gotten so loud in the last two months, especially so far from Tokyo?
*/Destroy feed kill kill **kill KILL!**/*

"Shut up!" I clamp my hands over my ears in a vain attempt to stop the voice.

*/Destroy death release kill kill killkill**killKILL!**-!/*

"Stop!" Much more of this and I'm going to paint a bull's eye on myself and stand up. Maybe a big

fucking sign on my head that says 'Shoot here, please!' Fucking hell, my brain's going to explode at this rate. It's so loud and it's all through my head and I can barely hear myself think and...

And someone's shaking me by the shoulders. "Kura!" That's me, right? I'm still in here, aren't I? Someone's screaming wordlessly and I can just barely hear it over the voice in my head. One more particularly hard shake breaks the spell for a moment, and wow, that's Yami in front of me. "Kura?"

I duck my head against his chest, fingers grabbing what I can of his shirt. "Make it stop, Yami!" Hey, at this point, I'm not ashamed to beg. Yami made it stop last time, back in Tokyo. He can make it stop this time.

I can feel his arms wrap around me as he pulls me closer. I feel close to doing something I don't think I've ever done before: sob my eyes out in pain. "Make what stop?"

"The voice in my head!" I choke out. "Make it stop! It's driving me crazy! I'll do anything - just make it stop!"

I feel warm liquid on my own cheeks as Yami lifts my head so we are face to face. I almost want to say he's trying to pull the voice out through my eyes, he's staring at me so intently. Unfortunately, the volume just raises like it's attempting to run from Yami or drive him away. I hear a whimper - and I think it came from me.

"Come back to me, Kura." The words whisper through my head, and whatever it is in me recedes till I'm left in silence. Once more I slump forward, this time in relief, burying my face against his shoulder. "Kura?!" Whoops, guess I scared him.

"I'm here," I answer. Damn, I think I must have screamed enough to do something to my throat. "I just fucking hurt."

"Get him out of here." I tilt my head slightly and glance at Mai through one eye. "Take him to Kaiba Corp, and I'll take care of things here. I'll let you know when it's safe to come home."

"Why Kaiba Corp?"

Mai shakes her head. "One, it's closer than Kame Games. Two, the security is tighter than Kame. And three, I have security clearance at Kaiba Corp. Now get your asses over there before I feel inclined to kick them.

Yami pulls me to my feet, which is just as well because I'm not too sure I still have solid kneecaps. A hand touches my arm, and I glance down. Okay, I have always known on a purely mental level that there had to be some benefit to tying oneself to a vampire, aside from a drastically increased lifespan; healing almost as fast as a vamp never occurred to me, though. There's a hole in the stomach area of her dress, blood liberally soaking the area around it, but the flesh revealed by the hole is solid, if a little reddened and raised. It's like watching a video of a wound healing on fast-forward; you won't see anything if you just stare, but look a way for a moment and it's a little better. "Cynthia." I cut myself off as one of the tigers growl. I hope that wasn't one of the ones I Know.

She smacks the gigantic Were on the nose like it's nothing more than a common housecat. "Stop that." It almost immediately silences, save some feline grumbings. She looks back up to us. "Our friend is getting desperate. He shouldn't have been willing to try this around us, so that says something, though what I'm not sure. We are going to find out who the leak is, I promise."

I glance down at the cat that growled at me (that had better not be Headband Boy or Kitty'll knock his teeth) then back to her before I say, albeit a little hoarse, "I'm sorry this happened, Cynthia."

"It's not your fault, Bakura-kun." It's odd, but those words make me feel like some weight has been lifted

from my shoulders. Weird. See, this is why I like Cynthia. "Now, you and Yami-kun get out of here. Find a place to hide out till dark."

"We're on our way out right now," answers Yami softly. He gives me a small squeeze with the arm he still has around my waist.

"Do you want me to send one of the tigers with you?"

I glance down again at the tiger that growled at me. Now that I look, there's a faint auburn tint to its fur. Definitely not Kajiki, but someone I've seen before. Maybe the only one that survived the 'four on one' incident in one piece? What was his name? It was something odd, like Amelia or Amelda or A Melted Patty or something. I shake my head. "Jounouchi has new cats, and I'm not sure how the wolves would take it." And the only one I'd be willing to take is Headband Boy, but we need a cat on the inside we can contact, so no go, but I'm not saying that.

She nods and leans back against a stockier tiger with darker tinted fur. Now that's Kajiki, I'm almost willing to bet. "Get out of here, you two. Be careful till dark."

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Yami nod. "We're gone, Cynthia-san."

You know, anywhere else in the world, it'd probably be a lot less safe after dark. What does it say about our lives that we're safer after dark? Besides that we have the most overprotective vampire in the world as our landlord?

"You know, I really need to tell Treeboy's secretary not to let just anyone in his office." I'm being good and not sitting in Seto's chair. On his desk is a whole other thing though. "We could have been anyone."

Yami shakes his head. "She was discreet about it, but she checked some kind of list. Obviously, Kaiba has given us high enough security clearance to get in here."

"Without me having to break in, too. Neat." You know, I think I like Seto's office. The desk is comfy, and the room itself is about the size of the apartment Ryou and I used to share. Okay, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration, but not by much.

Now, Yami, on the other hand, has apparently laid full claim to not only Seto's chair but also the corner of his desk where he now has his feet propped. You know, if I remember correctly, he was posed like this the first time I saw him, only in the Old Man's chair. That's where I got the impression of him being a cocky little bastard - and he is - but now it's a lot more endearing than it was back then.

"How's your shoulder feeling?"

Oh yeah. When we got in the cab, we discovered a slice going through the shoulder of my shirt. Apparently, I sat up right when the bullet was about to hit my chest. There's a little scrape that bled just a tiny bit. We found a first-aid kit hidden away in the office, and Yami got to go overboard packing and dressing the wound. I think I'm going to just let the brat double-check it when we get home and skip out on visiting Varon today.

"Not too bad. It barely even hurts. It'd be nice to have it just close up like Cynthia's though."

A thought strikes me suddenly, and I have to grin. Hell, I might have slipped into snickering or even one of my more maniacal expressions because he looks a little concerned. "What?"

I tap my foot against the chair he's sitting in. "I had a fun thought. Get over here."

He's moving hesitantly, but he stands and comes to stand between my legs. "What're you up to, Kura?" His tone may be suspicious, but the phrasing is too good to resist.

"I just realized we're all alone in Seto's office, it's barely three o'clock, and no one is supposed to disturb us till dark. No Mokuba, no Mai... no interruptions at all."

About halfway through that, he starts developing this huge smirk. "And as long as we don't hit the page button or anything like that..." I'd hate to see us now. I bet we're both wearing the same 'this is too good to be true but I'm damn sure going to take advantage of it' expression. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Damn straight. Now get over here."

It's incredibly quiet as we step out of the taxi at the front gate of Kaiba Mansion. Now, granted, the vampire guards are a lot quieter than the wolves, but this is quiet even for them. Not even a word of hello, just a single nod for all three of us. Something's wrong. You don't have to be psychic to see that. The vamps are quiet, but more alarming is that I can't hear the wolves having one of their parties out by the pool like they do almost every night.

Yami and I exchange a worried look, then I glance over to see one of the vamps paying the cab driver. From what I can tell, it even looks like he's giving the guy a pretty good tip. When he stands back up, I give in and ask the question that's been kicking around my mind these past few minutes. "What's wrong?"

"Kaiba-sama wants you in the house as soon as possible."

Alarm crosses Yami's face, and he demands, "What happened?"

"You'll find out inside."

We now exchange bewildered looks before shrugging nearly in unison. I look over my shoulder to Mai, who simply shrugs as well. Oh well, nothing else to do but go inside and see what we can find out.

The vamp guards have a car waiting to drive us up to the door, and we pile in. Hell, Mai even breaks routine and sits in the back with us, hurrying in the car after me before the door can be closed behind me. "I don't like this," Yami intones. "Something has to have happened to get them like this."

"The shooting today maybe?" I hazard a guess. "Cynthia got hit. Maybe Pegasus is giving Treeboy some grief about that."

He nods in response. "Sounds like that would be mostly likely, I think. It could be something else though."

"Like what?" But really, I dread to think what else could have everyone like this. If it's not Pegasus, I'm pretty sure I don't want to know.

And I'm saved from hearing a response by the car stopping at the steps and the car door immediately opening. Mai's out the door like a rocket, leaving the two of us to stare after her a moment. "Move it or lose it, boys." Somehow I don't like that threat coming from her, so I scramble out with Yami right behind me. "Let's get this over with."

Again, I shrug, careful to only use one shoulder. Really, it's not much more than a scrape, but it did bleed a bit. In fact, between the blood from it and from Cynthia, I had to trade in the shirt I'd been wearing for one of Seto's I found in the attached bathroom. It was a little odd dressing without a mirror and the shirt

hangs awfully big on me, but at least I'm a bit more presentable, which is extra amusing given I caught me talking to myself in the lack of a mirror about which button went in which hole. Chances are getting better and better that I'm losing it big time.

Yami opens the door... and it's like walking into a tomb. It's completely silent, and that in and of itself is more disturbing than the fact it looks like almost everyone who lives here is in the main hallway. I have to repress a shiver. It's that fucking cold in here, and that's just what I'm getting off the living people. If there's a homeless soul in here, I think I could lose it in the mix. The wolves look like something the cat dragged in, and weirdly Magnum looks the worst off of the bunch.

I half-turn to the woman standing behind me and hiss, "What's going on here?"

"Bakura?" Magnum cuts in before she can say anything. He may look like hell, but there's still something awfully commanding about him. "Where were you?"

"We-" I start before Yami cuts me off.

"Mai sent us to Kaiba Corp." He always does this. If it looks like there's the slightest possibility of trouble, he tries to step in and take it for me. "She said we'd be safe there till dark." Yes, ladies and gentlemen, chivalry is not dead. Still, the whole room is practically vibrating from the tension - and I'm not usually sensitive to those kinds of things.

I start to turn and talk to Mai again when Jounouchi-kitty pipes up. "Dorobou." That was awfully calm for the cat, I think to myself as I focus my attention onto him. "Who the fuck are you talking to?"

I can't help it. I point at the blonde woman over my shoulder. "Her." Please, don't tell me- I don't think I can take another one. "Tell me you see her, Kitty. Please." My voice feels strangled in my own throat, and it's all I can do to get words out. Between the shooting and that voice screaming in my head earlier, I don't think I can take another incognito spirit. I dimly note Yami's arm squeezing my waist, but right now, Jounouchi's answer is more important.

He shakes his head slowly. "The only people I see over there are you and Yami... but I smell three." His voice is breaking slightly, but I can barely tell that over the fact that this is all really funny.

I turn to where Mai's standing, staring at me like I've fucking lost it at last, and manage to get out around what are probably hysterical chuckles, "I've heard of job dedication before, but seriously, Mai, this is just too fucking much."

I faintly feel a hand close on my arm, and I follow it up to see amber eyes staring at me almost levelly. I'm pretty sure another thick, wet laugh escapes me before Kitty starts speaking. "Dorobou... Bakura. Come on, let's go in the den." My my, he sounds so calm. It could almost drain the humor out of the situation. "It's quieter there. Just you, me, Yami, and Marik."

'And Marik?' 'Quieter'? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? I can feel an eyebrow quirk up before Yami gives me a light tug. "Come on, Kura. Let's go," he whispers.

"Okay," I agree easily, letting my boyfriend (nope, need to change that to 'lover' now) lead me towards the den. I call it 'the den' anyway. Seth and Seto call it 'the family room', but I don't see anyone spending any quality family time in there, at least not of the less-than-R-rated sort, so it's 'the den', damn it. And what do you know? It *is* quieter in here. Even Marik's being quiet (and that's saying something), and Kitty's relaying something softly to someone on the other side of the door.

Of course, the minute I think that, Marik pulls Kitty in the room, closes the door, and wraps his arms around him. Hmm, he's definitely seeming better for my cat than Kitty's last love interest, but then again, a rock might be better for Kitty than Icecube Seto - and oddly, Kitty seems to be a calming influence on

the Maliks. Was Malik or Marik around last time something like this happened back in Tokyo? No, wait, I met them after that. Never mind. Anyway, they've moved on to full-fledged nuzzles, and I almost want to ask if they'd like us to leave because I don't want to think of my cat having a sex life, but I really don't want to leave; all I want to do is stand here at the front of the room and do some of my own cuddling with Yami because, excepting what happened a few hours ago in Seto's office, it has been a fucking sucky two days.

I can feel the worry radiating off Yami, and he gives me a light squeeze again. "I'm fine," I respond to the silent question. And I don't think anyone's looked at me with so much visible disbelief in their eyes before. So many that didn't come out totally convincing, but I should still get points for trying to spare their feelings, should I?

"Still," Kitty says smoothly, "maybe you should sit down. Both of you," he clarifies with a nod to include Yami.

...And the way everyone's staring at me, I feel like the lab rat that did a neat trick once and they're waiting on me to repeat it. "I'm not going to freak out again. I mean it. I'm fine. I'm not crazy."

Yami moves around in front of me, his hand moving through my hair. "We know, Kura. Of course you're not crazy. Remember, I saw her too." He drops down on one of the couches and pats the seat next to him. "Come here."

I get about half a step close and - *pain*. White, shooting, hot pain lacing through my already injured shoulder. Fucking hell. Next thing I know, Yami's jumped me and we're on the floor and I think Kitty just went out the window, maybe with Marik right behind me. Yami leans off my body when the door opens. I don't even look to see who it is, but I know the voice: Kisara. "Are you- What happened?!"

"Call a doctor!" Yami's yelling. Me, I'm trying to curl into myself to make the hurt go away, but I can't because Yami's still holding me down. Remind me when it doesn't hurt to thank him for that, because this way I can't move and tear the wound, and hit him, because it fucking hurts and I'll feel better when I've made myself a smaller target.

I can almost hear Kisara's eyes goggle, but then she yells, "Varon! Where are you, Varon?" Did we set up an intercom to his apartment or something when I wasn't looking?

Okay, yes, this sucks, but pull it together, Bakura. It's not like this hasn't happened before. If you didn't whine like a baby when you got shot a lot worse at fourteen, there's no reason to do it now at eighteen. It's just the fleshy part of your shoulder and it went all the way through. Suck it up. Deep breaths, in and out, push past the pain, just calm the fuck down. Now open your eyes and deal with everything else.

Yami looks frantic. I think I've already noted I'm probably the worst person in the world for him, given how many people want me dead and how hung up he is on not being abandoned, but I'm not giving up the ghost just yet. He glances down, and I try to summon a reassuring look to my face. "I'm good," I whisper. "Let me up."

"But, Kura! You've been shot!" His stage whisper has definitely improved in these last two months. "You shouldn't move or you might tear it."

"I know. It's not like it's the first time."

"The one earlier today doesn't count."

"I wasn't counting it."

I think I might have actually surprised him. His grip eases, and I slip by his hands to sit up. I need something to clog the bleeding because someone needs to make sure Jounouchi doesn't kill the guy before I get my answers. Oh well, I think this shirt has had it anyway. I'll just have to buy Seto a new one, I concede to myself as I start working on getting it off.

"What're you doing?" And now he sounds horrified. Great, I guess at the rate I'm going today, I'm going to break my boyfriend before I can get in his pants again.

"Someone needs to go after Kitty," I grit out, "someone whose scent he recognizes. I don't fancy walking around bleeding, so..."

"You're not walking around anywhere." Holy fuck, when did Varon learn to teleport?! I'm glad I hadn't made it further than my knees because they give out abruptly and I flop back against Yami. Immediately I have to grit my teeth against the pain as the back of wound hits his chest. Yami's arms are around me again to hold me still. And Varon's smirking at me, one of those annoying as shit 'I told you so' ones that I detest to no end. "What'd I tell you?"

"Fuck you, asshole," I growl. "Jounouchi's going to eat the shooter while you babble at me, and I won't find out the source."

He gazes back at me steadily. "There was a blond out there after him."

Oh hell, Marik. "That's not much better than him being out there alone. They'll end up sharing the kill." Marik'll eat the soul after Jounouchi's done with the body. Bloody efficient, if you ask me, which I'll note no one is. Yeesh, one little bout of nerves...

"Nevertheless, you're staying in here till I'm done with you," he breaks in, dropping a bag that probably weighs more than I do on the floor next to me. He's digging around it as he continues, "And if you try to get away, I'll have Mutou-kun cut you off."

...I hate him.

A little more than half an hour, several stitches, a few packs of gauze, some bandages, a sling, and a shot of painkillers later, the asshole's finishing taping the bandage in place when we hear a startled shriek from *outside* that ends in a body thumping on the floor *inside*. And me being me and my slightly less than normal self, not to mention hopped up on painkillers, I have to quip, "Did anyone order this? I don't think it's mine."

Yami pushes himself to his feet smoothly and glares down. "It's not mine. I think we should bust it up a bit and return it to the sender." Yeesh, I think I just went weak in the knees for a new reason. Yami's pretty when he's being dangerous. If he gets any prettier, I might have to jump him, Varon here or not.

"Special delivery via Leopard Express." And there's Kitty and Malik. When'd they sneak back in here? "I kinda left the gun behind. Good luck getting anything useful outta this fuckwit."

"Well, he makes good threats." I have to snicker at Malik's commentary, but really it is a bit surprising the guy's still drawing breath. If the look on Yami's face is any indication, he may not be much longer though.

"I'm not telling you who sent me!" Wow, 'fuckwit' really is an appropriate name for him. "I'd sooner die than-

"Fuckwit, we already know who's paying you," I interrupt. "I want to know who the leak is. Where's *Shachou*," I throw as much sarcasm as I possibly can on the word, "getting his information?" And for the record, I'm glad Varon and Yami moved me on the couch; it's nice to be able to look down on this idiot.

Kitty stalks over to the nitwit and crouches down next to him; whatever else he does, I lose because his back is to me. "Sweetie," he growls, "we can do this the easy way or we can do this the hard way." Malik looks lost. Good, I'm not the only one. "The easy way is, you give us a name, and I won't do anything else to you." I'll note he didn't mention the rest of us though. It's so hard not to smirk. "You can walk out the front door and leave." Ignoring the giant pissed-off wolfpack, of course. "The hard way is, you keep quiet and Ishtar gets to cut you up. After he gets bored, Yami uses you for target practice. After that, even if you're dead, Dorobou will *make* you tell us what we want to know. And there won't *be* a body to find because I'll *eat it*. So, dear, what's it going to be?"

Hmm, you'd have to be looking hard, but I think Yami and Varon both just went a little green at the gills. So of course, let me be the first to make things worse. "I don't know, Kitty. I bet Fuckwit here would give you indigestion." I beam angelically enough to put my little brother and both Mini-Me's to shame. "I vote we fill the pool with acid and toss him in."

"No no no. We should slice him up in bite-sized pieces and dump him in the shark tank at the aquarium." And apparently Malik's joining the game. "Sharks'll eat anything. I saw one eat a Volkswagon once." Oh yeah, I nearly forgot about that."

"I hear there's an Egyptian exhibit at the museum. We could always mummify him alive and add him to it." The first chance I get, I'm so jumping my boyfriend's bones.

"Mutou-kun!" I nearly jump out of my skin when Varon joins in. "You have to at *least* remove the stomach and liver before you mummify him."

And I think Fuckwit just pissed himself. "Amelda!"

"Motherfucking- Son of a- I can't believe that- What an- *Bastard!*" I can't believe that asshole! Stupid tiger! I'm going to-

The guy on the floor is still talking though. "That's all I was ever told. Just Amelda, no last name." Like that asshole needs one. "C- can I go now? Please?"

"Get the fuck outta here. Go bleed somewhere else." Thank you, Kitty. I think we've ruined Seto's carpet enough for one night.

The guy's out the door and running fast enough to rival Mokuba on a caffeine trip, so thankfully he's out of the room before Marik pipes up, "Should you have mentioned the large, angry wolfpack on the front lawn, suncat?"

Kitty smirks in a way that eerily reminds me of myself and Malik in our Tokyo days. "Where's the fun in that?"

And before I realize what's happening, Yami's marching himself up to the broken window and yelling out, "By the way, nice job missing Kura at the restaurant, asshole! I'm sure Cynthia-san and Mai-san appreciated you *shooting them!*"

...I'm jumping Yami the second he's in range.

And the wolves tear the guy apart is music to my ears.

"You're not going to Tokyo."

I seriously hope Varon doesn't think he's winning this argument. "I am going."

"There's no way in hell. Jounouchi and Ishtar can handle it."

"I'm the one they want dead." And I'm going to be the one to deal with Oyaji, one way or another. Amelda's just another step on the road to there. "I want to see for myself that no one else tries for me again."

"Well, that's great and all, but if you go off and tear the stitches I just oh so *lovingly* put in you," yeesh, guess I got Varon in a bit of a tizzy, "I'll just stand here and watch you bleed everywhere. I might give you a sponge to soak it up, but I'm not a seamstress. Besides, I'm invoking my doctor status to *order* you *and* Mutou-kun to stay the fuck in Domino!"

This is going nowhere fast. I have to bite back a smirk and heave a dramatic sigh. "Okay." I think I just broke Kitty. That, or he and Malik are onto my little charade already. Still... "You win. We'll stay here."

"So glad you see it my way." He's even smirking. Damn, I'm good. Maybe since I'm semi-retired from my usual job, I can go into acting.

"Then I guess we'll call you from Tokyo." Thank you, Kitty, for diverting the attention back off me. I quirk an eyebrow in a silent question. "Kajiki and Sasame are picking us up; I want to be there when the tigers find out."

Does he realize he's got this bloodthirsty glint in his eyes? I'm not going to mention it, but I'm surprised Malik - or worse, Marik - isn't jumping him now. Oh, I think I feel sorry for the tigers. They might be getting a free show, if the more psychotic Ishtar has anything to say about it. And if he keeps growling, Malik might have to do more than that 'I'm holding myself back, but I don't like it' moan. Hmm, haven't heard that one in a while.

And I might be mistaken, but I think either Yami's embarrassed by their little demonstration or he's annoyed by it; whichever it is, he's a little flushed. (Of course, there is always a third option, but I don't want to ponder why my boyfriend would want to be a voyeur with Kitty and Malik, because ugh... Kitty's like a little brother to me and the Maliks I've known forever.)

"I'll have my cellphone on me," I reply easily.

"We'll see you when you get back then," finishes Yami.

Jounouchi does this slight mouth-twitch-that-might-be-a-smirk that is always my best bet he's about to say or do something that will be... fun, since I don't think he knows he does it. "Wait till we're *all* out of the room before you jump each other again," he mouths off. "Seriously, did you even *attempt* to shower?"

I will not look at Yami. I will not look at Yami. I will not look at Yami. If I do, I might lose it. He'll be starting to either bristle in anger or flush in embarrassment. "Well, there was a shower involved."

"How 'bout soap? And I don't mean as an alternative lube."

I will not start laughing. If I do, I won't be able to stop. But it's so hard to resist when Yami yells, "Yes!" ...Especially when I'm already thinking about that in other connotations. I can't stop the snicker that gets out though.

"Not thoroughly, though. I can still smell you all over each other." Kitty smirks, though I have to wonder if he sees Malik beside him. I know that expression; Jounouchi is definitely getting jumped in the helicopter because Malik is *not* known for his self-control. "Sex and my brother are two things I'd rather *not* think about in the same sentence."

"We've got a ride to catch, don't we?" That comes from Malik, amusingly enough. At least, it seems surprising to some people in the room, namely Yami and Varon. Like I've said, I've known Malik- Gods, has it been eight years? I'd say I'm starting to know him pretty well. Which reminds me...

"Malik?" I prompt. He half-glances over at me. "Remember what I told you." And told you and told you, from the night we first started sneaking into some of the more interesting clubs in Tokyo. And... there's the flush. His mind just gutter-dove.

Kitty shrugs. "Like Malik said, our ride's waiting. We'll call you after Amelda's kitty chow."

"Sure," I agree, not able to hold back the smirk that's emerging. "I'll keep an ear out for you."

That should be just long enough...

This is going to be tricky, is all I can think as I step into my bedroom after Yami. The supplies I need for this little venture are in the top drawer of my dresser, pilfered a few weeks ago from Noa's room, of all places, though they do have the initials 'M. K.' engraved on them. Yeah, I'm not even going to ask. I really don't want to know. Still, I've got to get past Yami, retrieve them, and put them to use. Oh well, nonchalance should work best in a situation like this, I decide, walking over to the dresser and pulling the drawer open to rifle through it.

"I wasn't expecting you to back down so easily," Yami's saying as I half tune in, just in case I need to answer. "It probably wouldn't have been a good idea-" ah, there they are "-to go to Tokyo right now anyway." Tuck them in the sling so they don't any noise. Now... bed or door? He's slowing down closer to the bed, so I guess that'll be it. He sits down on it and pats the spot next to him for me to sit as well. Really, he's making this entirely too easy. I take a seat next to him, a little closer to the foot of the bed, arranging my bound arm with a wince. "Still hurts?"

"A little," I admit, leaning closer, "but not too much." This is actually a bit uncomfortable; I guess I might be pushing myself a little too far too fast, but I have to do this. I can rest later.

I lean a little closer and press my lips to his. He obligingly opens his mouth when I nibble at his lower lip and even lets me press him down into the bed. God, he tastes so good; I could almost forget what I'm doing if I let myself. His leg shifts against mine, and I feel a groan escape me. I grab one of his hands in my free one and pin it above his head.

The first clicking noise is eerily quiet, but the second is as loud as a gunshot, I muse to myself as I sit back up. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" Yami squawks, trying to get enough leverage to get free or at least sit up.

"I'm going to Tokyo," I state as calmly as I can. I fish my lockpicks and spare pain meds out of the bedside table, pocketing them, and slide the phone out of his reach. "I'll call Varon or someone to let you out in a couple of hours, but I have to do this."

"Why?" You know, that was one of the most impressive snarls I've heard him do to date.

"No one is killing my father except me." I sigh, standing and starting towards the door. I can't even make myself look back at him as I finish, "You can beat the crap out of me or hate me if you want because God knows I deserve either one, but after all that bastard put us through, I've earned the right to be the one to kill him. Later, Pharaoh."

"Bakura-" I close the door behind me, cutting off whatever else he was going to say.

Hmm, I wonder why my chest feels so tight. Not now. If it's not life-threatening, not now. I've got a job to do.

Two years ago, I walked out of this house and swore I'd never return. Okay, it was more like I snuck out in the dead of night, dragging a mostly asleep version of my twin with me. The majority of thought I put into the great escape was in trying to insure I'd have a few hours to cover our trail before Oyaji realized we were gone, so mostly I concentrated on timing and let everything else sort itself out. It worked pretty well, but it could have just as easily gone to hell in a hand basket.

It doesn't look like he's increased security at all since we left either, but I can't afford to relax yet. Yes, I can break into this place with my eyes closed on a good day, but today is far from a good day. And Kitty's already called to say Amelda's been dead for at least a good half hour now. Who knows how long it'll be till Yami gets loose or -

"Bakura-kun?" Of course. I completely forgot about the ghostly Mini-Me. Of course Yami would send him after me. It makes perfect sense, but I don't have to like it. "What are you doing?"

I send the best glare in my arsenal his way, and he falls back a step, feet barely a centimeter or two above the grass of the lawn. "I'm finishing this. Don't get in my way."

"But, Bakura-kun...," he starts. "He's your father, and it'd be wrong to kill him!"

I can't help it; a growl escapes me. "If I don't kill him, he's going to kill me and take Ryou away. If I don't kill him, it's just going to keep getting worse."

"He might give up!"

It's a good thing I'm the only one here who can hear him because he's starting to get really loud. It's all I can do to keep my own voice low. "He'll never give up. Believe me; I know. If you don't want to see it, then stay here."

I step past him, carefully working my way through the shadows to one of the darkened downstairs windows, the library if my memory serves me correctly. Glancing up and over, Amane's window is black; she's either not here or asleep. I can live with either of those. And speaking of living... A glance over my shoulder shows Yuugi still standing where I left him. I guess he'll be staying there after all. Oh well, no big loss.

At least the window still isn't alarmed. I guess Oyaji figures if you know which small parts of the fence aren't dangerous, you deserve to get into the house. Hoisting myself in is a little trickier than usual, and I have to hold back a gasp of pain as my shoulder protests it. The fucking sling is in the way, and I yank it off and tuck as much of it as possible in the back pocket of my pants that doesn't have my cellphone. It feels a bit odd to be doing this in gloves other than my usual work ones, but they vanished in the move between the apartment and Seto's, so I'm making do with a pair I snatched. I think they're Seth's. I figure Varon or Yami will kill me anyway and save Seth the trouble, so why not use what I can get my hands on?

Oyaji's office is in the room directly to the left of this one, so I need to get prepared now. I need a weapon then. I should have grabbed one of Yami's handguns, but a fireplace poker works just as well. I can get a pretty good swing going with my off arm, but I'm not too sure on my aim. Guess I'll just have to go for bigger targets, at least till he's down. This has to look like a crime of opportunity, after all, not premeditated murder. Note to self: grab whatever I can on the way out and drop it off at the train station, assuming I make it that far.

"Bakura-kun?" And I'm never going to admit, even on the threat of death, that I just jumped like an amateur. I make myself slowly release the doorknob and glance behind me at Yuugi.

"What?" I have to keep my voice low and I'm working hard to keep it level, but I might be failing on one of those two accounts because the boy actually wilts a bit.

"I- I-"

I roll my eyes. "Right now isn't the best time for a case of nerves, Mini-Me." Of all the people to show up, why did it have to be him? My nerves already aren't the best at this point. It's not like I've killed anyone before, and this is *not* helping. "Just-"

"I don't think this is a good thing to do, Bakura-kun!" I really nearly jump out of my skin when he lets that one loose. "He's your father after all, and-!"

"And do you want him to kill me instead?" I hiss back. "Leave Yami alone again?" I think I suckerpunched him with that one. I mean, damn, that was low, even for me.

While he's standing there looking stunned, I slip out of the library and down a door to Oyaji's office and calmly let myself in like I own the place. He's sitting behind his desk, looking over a stack of papers and completely ignoring the fact that someone just walked into his office.

You know, I might have forgotten to mention it before, but the brat, Amane, and I really look nothing like our father. Where the three of us have white hair, his is pitch black. Where Ryou and Amane have brown eyes and I have grey, Oyaji's are green. The three of us are fairly tall, but he towers over all of us. It's downright strange, especially since Amane has a different mother than Ryou and I do.

It doesn't take me standing here long, fireplace poker behind my back, to lose my temper and snap out, "Why the fuck are you trying to kill me?"

"I was expecting you here days ago. You're late." And he hasn't even looked up from his papers yet. Typical.

I'm having a rather... fun time keeping my temper reigned in. "I couldn't get away. So sorry to disappoint you, *Shachou*." To drop names or not to drop names? "My-" companions? new family? Hell, I don't know what to call our little coterie. They're all mine, after all. "-friends didn't want me coming here, after all."

That finally raises emerald green eyes to me, at least briefly. Oyaji's never been willing to look at me for very long. "Vermin like you don't have friends." He picks up a pen and starts jotting down notes, hopefully not on this little conversation. "Kaiba and Mutou must be very creative to come up with a purpose for someone like you."

Okay, it's been a little over two years since I've heard something like that addressed to me, and maybe that's why it stings so much more than any barb he used when I was younger. Well, that and I've long maintained how I'm the worst person in the world for Yami and wondered what the hell he thinks he sees in me. Maybe that's why it hits a little closer to home than I'd like. "Fuck you," is all I manage to get out, not my best retort.

"I'm not interested in two of *Domino's*," I'd forgotten how the city's name was practically a curse to him, which was why I chose it, "so-called elite's seconds... or would it be thirds?" He glances up briefly at me. "What does one call a common whore in your situation?"

It's all I can do to keep from growling. As it is, I'm forcing words past tightly clenched teeth. "I must be more impressive than I realized, to be a whore when the only person I fucked before today was Malik Ishtar." Now that was deliberate. Oyaji always did detest Malik, part of why I hung out with him, other than some less than pleasant common interests and histories. Now is not the time for that though. That familiar low humming/buzzing that is uniquely Yuugi is close by, and even if he wasn't, in front of Oyaji isn't the place to be spacing out.

He shrugs. "I suppose trash must seek out like trash."

And that's why I never let Malik in the house when Oyaji was around: Marik would kill the bastard, if Malik didn't do it himself, before I was ready for him to be dead. A deep breath in and out does little to calm me down, but I make myself speak anyway. "I'll ask you again, *Shachou*. I've been out of the way for two years, so why are you trying to kill me now?"

He sets down his pen and lifts his head to stare at me levelly. "I need my heir. For some reason, he is attached to you, so I need you out of the way." He taps his fingers rhythmically on his desk. "If I have you dead by June, I can acquire my heir soon afterwards and have him ready to present to the civilized world by his next birthday."

Behind me, I can hear Yuugi gasp, but it's faint over the rage building within me. "Do you even know your precious *heir's* name, you old bastard?"

Green eyes narrow, and he pushes himself to his feet. His hand flying is almost too fast to follow, if not for Yuugi's yelled "Bakura-kun! Look out!" As it is, it's close enough to make me have to duck and his hand still brushes the top of my head. My shoulder cries in protest.

I force myself to stand upright and not let the pain I'm feeling betray me in my voice. "That was your last free shot, old man."

"Somehow I doubt it."

That's all I let him get out before I take my first swing with the poker. Maybe it's just an accident that the point end sinks into his chest. Pulling it back out is a bit trickier, and blood douses my arms as he drops to his knees, before I pull back for another swing.

A hand grabs my wrist. I follow it up to huge purple eyes. Yuugi must be concentrating awfully hard to manage this much. I mean, I know if he thinks about it hard enough, he can grasp solid objects, since I've seen him hold cards and type on my laptop, but usually he can't touch any living being except Yami. Nonetheless, he is holding me in place. "The fuck, Mini-Me?"

"He's a bastard," at least we agree on that much, "but he *is* your father. You shouldn't kill him."

Okay, I've had all the sanctimonious bullshit I can stomach. With my free hand, I shove him off me. Since that was my injured arm, I'm sure I hurt it again, but right now I'm not feeling it over how pissed I am at the moment. "Lay off me, midget. I have to do this." Faintly, I notice him falling to land on his ass on the floor with a faint pained noise.

That doesn't matter right now. That I just touched a spirit doesn't matter. That Yami and/or Varon will most likely kill me the minute I get home doesn't matter. Right now all that matters is I'm finally getting to beat the shit out a bastard who richly deserves it.

After about six or seven more good hits, the majority of them after he's down so that it's a lot easier to hit his head and face, not that it's recognizable as such anymore, the old bastard's starting to make a sound similar to overripe fruit hitting concrete, not exactly the most pleasing sound there is. I'm breathing hard, I'm aching in more than a few places, and I haven't the foggiest how I'm supposed to get out of this place with this much blood and various gooey bits on me. Still, I pull back for one more hit when I hear *it* again, that dark urging voice. I thought it was loud in Domino; that was no preparation for the shrieking I hear now. It's becoming more coherent each time, which should worry me, I'm sure. Someone is screaming a steady litany of 'No!' and it's probably me, but the voice drowns it out. */Kill him! Finish him! Sacrifice him, and give yourself over to me!*

I drop the poker like it might bite me, hands coming up to clutch my head as if to hold the voice out, and back away from the corpse, only to trip and nearly fall over another body. Purple eyes glare up at me as Yuugi retorts, "That hurt, Bakura-kun."

And that's when the door opens behind him, and Kitty and Malik come tearing in like the damn cavalry. Somewhere in the midst of all the confusion, the voice recedes again. Good. No way I could deal with it on top of a suddenly breathing Yuugi and everything else. It's not terribly surprising that the two of them look rather confused; I feel about the same way. Of course Kitty regains the ability to speak first. "The fucking hell?" passes for coherency around here, after all, even when it is chased by a meow, especially when compared to the shrug I manage in answer. Hell, I don't think I have it in me to antagonize the situation for once.

"I thought Yami was still in Domino." OH well, I guess Malik is a pretty good (if second-best) antagonist. Of course, that could just be the nutball being curious.

"He is" comes from Kitty. "That's Yuugi."

"The dead one?"

I have to smack myself on the forehead with that little comment. Ugh... Something just squished into my gloved fingers, something that looks like remarkably like brains. "Ugh...", I groan softly, wiping my hands off on my pants before looking up to see the conversation coming back around to me.

"Dorobou?" is all Kitty asks. One word, but it's loaded with a million questions. Such a loaded question surely deserves an equally loaded answer.

"I don't know."

"Don't ask me," Yuugi pipes up when Jounouchi's attention turns to him.

I take a deep breath and let it out. "As fun as it is to sit around here and play guessing games, we should worry about getting out of here before anyone... fun shows up... like the police." That would just be great: an out-of-town Were and two of Tokyo's long-lost criminal elements at the scene of the murder of one of Tokyo's most prominent citizens. They'd lock us up and throw away the key.

"The house is clear," Malik puts forth. "Katsuya said Amane's been gone for hours."

At that, I can only let out a sigh of relief. Still, if she's not here now, she could be on her way. When we get out of here, I'll put in an anonymous call to the police about a 'burglary,' so she's not the one to find the body. And Kitty's eyes are narrowing. "Who's Amane?" Whoops, guess I forgot to ever play storyteller with him on that one.

"Amane's my little sister. She and her mother still live here." For reasons I can't fathom, of course. It's good she wasn't here. "If she wasn't here, she won't be a problem. She's..." I trail off, floundering for a word.

"Nice?" Yuugi offers, finally dragging himself to unsteady feet.

I shrug. "That works. So, are we leaving now?"

"That sounds like a stellar idea." Ooh, Kitty sarcasm. "Any ideas as to how we're to do so without tracking blood through the foyer?" Has he been hanging around the Kaibas when my back was turned or something? Yeesh, that sounded more like a Seth thing to say. Still... I need a new shirt, again, and I see only one option that might possibly fit: the nutball's.

"Give me your shirt," I demand.

Malik looks lost for a second, then annoyed, before shrugging out of his black over-shirt. I know a certain blond leopard who's doing some quality ogling. The shirt gets tossed my direction, and I start pulling it on after taking off Seth's gloves and gingerly removing Seto's shirt. Looks like I pulled a couple sections of Varon's 'oh-so-loving' stitches; let's add that onto my list of things I've done to get in trouble tonight. It's bleeding, but sluggishly, so I just use Seto's shirt to wrap around it before Malik speaks up again. "You aren't getting my pants, Boss. These are new."

I roll my eyes at him. "Forgive me if I'm not interested in getting you out of your pants. Kitty might be, though." And the Mini-Me, but that's one I'm not getting into.

"I'm not the only one," Kitty smirks. Now *that* catches Mini-Me's attention, and he glances over at Jounouchi. "Hey, looking's no big, but don't forget he's mine." There's some extra meaning there that I neither am aware of nor want to know. From the look of things, the nutball's in the dark too, not that's all that uncommon.

"But Jounouchi..." Mini-Me whine as I tune out the conversation to tug my borrowed gloves back on and start examining some of the various artifacts in the office. Hmm, there's that strange gold dream catcher thing I always liked; that's a keeper for certain. There's that puzzle box thing the old bastard brought back from Egypt; Yami would love it, and maybe it and Yuugi might be enough to get me out of trouble with him. Okay, I'm building enough between those two and various statuary and such to necessitate turning my sling into an impromptu bag. The safe is on the wall, and it only takes me a moment to open it (knowing the combination is helpful there) and empty it.

A car horn beeping repeatedly finally drags me away from my... 'shopping'. Kitty's at the window - which is now open and he's still holding the edge of it with his hands covered by his jacket - and he looks ready to go completely into pissy kitty mode as the blaring noise repeats itself. "Damn stupid tiger," he snarls. "*This* beats the four-on-one thing." And that is pretty much a dead giveaway who's out there. I wonder if I can't get Cynthia to patch me up so I don't have to deal with monster Varon.

Still, I can't help a snicker and side-comment to Ishtar, "Kajiki is the most impatient getaway driver ever." Another snicker escapes me. "I'm glad he didn't use to work with us."

Okay, I'm doing some hardcore avoiding of the inside of Kaiba Mansion. I've seen Sasame off on her way back to Tokyo. I've introduced Mini-Me to all the wolves and what leopards I could find outside. I can't really say anything about my behavior, though, because Mini-Me's been right beside me. I guess neither of us is really looking to trying to explain this to Yami. Of course, I'm also avoiding Varon, even though Cynthia was good enough to piece me back together, so I don't know what Yuugi's excuse is; it's not like he's in trouble or anything.

It's an hour till dawn before we finally head inside by silent mutual agreement... or rather, I start walking and Mini-Me falls in behind me as close as a shadow. Wherever his brother is, it's going to be somewhere where he can get a good lap of pacing going. My - our - my... whatever. The bedroom isn't big enough, somehow I get the feeling he'll be in one of Treeboy's main places (the study, the office, etc.),

so that narrows it down some.

"Are we going to talk to niisan now?" Yuugi asks quietly.

"If I can find him," I mutter under my breath. "Library or hallways?"

Yuugi's quiet a moment then decides. "Library. More stuff to throw if he's still in a bad mood."

That does not bode well at all. I'm screwed - and not in a fun way. This is going to be a fun -

"Bakura?"

Show and tell. Did I mention I'm fucked?

Have I ever mentioned I don't believe in happy endings? No? Well, I don't. In fact, they're pretty much impossible as far as I can tell. 'All's well that ends well' is for the birds and shoujo manga. And even if I did believe in them, seeing Yami standing in front of me, red eyes blazing, might shake my belief a bit. At least the foot isn't tapping... I spoke too soon.

"Yami..." I begin. I haven't the foggiest what I'm going to say. I guess I need to smooth things over with him. All things considered, the past two months have been some of the happiest of my life, having someone to give a damn about me besides my brother.

"You handcuffed me to the bed." Every word is a tightly bit out sentence. Maybe I should have let Fuckwit shoot me dead earlier and saved all the problems because I think my boyfriend's going to kill me now. Is he still my boyfriend - lover - whatever - if he's obviously thinking about wreaking grievous bodily damage upon me? "You handcuffed me to the fucking bed and went traipsing off to Tokyo. You asshole."

"So it wasn't that you were handcuffed down, but that I left you there that's pissing you off?" And that just came out of my mouth, didn't it? Fuck.

A low growl escapes him, and it's his best one to date. It's almost a shame it's because he's pissed at me. Otherwise, I might jump him for it. "I am incredibly pissed at you. Don't even *think* about making jokes about this right now."

"Niichan..." Mini-Me starts. Faintly, I can hear him stepping around me.

"Not onnly is it pretty much saying you don't trust me-"

"Hey, I never said that!" I try to interject but fail miserably because he keeps on like I never spoke.

"-it was fucking irresponsible to boot. What if something happened to you? If you got shot again or something? I'd never know. Or if-" He breaks off, as if he suddenly realized we have an audience. Not just Yuugi anymore either; out of the corner of my eye, I can see the shorter half of the Kaiba clan staring on with rapt interest. "What if something happened like at the restaurant again?" he asks, his voice softer.

What? Oh. Fuck. "It did."

That catches his attention. "What?"

"It did happen again," I admit, almost whispering, not that it makes a difference around two vampires. "It was worse this time." And that's all I'm saying with this many sightseers. I'm smoothing things over with Yami (hopefully), not the whole damn house. "Can't we talk somewhere less-"

"-open?" he finishes, giving Noa and Mokuba another sidelong glance. "Yes, please." He starts towards

the library, and I follow.

"Bakura-kun?" Mokuba cuts in. With an exasperated sigh, I glance back at him. "Two things. One, your shoulder's bleeding, and it's really distracting. Two, why is there another Yami-kun behind you?"

It's kind of amusing. I can literally see Yami freeze for several seconds before turning his attention to his little brother. Mini-Me looks sheepish as he chuckles nervously. "Surprise, niichan?"

"Wha- H- How?" I'm impressed. It takes bringing his brother back from the dead to render him speechless.

"I'm not really sure, but here I am! Alive, seventeen, and kicking. Isn't it cool?" Yami nods mutely. "One second I was dead, then Bakura-kun pushed me, then I was alive again." Oh great. Not only is he in full-on babble mode, but he also mentioned the shove I gave him. I'm gonna be in trouble for that one.

Or maybe I would be if Yami had paid attention to that part. I think maybe he got stuck on the 'I'm alive again now' part. I can't say that I would blame him either. Only a couple of months ago, he was having hardcore denial of the fact Mini-Me was dead, and now suddenly he's alive again, none the worse for wear, though slightly older now than when he died three years ago. If it was my little brother... Well, for starters, heads would have rolled about him dying. After that, it'd be murder, death, and mayhem till I figured out how to fix the problem. Not to mention I'd spend a lot of time doing what Yami is right now: patting him down to make sure he's real, hugging, etc.

Finally, Yuugi apparently gets tired of the attention - at least from his brother - and steps back away from Yami. "I'm going to go see Ryou-kun now. You need to talk to Bakura-kun, niichan." He probably thinks he's whispering as he says, "He was worrying all the way back here if you were still mad at him."

I wince. "Okay. That's enough, Mini-Me."

He continues like I didn't even speak. "You're *not* still mad at him, are you, niichan?"

Yami looks up at me. I'm not even going to try to guess at all the emotions I see represented in those red eyes. "No, I'm not mad at him." Saved. "Why don't you go see Ryou-kun while I see about Bakura's shoulder?"

"Sure!" he chirps before dashing up the stairs past Noa and Mokuba at somewhere around Mach Three. The shorter Kaibas follow till it's just me and him at last. And suddenly I'm feeling a whole lot less nervous than I was before about this. All the same, though, I do have one question.

"Did you mean that?"

"Hmm?" He seems to be a bit distracted. Understandable, I suppose, with the circumstances. "Yeah, Kura?" And I'm back to the shorter form of my name; I guess that's a good sign too.

"Did you mean it, that you're not mad at me?" I am not whining, I am not pleading, and I'm damn sure not begging - or at least I can tell myself that. I'm not nervous anymore, no, but there's still that lump of dread in the pit of my stomach that says nothing good lasts for long around me. And... Damn it, it's mushy, but I don't want to lose him.

"Yeah, Kura, I'm furious. That's why I'm going to patch up your shoulder - again - before the Kaibas start drooling."

Ahh, familiar sarcasm. I think I might have missed it. "I don't know," I shoot back. "Now that the tree's out of his ass, the Ice Prince is starting to be one hot number." When in doubt, play the Treeboy card.

He moves forward like he's going to hit me, and I have to hold back a smirk as I catch his raised hand,

using it to reel him in for a kiss. God, I missed him.

The next nightfall finds us in a scene that I'd normally consider far too homey for my tastes. Yami and Yuugi are playing Duel Monsters on the newly cleaned carpet in the den. The brat's got his head in Mini-Me's lap as he lays on his side watching the match. Kitty and Ishtar just wandered off for food not two minutes ago. Treeboy's supposed to duel the winner of the Mutou match and so is at the coffee table arranging his deck. Seth looks just as enthused about all this Duel Monsters shit as I feel (in other words, not at all), but he's at least attempting to go over the cards with the Ice Prince. I haven't seen Noa or Mokuba yet tonight and that might be for the best. And as for me, I'm sprawled over the chair Yami's leaning against, absentmindedly trying to figure out how the hell his hair can be so soft and yet maintain its odd shape. It must be genetic, since Mini-Me's and the Old Man's have the same general shape.

I have all of half a minute to look around the room as Yami triumphantly lays down one of his favorite cards, the Saint Dragon of Osiris or something like that, and wonder completely to myself at how my little family has grown in the past few months. Six months ago, it was the brat and me and sometimes Kitty, and that was it. Now it's exploded, and I could learn to really enjoy this.

And that's all the time I have to think before there's a tap at the door, and an unusually timid-looking Kisara steps in the room. "Seto-sama?" You know, for being a *gaijin*, her Japanese really is flawless.

Treeboy barely glances up. "What?" Politeness, thy name is *not* Kaiba Seto.

"There are some men here." Finally he looks up. It took him long enough. She's had the rest of our attentions from the first hesitant word. "They're from the Tokyo police."

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck *fuck!* I wasn't expecting them this soon! How the hell did they trace us to Domino so soon? Shit... Of course, Bakura isn't that common a family name, and the brat is enrolled in school under his real name - and it's not like either of us blend in, looking the way we do.

There's alarm on entirely too many faces in this room, so deep breath, Bakura; we'll handle this somehow. Thought it might be a bad sign that the two calm ones here are me and Treeboy; even Seth's gone scary vamp.

"Let them in, Kisara." There isn't a person on the planet - human, vamp, Were, or otherwise - that's ever going to touch the Ice Prince for his unshakeable exterior. It's that impressive. Besides, even I couldn't just keep going through cards with police on their way in, though to be fair, I've probably done a lot more illegal things than Treeboy. Anyway... Two men step into the room. Seto barely gives them a moment to look around before he continues in his most bored voice, "Can I help you with something?" Oh, I know that tone he's using: that's Seto's version of service with fangs and a hearty 'fuck off' tone, not that it's terribly different from his other tones, but still... I rate the 'fuck off' tone. I didn't think he liked me that much.

One of the cops actually flinches at the tone (and the glare that accompanies it), shifts nervously, and then finally gets out, "We need to speak to someone here about an... incident in Tokyo last night."

"Oh?" Is that an icicle I see hanging from the ceiling? Treeboy's voice does have the room below freezing, after all. "What would any of my people be doing in Tokyo?"

The other cop speaks up now. "'Your' people?" Wait for it... And there's the pad and pen. "Your name, sir?"

I think the temperature just dropped another ten or so degrees. "Kaiba Seto." He pauses a moment to see if they recognize the name. When they apparently don't, he heaves a nearly inaudible sigh and adds, "The Master Vampire of Domino City." You have to be really listening and really know him to realize just

how much he doesn't enjoy owning up to it. Sometimes I wonder if he wouldn't rather Seth act as Master in his stead to free him up to do the real work. Far be it from me to suggest something helpful, though.

Cop Number One pales a bit and starts eyeing the door like it's the only door from Hell. Apparently he's of the 'err on the side of caution' thinking when it comes to master vampires. Dealing with a pissy Treeboy, it's a wise way of doing things. Cop Number Two, however, apparently disagrees with this philosophy since the next word out of his mouth is "Bakura?"

"Yes?"

"Yeah?"

Whoops, the brat and I just went stereo on that. Cop Number Two looks away from Seto and blinks. I can get doing that: there are a lot of look-alikes in the room, and the brat and I probably look the closest of all the sets. After all, the only real difference between us are our eyes and my scars.

"I... was told Bakura Takuto's son lived here?" We made him lose his cool. I'm only barely holding back a smirk.

"Surprise," I'm unable to resist mouthing off, adjusting my new sling to sit a tad more comfortably against my chest, "we're twins."

"What does our father want?" The brat's so much more polite than I am as always. At least he's finally sitting up, even if he is still leaning on Mini-Me. I guess that means I should sit up as well.

"Nothing anymore," Number Two returns.

"I'm sorry to inform you, but he's dead," finishes Number One.

"So where were both of you last night?" This is like the brat and me when we're playing the twins thing to the hilt, back and forth. At least they aren't finishing each other's sentences. Yet.

Yami and Treeboy stiffen simultaneously, but of course it's Yami who speaks first. "Just what the hell are you implying here?!" he snaps.

"And you are?" Cop Number Two has a death wish.

"Mutou Atemu, and spell it right: A-t-e-m-u. And I'm Mutou Sugoroku's grandson." Red eyes narrow sharply, and I can see cop blood in them. Damn, it's pretty. "Now what exactly are you trying to say about Ryou-kun and my Kura?"

Cop Number One is edging back towards the door. Smart man. Number Two is slowly getting the point, I guess, because he's finally developing a slightly more respectful tone. "Begging your pardon, Kaiba-san, Mutou-san, but I do need to know where both Bakuras were last night."

"Ryou-kun was at the movies with us - Kaiba Noa, Mutou Yuugi, and myself - last night." Holy shit, Mokubas out of thin air. Can we *not* repeat that trick, please? "Do you need to see the ticket stubs?" Apparently, Seto isn't the only Kaiba here with a glacial glare. I'll have to make a mental note of that.

And suddenly all attention in the room is focused on me. I open my mouth to speak, even though I have no idea what I'm going to say, but it's not my voice that comes out. I'm not Yami, after all. "Kura was in here with me all night."

"Mutou and I were *trying* to teach him to play Duel Monsters." Holy shit... I have Treeboy and Yami for my alibi. "He's a most unwilling student though."

"I can't help not being as game-obsessed as the two of you are." Might as well run with it, since they all but offered it up to me on a silver platter. I mean, this hands down beats the time Cynthia gave Malik and me an alibi that one time. (Never mind that both times I actually did do what I was accused of.) Actually, I think the cop who tried to bust me that time might be Number One. I wonder if he still has nightmares about it.

"You'll have to give us sworn statements." And that tiny bit of respect seems to be bleeding into outright fear. I guess maybe I am rather well connected these days.

The Ice Prince's eyes narrow slightly. "I will have them on your chief's desk first thing after dark tomorrow." Ah, that's our Treeboy, going for the hit that'll hurt the most. "Now, I'm sure you have better things to do tonight than accuse my people of murder, so why don't you go do them?" What did I say: service with fangs and a hearty 'fuck off'? I meant it.

I don't think I've ever seen two cops make a break for it quite so fast in my life. I've seen Diceboy vanish like this once, but never cops. They should add it to the Olympics or something. Toss in some midget wrestling and popcorn, and you've got some quality programming there. Mini-Me could star in it; it'd be great.

The minute Kisara pulls the heavy door closed behind them, I let out a sigh of relief that's echoed around the room, only Treeboy and Seth not participating in it. "That was way too close," Yuugi breathes, somehow wrapping his arms around the brat without dropping or revealing his cards. "Do you think it'll turn out all right, niichan?"

Yami doesn't answer immediately. He's too busy pulling me down to where he's sitting and slipping an arm around me. Ah, post-adrenaline cuddles. I could get so spoiled on them. "I think they'd better leave all of alone if they know what's good for them." And I could get very used to all the pretty threats.

"They'd be stupid to try anything now that they know how well connected you are," Mokuba puts forth. "I mean, going against the Mutous alone is one thing-

"Hey!" Yuugi interjects, but Mokuba ignores him to continue speaking.

"-but the Mutous *and* the Kaibas? It's career suicide." Wow, every so often, the halfpint says or does something that really reminds me that he's Treeboy's brother.

"Thank you for the save, Mokuba-kun." Ryou really is so polite, especially compared to me. How are we from the same family again? Still, there *is* something to be said here. Yami will get his thanks when we're alone (if that ever happens again), so...

I turn slightly in time to see Treeboy looking back down at his cards in a hurry. Cute. Well, let's see if I can get this out. "Hey, Seto, I-

"Aren't you two finished yet?" he snaps, glaring up at Yami and Mini-Me. "I'd like to get a duel in some time tonight."

A quick snicker escapes me. I guess the Ice Prince is as uncomfortable about receiving thanks as I am about giving them. I get the feeling that, if he'd fed more yet tonight, there might be a flush on his face. Maybe. Perhaps. That's fine, though. I'll just find a way to pay him back one day, but first, I have a couple of Duel Monsters games to try to sit through.

And that, as they say, was that.

Oh, I caught Cop Number Two trailing me a few times around town, but I never heard a breath about the vaguest possibility of me getting arrested. You know for a (completely unreformed) former street punk,

ex-thief, and now murderer, I have a remarkably clean record. Before, that was mostly due to Cynthia Crawford; now I have Yami and Seto to thank... whether they want me to or not.

We're all adjusting as best we can. The brat and I briefly kicked around the idea of moving back to the apartment. Treeboy was the one to nip that one in the bud, though I will admit he had a good point: who knew whether or not word had gotten around to all the people Oyaji hired yet that he and Amelda were dead, so the reward on my life was useless. Personally, I think he just enjoys having all of us around. He's miserable unless he has lots of people to be worried sick over. I can relate.

Apparently in all the mess between our return from Tokyo and the cops showing up, Jounouchi-kitty got three new kitties of his own. I completely missed the introductions (What can I say? Yami and I managed to turn up half an hour to ourselves. We took advantage of it.), so I've dubbed them Larry, Curly, and Moe. I'm told they hate the names, especially since I'm far from the only one calling them that. I'm sure that's the case. I'm positive I don't care.

Kitty and Ishtar have apparently started to take up residence in the boathouse. Who knew? I mean, I for one had no clue there was even a lake on the property, much less a house attached to it. Seth assured me it's another of Gouza-baka's additions... because everyone knows how much vampires *love* sunrise walks on the lakeshore. Have I mentioned how much I detest that man? If Treeboy hadn't offed him, I might have tried to.

As much as it galls me to admit, though, Seto did have a point about Oyaji's assassins. There were a few more attacks in the weeks and months after the 'burglary gone wrong' that killed him, bringing the total number to seventeen, eighteen if you count Takeshi. At least he kept the 'I told you' looks to an absolute minimum, possibly because none came *too* close. It might have had something to do with me threatening to plant him on the lake shore at dawn, though. Maybe. Really, we get along so well.

Another thing I hate to admit: apparently I've become rather well-known. Something about multiple assassination attempts in broad daylight in public and being seen about town with Mutou Yami seems to do that to a person. Well, notoriety is far from the best thing for my career, so it looks like my hiatus has become my retirement, one that almost definitely will be permanent. But I'm trying hard not to let it get me down. We've all been brainstorming (because apparently, although I was trying hard not to be miserable, I was failing), and a few suggestions came up that might be able to live with. Jounouchi-kitty suggested I might see about getting hired testing people's security; I think if I do that and do it at night that Mokuba wants to tag along. It was Seto's fed-up suggestion that I put my... talents to use and starting putting some of the local spirits to rest. So either a "security consultant" or an exorcist of sorts. Either sounds promising.

Yuugi's still alive and kicking - and sleeping with my little brother. Yeah, I knew it was coming, but that doesn't mean I have to like it. We still haven't figured out what I did or how I did it to bring him back - or even if I could do it again - but he is alive. Thanks to that little fact, he and Yami have to go visit the Old Man every weekend and out to dinner with him once a week. The brat's been with them once or twice, and Yami's still trying to get me to attend. I haven't yet.

Mahaado's still working on figuring out Yami's powers. He's seen every ghost and spirit that I have lately, a couple of which he's been able to physically touch, something that personally I strive to utterly avoid doing. Mahaado's frustrated, Mom and the pixie are stumped, and Cynthia has professed to have run out of ideas. I'm still curious, of course, but we're coming to accept it. All we know is: it concerns the dead; it might well involve magic; and - according to Mana, so there's no knowing with that source - it is neither good nor evil nor neutral, neither black nor white nor that nebulous grey that people like animators claim. It just is, in other words. Hence is why I'm still quite curious. I'm learning to live with it though. It's part of Yami, and since I rather like having him around, I put up with his mysteries.

And yes, we're still together. We've even given up pretending to have separate bedrooms. Yeah, it gets a bit lonely on the weekends, but that's what the living room sofa is for. It's not perfect, not by any stretch. It should be a given that two people as different as us will fight and disagree. We have a 'don't

go to bed angry' rule, though. It works for us. And everyone else knows to stay the hell out of the way when we are fighting. Like I said, it works.

All in all, life's been pretty good lately. I haven't heard *that* voice since that day in Tokyo. No one's tried to kill me in a while. Treeboy's even been in a fairly decent mood, for him, which probably means he hasn't had a Gouza-baka's memories attack in a bit. There *has* been some strange letters lately, but Seth insists they're cranks so we're all writing them off as such.

Besides, life is good: I've been assassin-free for six months now, unless you count the one that lives with us.