

## The Sins of the Past Shall Haunt the Future (CRT)

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Relationships:	<a href="#">Tartaglia   Childe/Zhongli (Genshin Impact)</a> , <a href="#">Xiao   Alatus/Ying   Lumine (Genshin Impact)</a> , <a href="#">Guizhong/Osial (Genshin Impact)</a> , <a href="#">Minor or Background Relationship(s)</a> , <a href="#">Hu Tao &amp; Yanfei (Genshin Impact)</a> , <a href="#">Beidou/Ningguang (Genshin Impact)</a> , <a href="#">Kamisato Ayaka/Thoma</a> , <a href="#">Albedo/Kaeya/Sucrose (Genshin Impact)</a> , <a href="#">Chongyun/Xingqiu (Genshin Impact)</a>
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# The Sins of the Past Shall Haunt the Future (CRT)

by [orphan\\_account](#)

## Summary

"Who is he?" Chongyun texted back, and Xingqiu could perfectly envision the confusion and surprise painting his face. Even he was shocked to see Zhongli, Liyue's most eligible bachelor, out and about with a blue-eyed beauty. He was definitely from Snezhnaya, unmistakably ginger, or maybe he was from Fontaine? Xingqiu could only assume, but that was fine, he had a much better way to find out.

"He's Childe, didn't catch the last name, but you're bound to find it. Make sure to send it to the Adepts." Xingqiu chuckled as he hit send. He knows it'll take less than 5 minutes before the news reaches the current lady of the Golden House.

He returns to his table and leaves a huge tip for the waiter. He was feeling extra generous today, the new romance venture fuelling his current mood. As his slightly heeled shoes clatter against linoleum, he glances at the ginger one last time. He was no stranger to dressing up, his shoes are definitely a bit pricey. The poor man just doesn't seem to know just what he's gotten himself into.

As he opens the door, he wonders if he'll even be able to make it into the Golden House's gates.

or: The Crazy Rich Asians AU I've always wanted to write. (Crazy Rich Teyvatans)

## Notes

Well then looks like it happened again \*head in hands\*

This was originally posted September 14, but I guess my laptop's browser did not cooperate (once more) and lo and behold, I have to reupload. Again.

Idk what sort of bug I have, but it's probably time I changed browsers.

Anyways, this prompt has been stuck in my head ever since the Lantern Rite, and now that I've finally figured out each character's role, I'm happy to finally post this fic! This will probably be my first multiship fic and I'll be implanting a lot of my headcanons into this brainchild of mine. The entire fic is only slightly inspired by Kevin Kwan's series, Crazy Rich Asians.

I hope you enjoy this fic, this will probably be the longest fic I'll ever write.

All italics are in Liyuean or any language that isn't Teyvat Common, which is what I'm calling English.

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

# Chapter 1

The night was slow for the Grand Goth Hotel. Aramis found himself lazily polishing the placard at the front of the reception desk, waiting for the usually busy elevators to finally make a sound. Not a single guest had gone outside, and if he were being honest, he found this rather boring. The rain angrily pouring outside did nothing but further accentuate the emptiness of the hotel, and for once, he wished that the night wasn't as peaceful.

He glances towards the hotel's windows once more, his eyes squinting as he spots dots of black sprinting towards the hotel. Guests? At least something was interesting to his already bleary day. He straightens the lapels of his coat and stands straight, painting his usual service worthy smile onto his face as he waits for the guests to arrive.

He sees two children, probably no older than 10, running into the revolving doors, bags pressed against the glass. They were drenched head to toe, and Aramis couldn't help but curse at the mess he'd have to clean later. They were soon followed by two women, one of them had paperwhite roots, her long hair tied around into an intricate bun, holding onto a rather stunning purse, and another woman clad in blue, who just seemed to be relieved that she finally didn't have to scurry about in the rain.

He watched the white-haired woman usher the two children onto the rug, drying off their shoes before scurrying towards the desk, the woman in blue following them, carrying the rest of their bags. He bows his head down as the woman strides to the counter, heeled clacking shoes against the marble. "This is the Grand Goth Hotel, a private-" He greeted, having recited those same words over and over again to the multitude of guests that flooded the fine establishment.

"I have a reservation under Zhenjun for the Brightcrown Suite?" She inquired politely, her Teyvat Common flawless. Her eyes were cold as glass, almost as if she and her kids hadn't just run across the road in the middle of the rain. Her eyes were golden, a striking amber that essentially radiated timelessness. "I believe we spoke over the phone, I even have a confirmation,"

Aramis looked towards the list of bookings, scanning through them with haste honed over the years. His lips painted into a thin line. "It seems we don't have one under that name, my



apologies, but I'll have to ask you to leave." He politely replied, cordial as ever. Her name wasn't on the list, people couldn't just stride in here and demand their finest suite. Master Goth wouldn't want rowdy Liyuean's entering his establishment without even the slightest bit of decorum.

Her brows raise, not too high that it seemed genuinely confused but high enough that it was evident she was unimpressed. Liuyun turns to Havria, whose face had seemed to have sunken even more. "*We made reservations, didn't we?*" She muttered to her sister.

"*We did achi, they're probably just being stingy,*" Havria replied, her voice low and traced with a hint of bitterness. Havria never liked it when people looked at them and assumed otherwise.

Zhongli opted to tune out the rest of their conversation, opting to look at the clerk in front of them to distract himself from getting down. The boy saw the clerk's hands reaching under the desk as if pressing a button. He tugged on Guizhong's coat, his head motioning towards the desk. This, in turn, made Guizhong tug on the sleeves of her own mother, who had finally glanced back at the man in front of them.

Havria and Liuyun quiet down as they realise the situation they were in. It was utterly laughable, really, for them to be treated in such a manner, but she supposed that he would be proven wrong soon enough. Another man enters the lobby, wearing a plain black suit with matching slacks. His eyes fall on the family.

"Good evening, I'm the hotel manager, Porthos, what seems to be the problem?" He greets, his face indifferent despite the polite tone in his voice. Zhongli frowns, he just knows where this is going, again.

Liuyun sighs. "I'm Mrs Liuyun Jiefeng Zhenjun, I and my family booked a suite here, it was confirmed over the phone. We'd just like to be allowed into our suite, is that too much to ask?" She responds, placing her hand onto her son's back. Zhongli took this as his cue to act all mopey, if the man had a heart, then he'd probably allow them in.

Guizhong shot him a raised brow, but Zhongli ignored it.

Porthos sighed, not realising the gravity of the situation. "I'm terribly sorry madam, but we're fully booked. We would've found your reservation the moment you stated your name, but if Aramis found nothing then I'm afraid you must be mistaken." He spares a glance to Aramis, the man behind the desk nodding. "May I suggest another option? Perhaps you'd enjoy Little Liyue?"

*"This fucker is..."* Havria cursed beneath her breath, making sure to not let the two children hear. She didn't want them to pick up such habits until they were older.

"At least allow me to use the phone, it's the least you could do for troubling my family so." She replied, her voice levelled as a sharp glare was directed at him. She ushered Zhongli and Guizhong towards Havria, who had already turned away from the hotel manager, fearing that her rage might double at the sight of his crooked glasses.

Porthos remained indifferent. "As you wish."

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Zhongli and Guizhong knew where this was going. They usually had to resort to rather...drastic measures. He still remembered that time where his mother had bought an entire acre to drive away a certain miscreant. "So...how long do you think this one will last?" Zhongli muttered to Guizhong, who had her ears pressed against the glass of the phone booth.

Guizhong smiled, her arms dancing slightly as she heard the good news. "It's already ending, 'Li. She's saying her goodbyes to your baba."

Zhongli sighed contentedly, finally happy that this was all over. "At least we don't have to be in the rain anymore."

Guizhong nodded. "Race you to the doors?"

Zhongli didn't need to be told twice.

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When Liuyun returns inside the lobby, Havria smirking proudly behind her with the two children scurrying about, Porthos almost lunges across the counter. Instead, he opts for a much more headstrong approach, using words to kindly deliver his message to the woman. “Mrs Liuyun! I politely ask you to leave the establishment, otherwise, we’d have to involve authorities-”

“Please go right ahead, I wouldn’t mind the conflict all that much.” Liuyun scoffed, and the two children behind her couldn’t help but chuckle. Zhongli was beaming at the aghast man, his eyes the same shade of amber his mother possessed was now tinged with a confident glint. If he were a more mischievous kid, then maybe he would’ve made some face, sticking his tongue out at the less than pleased man. However, he wasn’t the impolite one. That was more Guizhong’s playing field.

As a matter of fact, she was doing it right now, using her hat as a way to hide it from her mother, who was ready to spit out another insult at the clueless men. Guizhong taunted the man with fervour, tongue sticking out and nose scrunched. Zhongli glanced at his Havria probably noticed her daughter’s less than discreet attempts at hiding her taunting, but she paid no mind. There was no use reprimanding a young child for something this trivial anyway, she’ll grow out of it.

The rising—not really— tension had snapped at the sound of the elevator, the doors opening to reveal a man in nightwear, a bright smile on his face. Upon spotting the man, Guizhong immediately relented, which made Zhongli snicker a bit, though it was hidden behind a poorly hidden cough.

Zhongli watches his mother and the hotel manager turn to face the man, and he already knew the flowery words that were going to leave the elder man’s mouth. Such was the way when dealing with the Adepti, people whispering the sweetest and kindest of words as if his mother was the purest soul they’d ever met, the respect and adoration melded with fear as what seemed to be improbable came to bite you back. He watches as the hotel manager freezes in place as the elderly man greeted his mother with a hug.

“Mrs Liuyun, my deepest apologies, I should’ve come to escort you sooner. Now I’ve sullied a perfectly good coat.” He greets with slight chagrin as if his tardiness felt like it deserved

punishment. It didn't really, though Zhongli would've preferred if he and Guizhong weren't drenched in rain, again.

"Prepare the Brightcrown Suite! Now!" The man —whose name was Goth, similarly to the hotel— snapped at his staff, his welcoming tone shifting to authoritarian in an instant.

"Sir, are you joking?" Porthos shyly asks, his confidence washing away in an instant, one could say his mood was comparable to the rain outside.

"Porthos, this is the Zhenjun family from the heart of Liyue, I'm very pleased to have them as my business associates. Please, right this way, let's have tea to celebrate our newly founded partnership." Goth introduces, motioning for the small family to follow after him, the smile on his face never leaving. Zhongli wanted to bet that his mother had thrown more money at this building than what it was worth, but then again, he couldn't really blame her, the zeroes on her account were endless.

"Get a mop, will you? The floor's rather wet." Liuyun gently nudged her son forward, winking at the child as she took his hand. Zhongli dutifully followed behind his mother, his hands gripping her slim fingers, though he couldn't help but glance at the poor hotel manager. He could feel the anxiety that exuded from this man. Being the manager of the Goth Hotel must've been such a big deal to him.

He put this upon himself though, so Zhongli didn't feel *too* guilty about his jobless future.

Guizhong happily skipped behind her mother, almost blowing a raspberry towards the manager, though Havria managed to stop her from doing any further than a wiggle of fingers and skipping tauntingly, the pep in her step unmistakable. Havria ought to teach her how to hide these uglier emotions better, it wouldn't be good for her daughter to be known as a bully.

So, the Zhenjun family headed towards their new suite—and business venture— with a relieved smile on their faces, finally happy to receive the accommodation they deserved after a gruelling 12-hour flight and a sprint across heavy rains. As for what happened to the two clerks, let's just say they were suspended until further notice.

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Zhongli watches amusedly as Childe flips a recruit over his head, twisting around to pin the helpless man against the ground with a thud, the makeshift arena in the bank acting as a softer surface for the man to lie on. He placed his foot on the man's back as if solidifying his point. "We may no longer share the same convictions as the past Fatui, but you could at least learn to throw a punch, Victor." The Snezhnayan proudly smirked, his confidence reaching tenfold as the man sagged sadly beneath him.

"I yield! I yield, Lord Tartaglia!" Victor pathetically admits, relief coursing through his veins as Childe detached himself from him. He must admit that it was quite embarrassing to be made an example in front of all the recruits.

"Honestly, you recruits are so easy to tease, you guys better not be like that when you're actually performing your duties." Childe muses, his gaze falling on each recruit, the nervous air from the first minutes of his initiation no longer palpable. It was the type of anxious air you'd feel after wondering if the teacher would give more homework, it was something Childe could work with.

The crowd nodded with a chuckle, Nadia and Vlad laughing rather loudly from the back, seeing as they were the most experienced and long-standing recruits Childe ever had the pleasure of working with. He scans the eyes of each member, relieved to find that any threats he had made at the beginning had been washed away by the stunt he pulled on Victor. This was the type of initiation he enjoyed, way better and more realistic than whatever Dottore had when he brought new interns to his "expeditions".

His eyes fall onto a familiar golden-eyed man near the foyer, his spot slightly covered by expertly placed privacy screens. Childe finds himself smiling even more. "Alright, freshies, Welcome to the Fatui! For the record, any rumours of bounty hunting are completely false. If someone tries to sell you a delusion, don't take it, that's weed." He began once more. He could feel Ekaterina's stare burn holes into his back, he'll probably get lectured by her for his lack of professionalism and such. It didn't matter much to Childe anyway, Childe was her boss, who was she for him to take her advice?

"Ekaterina will inform you of all of your assignments for the time being. An email from the Zapolarny palace will inform you of when you are due to return to the country. That's all for now." He could see the way some faces lit up at the mention of that last bit. It was always

like this with the freshies, so eager to return home, to be bundled up in their houses beside fireplaces, sipping fire whiskey while cuddled up to someone or some pet.

Childe felt homesick sometimes, but he had to admit it became significantly easier to juggle his personal feelings and responsibilities ever since Zhongli came into his life four years ago. It's quite ironic for him to say that though, considering he's quite the trainwreck himself. Childe vows to never admit this to Zhongli.

Without saying another word, he dismissed the recruits in his care, letting Ekatrina—who looked ready to tear him a new one—deal with them. It was her job as his secretary to act as his extension, ready to pass on “his” word onto them. This shouldn't be too much of a struggle for her.

As the recruits file out of the office, one of the recruits nearly running into the door frame, Zhongli casually slips in, a lethargic smile on his face as he walks towards the ginger. “You know, you really do tend to get a bit riled up when it comes to these types of things.” Zhongli duly noted, as if his display of martial prowess against the fresh recruits was not enough proof.

“Did you come in here to tease me about my tendencies, Zhongli?” Childe jokingly asked, his hands focused on straightening the fabric of his shirt.

Zhongli paused for a moment, pondering on what to say. “Well, I was going to invite you to brunch, but it seems you'd prefer if I teased you here instead-” He began to ramble, that ever-familiar air of confidence radiating from him.

Childe promptly cuts him off by jokingly nudging his elbow to the man's arms. He engraved the confident smirk that had plastered onto Zhongli's face into memory. “Keep quiet, professor.” He began with a tut, fingers disapprovingly wiggling at Zhongli in a cartoonishly animated manner. “Now let's go to that brunch I'm definitely paying for.”

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“Honestly, Zhongli, for someone so well versed and knowledgeable, I would have expected you to have the sense to bring your own wallet. I can count the number of times you’ve paid with the back of my hand...and you’re drinking my drink again.” Childe groaned as he watched Zhongli steal a sip from his blended tea, the latter humming a non-committal noise as he continued to drink.

Zhongli sets the mug back down with a chuckle. “I’m terribly sorry, Childe. I promise to bring it with me next time.” He reassured Childe, his smile wholehearted as if he hadn’t drained Childe of thousands ever since they started dating 3 years ago. Childe couldn’t stay mad at him though, he was utterly smitten with the man. Head over wallet for him, in a way.

“You’ve been saying that for about two years now, ‘Li...” Childe trailed cheekily, eyes trained on the sudden pink flush of embarrassment that painted Zhongli’s face. It was worth it, teasing Zhongli like this, the man was always an open book to him, easy to read, fun to be around with. He honestly couldn’t imagine a life without the other’s eccentric yet lovable tendencies.

“I...I will make it up to you then,” Zhongli began, his voice the same silky, steady baritone that put Childe’s mind at ease. “How about travelling east?” He inquired, his gaze genuine.

“East as in...that border city between Fontaine and Sumeru?” Childe asked, brows raised as he sipped his seafood soup, the only thing Zhongli didn’t dare touch the entire dinner.

“I was thinking further like...east as in Feiyun Slope, Liyue?” Zhongli admitted his intentions, all laid out for Childe to see and ponder. Childe almost wants to snort, but instead opts for a much more sensible approach.

“So all this was to bait me into this? I have to say, you’re getting very good at manipulating the conversation.” Childe joked as he scooped some octopus into his spoon. He could feel the way Zhongli falters for a moment as if he realised what he’d just done.

“I apologise, Childe, I didn’t mean for our meal together to sound like an excuse to segway into this topic...I just wasn’t sure how to approach it.” Zhongli apologised once more, and, as most of his apologies were, it was sincere. Zhongli takes apologies very seriously, contracts even more, but that’s probably due to the fact he’s an acting consultant of the Wangsheng Funeral Parlour, and parlour tends to deal with many grieving souls.

“I know, I know. Don’t worry you didn’t do anything wrong. Just know that when you’re with me, you don’t have to resort to this, you can be as direct as possible.” Childe reassured, knowing full well that if he didn’t, Zhongli’s faultless guilt was going to eat at the man for at least two weeks.

“I understand, I’ll keep that in mind.” Zhongli chuckled, relieved.

Childe raised a brow at the man. “So...why do you want to bring me to Liyue?” He asked, slightly hesitating. Liyue meant one thing, Zhongli’s family, and the thought suddenly stirred very complicated emotions in the pits of his stomach. Zhongli rarely talked about his family, and he had only met his cousin, Guizhong, in passing. And while Zhongli insisted that the rest of the family apart from Guizhong were rather *distant* with him, he couldn’t help but think anything but.

“We’ve been dating for at least 3 years now, I want you to meet my family. I just couldn’t find the right time to ask you to come with me. But now...” He paused, articulating the words he wanted to say to the Snezhnayan in front of him. “You’ve heard of Xiao, right?” Zhongli asked, only continuing after Childe nodded. Zhongli has a soft smile on his face, reassuringly placing his hand on top of Childe’s. “He’s getting married, and as he had promised many years ago, I’m his best man. I want to bring you to the wedding. I should’ve brought you to Liyue sooner, but I didn’t want to interfere with your work much.”

Childe smiled at that. Archons above, Zhongli truly was perfect inside and out. The amount of consideration this man placed in each decision, the amount of sincerity and genuine concern and love he could give. If this were anyone else, it would’ve overwhelmed Childe, but this wasn’t just anyone else, this was Zhongli. He was pretty sure he’d jump off a cliff if that meant he could spend the rest of his life with him.

“You always put me before you, you know? I wouldn’t have minded if you told me to come with you to Liyue earlier.” Childe intertwined his calloused fingers with Zhongli’s slim ones. “I’ll come with you to Liyue, it’s near Dragonspine anyway, and archon knows Kaeya’s been pestering me to come.” He said, and he could feel Zhongli breathe a sigh of relief.

“Honestly, there was no need to be so nervous. I’m sure your family operates like any other would.” He offhandedly comments, and the moment the words left his mouth, Zhongli



choked on his own drink. Suddenly, that pit in his stomach returned, was Zhongli's family *that* bad?

"I will be very honest with you...they work in strange ways. But I have no doubt you'll impress them, after all, you are extraordinary." Zhongli praised, and Childe almost wanted to grab Zhongli and make out with him. Of course, he let his self-restraint control his movements, opting to press a light peck to Zhongli's lips.

"I'm very glad that you hold me with such high prestige then," Childe swore that his heart melted with the utterly lovelorn gaze Zhongli gave him.

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Xingqiu passes by them, phone in hand as he very discreetly snaps a photo of the Zhenjun heir. He couldn't believe his luck today, it was honestly appalling. Who would've thought that Zhongli would end up dating a Snezhnayan? A seemingly confident one as well. He always thought Zhongli to be the type to go for a more calm and collected type, someone he could probably enjoy tea with and walk through museums in and whatever other stuff he was rumoured to enjoy.

Xingqiu's finger hovers over Chongyun's icon, ready to send his newly acquired, boiling tea. How would the Liyuean business families react? He wondered if the Wangsheng family would jump at the chance to interrogate Zhongli, the man was acting as a consultant for them after all. He wondered if the Qixing would send Kazuha out to investigate, the man was quite talented at stealth. He wondered how the adepti would react, and how willing they'd castrate the ginger in front of Zhongli.

*"Looks like I found where the Zhenjun heir's been keeping busying himself with."* Xingqiu sent the photo without a second thought, his glee expertly hidden behind his expertly crafted poker face. He glances towards them as he walks towards the counter, ordering a smoothie. He glanced at his phone as he watched Chongyun type back.

*"Who is he?"* Chongyun texted back, and Xingqiu could perfectly envision the confusion and surprise painting his face. Even he was shocked to see Zhongli, Liyue's most eligible bachelor, out and about with a blue-eyed beauty. He was definitely from Snezhnaya,

unmistakably ginger, or maybe he was from Fontaine? Xingqiu could only assume, but that was fine, he had a much better way to find out.

*"He's Childe, didn't catch the last name, but you're bound to find it. Just make sure to send it to the Adepts."* Xingqiu chuckled as he hit send. He just knows it'll take less than 5 minutes before the news reaches the current lady of the Golden House.

He returns to his table and leaves a huge tip for the waiter. He was feeling extra generous today, the new romance venture definitely fueling his current mood. As his slightly heeled shoes clatter against linoleum, he glances at the ginger one last time. He was no stranger to dressing up, his shoes are definitely a bit pricey. The poor man just doesn't seem to know just what he's gotten himself into.

As he opens the door, he wonders if he'll even be able to make it into the Golden House's gates.

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**Chongyun\_official:**

*sent attachment OMGYUNYUNIT'SZHONGLIWITHAGUY.jpeg*

Hey, isn't this Zhongli? @Who-HuTao\_off

**Yan-Yanfei:**

*sent attachment OMGYUNYUNIT'SZHONGLIWITHAGUY.jpeg*

*Hey, isn't this Zhongli? @Who-HuTao\_off*

You're right, this is Zhongli-

**Who-HuTao\_off:** Oh my archons what is Zhongli doing?? He said he was going to deal with a client in Fontaine not flirt with some dude???: head in hands:

**Crux\_captain-official:** Zhongli's been hiding because of this? He's so screwed.

**Tianquan\_off:** Who's the guy? @Chongyun\_official @Guhua-Clan\_Xingqiu

**Guhua-Clan\_Xingqiu:** I heard his name's Childe or something.

**Kazuha\_official:** He picked a ginger of all people? Damn it now I lost my bet with @Gold-winged\_Xiao

**Gold-winged\_Xiao:**

*sent attachment OMGYUNYUNIT'SZHONGLIWITHAGUY.jpeg*

*Hey, isn't this Zhongli? @Who-HuTao\_off*

THAT'S A FUCKING FATUI HARBINGER

**Bubu-Baizhu:**

*THAT'S A FUCKING FATUI HARBINGER*

Now this is interesting

**Yuheng\_official:** Ugh, is this a joke? Zhongli should have better taste than that.

**Xiangling-ling\_wanmin:** I heard from one of my branch managers that they come to Wanmin ALLLLLLLLLLL the time.

**Amp-It-Up:** I've seen him before when I toured in Natlan, he's the feared 11th Harbinger or something along those lines.

**Who-HuTao\_off:**

*I heard from one of my branch managers that they come to Wanmin ALLLLLLLLLLL the time.*

No wonder Zhongli never pays his bills back after redirecting it to Wanmin, he's been draining this guy

**Yan-Yanfei:**

*No wonder Zhongli never pays his bills back after redirecting it to Wanmin, he's been draining this guy*

That's what you get from this @Who-HuTao\_off?? :disappointed:

**Ganyu\_sec:** Shouldn't we be informing Guizhong?

**Gold-winged\_Xiao:**

*I've seen him before when I toured in Natlan, he's the feared 11th Harbinger or something along those lines.*

I'm suddenly feeling the urge to stab-

**Kazuha\_official:**

*I've seen him before when I toured in Natlan, he's the feared 11th Harbinger or something along those lines.*

He's that 11th? Just what did Zhongli get himself into?

**Yuheng\_official:**

*He's that 11th? Just what did Zhongli get himself into?*

At least he's better than a certain someone...

**Guhua-Clan\_Xingqiu:** @everyone HE'S BRINGING HIM TO THE WEDDING BTW :flamenco:

**Bubu-Baizhu:**

*@everyone HE'S BRINGING HIM TO THE WEDDING BTW :flamenco:*

Looks like it's my job to step up as Lady Zhenjun's associate...

**Crux\_captain-official:** Here lies Zhongli, his ass isn't in here yeah, but he's surely going to get chewed out by Lady Zhenjun.

**Who-HuTao\_off:** I'll make sure to give him a discounted coffin.

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Baizhu was allowed into Liyun's office, her usual smile replaced with a concerned frown. She sets her gaze on the man in front of her, awaiting the words that would come out of his mouth. She was concerned, especially after the urgency in which Baizhu reached out to her. The man rarely ever approached her in such a manner, his usual self a mixture of a composed and cocky individual.

"So what brings you here, Baizhu?" She asked, her brows furrowing as Baizhu fished his phone out of his pocket.

"Lady Liuyun, are you aware that Zhongli is bringing someone to the wedding? A Fatui Harbinger, no less." Baizhu inquired as he showed her the photo Xingqiu took a few minutes ago. Liuyun's eyes widened as she stared at the photo. She never cared for the gender of the lover's her son took, but she was rather befuddled that he'd collude and fall for a Harbinger.

"I was not aware of it until now...Thank you for informing Baizhu." Liuyun pressed her lips into a thin line, her thoughts racing. Would Zhongli settle for this? From the looks of it, he seems very serious about his relationship with this Snezhnayan. Was he really planning to bring home a Fatui Harbinger after years of leaving Liyue?

Baizhu stopped himself from grimacing at the look on Liuyun's face. He could understand why she'd be like this. The rest of the world has always been rather apprehensive of the Fatui, regardless if their reign of terror was nothing but a myth from centuries before, lost to

history in scrolls and such. Zhongli being seen with someone like that would be horrible for his image.

Liuyun sighed. “You can leave now Baizhu, I have a call to make.”

Baizhu did so without a second thought.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

Fun Fact, I did not realise how much I had typed out. The chapter just looked so little in the drafts that I almost choked on my tea when I read the word count. Anyways, I finally got to update!! I hope you enjoy reading this chapter, I tried to make it as cohesive as possible while showcasing enough of what you need to know about the family tree I made for the fic!

Always a reminder that English will be called Teyvat Common in this fic and the specified use of any other language is in Italics!

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

Zhongli found that he could not sleep tonight, not even with his boyfriend cuddled beside him, light snores escaping him as he slept. He knew that the man beside him was tired, and quite frankly, he was too, but today's events were quite overwhelming to him. He recounted what could've possibly gone wrong throughout the entirety of the day, gently carding a hand through Childe's damp locks of ginger hair.

His usual trip to the local branch of Wangsheng was completed, the man not worrying about any traffic all throughout the morning. His consultations were smoother than his grandmother's silks. His meal with Childe was delightful, his lover surprisingly accepting his invitation to come to Liyue with him, stating that his schedule wasn't as packed as Zhongli thought it was, and that he was free for about two weeks before the wedding.

So all in all, he would call this a rather accomplished day and should be able to sleep rather peacefully with anxiety clawing at his chest, right? There shouldn't be planted doubts swirling in his head, doubts that wouldn't leave him alone. The swirling amalgamation of anxiety and uncertainty suddenly reminded him that these doubts weren't his alone. The thoughts that were plaguing him are the same doubts that plagued Guizhong.

It seems that phone call with his mother had shaken him a bit.

He was fully aware that his mother was never satisfied with anyone he dated, and therefore, none really stood around long enough. He did enjoy their superficial company, though not in

the way they hoped for at least. His past relations tended to amuse Zhongli with how obviously greedy they were, seemingly vulnerable at the prospect of the loss of an opportunity to social climb. So in the end, there wasn't much to lose apart from the newly found rumours about the one he had detached from his hectic personal life.

And then Childe entered his life, and suddenly he could only keep his eyes locked on that head of ginger hair, on those eyes that failed to shine beneath the sunlight, only glistening beneath the moon. He found that despite finding Childe's behaviour absolutely incorrigible, it was in fact, that very stubborn personality that made Zhongli love him to bits.

They've been together for years, have come to understand each other without words, and see the other for who they are. Zhongli wasn't just some guy stamped as some eligible bachelor for some noble to see, he was human with Childe, a human that was loved and continued to give that same love. But Childe wasn't aware that their relationship had always been kept in a bubble, a world just for the two of them, each of them wounded with certain fears from the past and the present. The years of trust between them, their past and their backgrounds not defining each other. It was a sanctuary.

Yet a call from his mother managed to ground him back to reality.

He had been expecting such a turn of events, of course. It would be foolish of him to say that he didn't, he knew how his mother was like. But even then, as he listened to her words through the phone, absolutely confirming his suspicions about her sources of information and her views on his lover, he found himself utterly floored.

*"I and your ah ma are excited for your return Zhongli."* He could feel the stress in her tone, could picture the way she was probably leaning over the windows of her office, glaring at thin air. Her connotation felt like a punch to the gut. They were welcoming him and him only. To her, Childe was probably just another pawn, disposable and completely removable from Zhongli's life.

It had always been like this, even before Childe, even when he took on flings that, in the eyes of everyone else, were "worthy" of him. He could never run away, he may outrun his past, but he can't stop time to try and plan for the uncertain future. It was foolish for him to think that he could escape from this aspect of his life, to have his shoulders relieved of the weight he was carrying ever since his birth. Being the only son of the eldest child, Zhongli's path in life had been set before he could so much as protest.



He loved his family, he respected their opinions and knew that what they wanted was what was best — though it could be debatable that what was best in their eyes was not the best for him, though. However, the filial piety and unyielding love and loyalty he had to his family was unlike the one he held for Childe. His love for Childe was the one he wanted to grow old with, the one he could hold onto deep into the night as they peacefully slumbered in their humble shared apartment, the type of love that softens and becomes even sappier as the years go by.

Yet he knew that he could not escape the reality of his situation. Those expectations have long shaped his desires. The duty that came with the numerous titles the people of Liyue and others around the globe have bestowed upon him. He had a responsibility that tied him to his homeland. He can't rid himself of the eyes on him, of the eyes that take him at face value. Eyes that will soon scrutinise and dissect Ajax. He may be a Harbinger, but titles such as that did little to deter people, much less his family.

Zhongli pressed his forehead against Childe's. His life was exposed to almost everyone in the world, every bit of him printed and pressed and consumed. Everything was out there, all except his relationship with Childe. This semblance of normalcy, the domesticity, and the adoration tied together with a bow. He could lose this the moment he steps back into the soil of his motherland, this safe space between crumbling to dust. It could slip from his grasp like flowing waters.

He relaxes against the other, holding him close. He knew that Childe was strong, a fighter by heart. He did not back down with a fight, and quite frankly, he wasn't going to either. They'll get through this together, even if he has to claw into the depths of the abyss. He's going to let Childe break down their apprehensive walls one way or another. He'll show him to the rest of the world, letting his affections be known. There was no way he was going to let this crumble.

With a sigh, he pressed a light kiss against Childe's forehead and shut his eyes. "We'll get through this together, Childe, even if it means I'll throw all this away for you."

The only response Zhongli got was his lover's snores.

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“You’re late, Achi.” Retuo condescendingly jeered as his sister walked into the room, his right brow raised as he studied her posture. Her lips were pressed into a thin line, her makeup barely consisted of anything more than blush and lip gloss, there was a light crown of sweat lining her forehead, barely noticeable unless you looked really closely, or you were her brother.

Guizhong sighed as she effectively ignored her brother, sitting down on the plush couch beside Baizhu, who moved to make space for her. He too was ignoring her brother, who was undoubtedly pestering him before she entered the room. The tension in the room was palpable, and it made Guizhong’s anxiety rise by the second. Everyone here knew what they were about to discuss, and she could assume this happened when she introduced Osial to them as well.

She wondered what Zhongli had said about him then. If he had said anything at all.

"It seems Venti's late again," Baizhu commented, his eyes on the empty ottoman Venti's petite self usually perched at. Baizhu had always been rather harsh towards Venti, probably due to Venti's much more lenient approach towards such important matters. However, Guizhong knew it came from a good place, Venti had gotten himself mixed with too many people, and Venti could only read so many before wolves came at him. Baizhu was simply concerned, though it wouldn't hurt for him to express it properly.

"I like to believe that I am always on time, Baizhu. An artist has their own pace, you can't possibly tell me I'm late based on your construct of time." Venti scoffed playfully, Baizhu rolling his eyes at the teal-clad man. He skipped towards the ottoman, his soles tapping against the floor in a pitter. He was always rather peppy, very cheerful and carefree. He was much like Retuo, except Retuo still possessed a sense of duty and urgency.

“So, what’s with the meeting?” He asked the room, scanning his teal orbs onto the other three, batting his lashes at them rather mockingly.

Well, it seemed everyone except their half-Mondstadter cousin knew what they were talking about.

“We’re finally complete, very well.” Liuyun walked down the stairs of her study, not a hair out of place as she eyed her nephews and niece. From the corner of Guizhong’s eye, she could see Venti tense up, the atmosphere finally catching up to their usually carefree cousin. They all feign indifference to her levelled gaze.

“I assume that with the absence of my son, you clever lot have deduced that he’s the topic of discussion, no?” She asked, her lips slightly turned upwards, the only sign of emotion she had presented as of now. She was usually expressive, and they were very blessed to have an aunt that taught the values of family. But it was times like these that made their hearts stop for a moment. The moment that makes you wonder if all the happier, more lighthearted experiences were but memories from another timeline.

Everyone nodded in response, even Venti, whose face was still painted with confusion.

Liuyun chuckled as she saw the expression’s that adorned their faces. “No need to be so tense, this is just a simple gathering.” A smile finally made its way onto her face, another one of those unreadable curved ones that she usually wore. Her ability to control her expression was amazing, but Guizhong supposed that it was a gift to be able to do that so seamlessly.

Venti sighed. “Aunty, for a second I thought you were going to murder me.” Venti jested, seemingly regaining his momentum as he casually addressed her. Venti had always been brave, acting accordingly. He was just trying to ease out the tension, if this got a laugh out of their aunt, then the rest would follow accordingly.

Liuyun chuckled. “If you were a few more minutes late, I would’ve.” Her eyes crinkled at the edges, the only readable sign of genuine emotion that solidified Venti’s success. Guizhong watched Retuo visibly relax against his seat, his shirt further wrinkling against the leather. Baizhu didn’t react though, his perfectly honed poker face shining through.

“So we’re going to gossip about ‘Li now, right?” Retuo asked no one in particular, focusing his gaze on the grandiose painting of Morax, the former geo archon, on the wall.

Liuyun’s smile faltered ever so slightly, her eyes no longer crinkled. Guizhong reads it as distaste. “As you may know, he’s bringing someone to the wedding.” She began steadily, her voice didn’t shake, though it was pretty evident there was restraint in her tone. She hadn’t even met Childe yet, what was the need for such hostility?

Dread pools in Guizhong's stomach as she remembers the way they scrutinised Osial the first time around. Not even Zhongli's comforting words could ease her anxiety.

"I've only received news of it in passing, Aunty~ Does that mean Zhongli is serious about them?" Venti inquired, his joking tone melding with genuine curiosity.

"He's actually bringing a harbinger, the eleventh, Tartaglia," Baizhu commented, his ever composed self leaning against his hand, his stare on Venti. His face went blank for a moment as if processing the words that left Baizhu's mouth. The word harbinger never really did sit well with Venti ever since the cathedral defamation incident. Venti's face was instantly coloured with the different stages of grief, and Guizhong could barely hold in a sigh as Venti went off.

"He's bringing a *what* to the wedding?"

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Childe wasn't expecting this.

He stretched his arms over his head as he stepped into the way too luxurious cabin, rotating his head to rid himself of the stiffness in his back. He slowly started stringing together a cohesive train of thought, replaying the events of the hour in his head. Ekaterina had agreed—read: bribing her with a bonus—to drive both him and Zhongli to the airport early in the morning. She promptly dropped them off with a curt farewell and sped away. Afterwards, they entered the airport and...

Everything else went by like a flurry on a rather harsh Snezhnaya day. It was obscured, his world shifting ever so slightly as luggage caddy's and attendants flocked around the two. He was not expecting the way Zhongli was addressed with such grace, as if speaking his name in any manner but respect were sacrilege. He was positively shocked at the way they addressed him similarly to his lover. All their luggage had been taken from them, brought onto the plane ahead of the other passengers. Their seats—which he swore were simply premium economy tickets the last he checked—were upgraded to a suite that not even Childe had heard of before.

And thus he finds himself in front of his boyfriend, confused, baffled, and most notably of all, very exhausted. He rubs the sleep out of his eyes as he finally takes a seat next to Zhongli, who had been watching his rather shy actions with keen amusement. “What’s going on ‘Li?” Childe asked with a quirk of his brow, turning to face him.

Zhongli merely shrugged. “This is all because of my family’s affairs, it’s nothing much really. This is comparable to those rewards card perks.” He stated nonchalantly. Childe knew there was more to this than what Zhongli let on. An ordinary person would not regard these luxuries as menial amenities within reach, even Childe, whose hefty paycheck often left him within the reach of said comforts, often found himself hesitating to indulge in them.

Yet Zhongli did so without batting an eye and intimidated Childe in the slightest. It was as if this was a part of Zhongli that he had not shown to him, which was quite similar to the rather vague recounts of his diplomatic duties. Here was Childe thinking he was the only one who omitted the more work-related details of his life, turns out they both were keeping a few things from each other. The duality they both held over their lives was horrifying.

Though it did bother him a bit that Zhongli had to hide his family, of all things, from him.

“So, you’re saying you’re like...Tsaritsa type of rich.” Childe continued, letting the reality sink into him that Zhongli was probably the one who paid him back under the name of the Wangsheng Funeral Parlor, and it wasn’t just Director Hu feeling a bit guilty for his frivolous spending.

Zhongli cleared his throat. “My family is...financially capable.” Childe thought that Zhongli’s attempt at convincing him was rather adorable. It wasn’t hard to see through Zhongli when not even he believed the words that came out of his mouth.

“Look, I’m just surprised, is all.” Childe took Zhongli’s hand in his, feeling the tense fingers felt pliant in his own skin. Zhongli was nervous, it was very obvious in the reluctance that he suddenly possessed. “It isn’t a big deal that you come from some super-rich family, and though I’m a bit confused as to why you’d hide this aspect of your life from me, I’m not mad.”

Zhongli sighed as he thumbed over Childe's knuckles. "I'm sorry for not disclosing this sooner...my family, it's rather complicated to discuss them," Zhongli admitted sheepishly, his golden eyes glimmering beneath dimmed cabin lights.

Childe paused, genuine confusion painting his features. "Complicated how?"

"Well..."

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"I don't understand why Zhongli would bring a Harbinger to the wedding? There are so many people out there that could easily become his arm candy if he so desired. Why choose someone from the *Fatui* ?!" Venti hissed, his distaste coating his tongue as he sifted through the messages he missed, eyes widening as his eyes landed on the photo the Gyun heir sent. "A ginger too!"

Retuo rolled his eyes. "Honestly, you're missing the point of this entire thing. Him being a ginger or a member of the Fatui has nothing to do with this." He replied, finally acting his age for once in his life. "Zhongli wanting "arm-candy" so to speak, shouldn't be a part of your concerns either." Guizhong almost wanted to pat him on the back for his maturity. How her brother had grown, the thought almost brought her to tears.

"As Retuo has stated, his Harbinger status and whatnot are the least of our concerns as of now." Liyun supplied, causing Venti to visibly deflate. "I understand that your outburst was out of concern, but at least we know that Zhongli is bringing someone rather qualified and with esteem to the wedding."

"Qualified." Baizhu deadpanned.

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"There's Venti, he's a bit...immature, however, he is much more sociable compared to the rest of my family. He's probably one of the few who made rather scandalous headlines on the regular...Baizhu comes a close second, though for completely different, scandal-less

reasons.” Zhongli looked rather unimpressed at the thought of his cousins, with the way his tone turned into an exasperated whisper. The faraway look he had reminded Childe of the way his older brother looked at him when he caused a bit of mischief around their neighbourhood, pure and utter exhaustion painting schooling on his brother’s face.

He’d heard of Venti from La Signora, one of his more distasteful colleagues. He doesn’t necessarily despise Signora, but he’d much rather avoid her as much as possible whenever they’re assigned bureaucratic duties. As per La Signora’s retelling of her brief rendezvous with Barbatos, she merely described him as a twin-tailed rodent, a thorn in her side, and ardently a pest. Though that didn’t really help much in gauging his personality. Almost everyone was a pest to Signora. “By Venti you mean the idol Barbatos, right?”

“Indeed. He is rather free-spirited, probably due to the Mondstadter blood flowing through him. He could be classified as the black sheep of the family, nonconforming and crass, certainly not how his parents wanted him to turn out.” Zhongli pressed his lips into a thin line, frustration creasing at his brows. “Then again, his parents were rather...absent.”

Childe nodded thoughtfully. “Ahh, I see...” He trailed. It was probably important he didn’t talk about familial bonds towards anyone in Zhongli’s seemingly larger than life family. Relationships in general felt like a very strained subject to delve into. It was a good thing Zhongli decided to tell him these tidbits of information now, lest he make a fool of himself when he actually met them.

Venti would probably have the personality of someone like Tonia, he’d have to try and warm up to him first. As for Baizhu...

“Who’s Baizhu though?” He inquired. That was an unfamiliar name, yet Childe knew he must’ve heard it at some point in time. His job did involve a lot of information and data gathering, and knowing potential clients to deal with were rather important. Did he hear that name from his agents? Did it just feel familiar out of coincidence?

Zhongli fished his phone out of his pocket. “I don’t have much to say about Baizhu. He’s always been rather odd, and though he’s not necessarily distant, I prefer not to know and dabble in his affairs.” He admitted. “However, when one of us is in need of assistance, he’s the most likely one to rush to our aid. It’s probably due to his line of work.” Zhongli continued, scrolling through the articles as Childe watched his fingers on the screen.

Childe tried his best to not cringe at the horrendous titles in the sea of articles.

“You’d learn much more about him from an objective standpoint from any piece of media than from me, that’s for certain.” Zhongli handed Childe his phone, having found what he had been looking for.

Childe had to do a double-take at the man in the article. Wasn’t he the one Dottore was "meeting" -

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Venti coughed into his fist. “Fine, but don’t blame me for having such distaste towards them. That Signora woman was vile, putrid, I could write an entire song dedicated to how much I hate her with a passion that it’ll be classified as a hate crime-”

“We get it, Venti. You hate the Fatui.” Baizhu cut off, shooting an unimpressed glare in the man’s direction. Venti huffed in response, refocusing his attention on his shoes. “What other concerns do we have regarding him?” Baizhu asked the room, his question specifically targeting their aunt.

Liuyun continued. “I suppose we need to know his financial status-”

“And that’s important because?” Guizhong interjected, her gaze turning cold as she spoke. Finances and economic wealth were always a bit of a “sensitive” subject when it came to their household. They were influential and affluent, and there were also many people hungrily social climbing, naturally one's class and status fell into play here. It was logical to think of the consequences of bringing someone “uncouth” to the family.

But just because it was deemed logical did not mean it did little to stop Guizhong from scrutinising it whatsoever. Her husband had felt that very weight over his head before, of being looked upon like something lesser than. Being a General of the Milileth did little to dissuade them from thinking ill of him. She did not enjoy the way they stripped him of his



being and simply labelled him based on material wealth alone, and she did not wish that on Zhongli's lover either.

Guizhong nearly shuddered at the thought of another being treated as such. To be stigmatised by veiled smiles that did not reach the glint the eyes held, to be put under a microscope and studied. It felt violating. The entire experience of them, her family, towards anyone that wasn't "worthy" was violating. It was as if they were laughing at an exhibit at a zoo, the life of another but another measly show for them to watch and analyze.

She hated it.

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"Then there's Guizhong," Zhongli supplied, the familiar name rolling off his tongue as he swiped his phone towards a photo of the two of them.

"You've talked about her for hours on end that I somehow can't believe that you're not siblings." Childe joked, poking fun at the way his lover often found himself lost in his stories of the past. His family had seemed innocent enough on the occasions he did go on his nostalgic storytelling—which happened when he was tipsy, or wasted. It felt innocent enough when all he would bring up was the pranks he managed to pull with Guizhong, or what clay figure they made during some particular summer day.

Childe knew much about Zhongli in the present and would love to learn more together with him in the future, but this entire thing, from the suites they sat in, to the finer, simpler details of Zhongli's boyhood, were all lost and locked behind his lover's mind, only ever resurfacing in the moments where his inebriation made him more susceptible to such whimsical vulnerability. He knew the man had secrets, as did he, but he couldn't shake the anxious feeling of the values of the names to the faces he had only seen in passing.

Was Zhongli's family truly too much to unpack for him to keep this from him for years?

"Well, out of all of my cousins, she is my favourite." He chuckled, shaking Childe out of his train of thought. "But don't tell anyone that, Guizhong would never let it down, and then

Retuo would probably compete with her...” He said in reply. His gaze softened as he saw the look that was painted on Childe’s features.

“Are you okay, *baobei* ?” Zhongli asked, concerned for his lover.

“I’m just a bit overwhelmed, is all. For three years I simply knew you as Zhongli, the Wangsheng Funeral Parlor consultant who took millions of mora out of my pockets. The man who absolutely detests any sort of seafood, which is pretty prevalent in Liyuen cuisine, by the way. The man who can never seem to run out of words, so much so that I get lost in your world entirely.” Childe admitted. “I just need some time to adjust, don’t worry too much.”

“I can’t help but worry, not when you’re frowning like that.” Zhongli gently cupped Childe’s face with his hand.

“Trust me, ‘Li, I’ll be well adjusted to all of this after our flight.” Childe smiled reassuringly. Zhongli felt relieved to see his smile finally reach his beautiful glassed eyes.

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Baizhu ran a hand through his hair. “Look, Gui, we’re not talking about Osial-”

“Who said I was referring to him, Baizhu?” Guizhong scoffed, resisting the urge to roll her eyes at him. She would not give in to it, not when Guizhong should be holding herself in much higher esteem than her cousins and brother. She would not give them the satisfaction of seeing her composure crumble.

Baizhu merely stared at her, as if challenging her to continue, fully prepared for any nasty words that could be said between them. Instead, Guizhong chose the much more civil option. “I must apologise, it was rather rude of me to cut you off like that.”

Baizhu sighed. “All is fine Guizhong, no harm done.” To your pride was left unsaid by the man with jade eyes. Guizhong swore she’d find a way to pluck his eyes out of sheer spite alone.

Liuyun cleared her throat to catch their attention. "Settle down, it would truly be better if you let me finish." She said, the rest of the room taking the hint. These sorts of meetings usually went much smoother with her son around. He was a beacon, in a way, the mantle his father once held now passed onto him was a glaring reminder that her son was unchallenged, above the rest. Certainly above this smattering and unneeded chatter of sorts.

"Apologies Auntie, it's just been a while since we last reconvened like this, and for this reason too..." Retuo trailed off, gesturing awkwardly towards the very empty seat a few spaces behind Guizhong. "Especially for this reason..."

Defeatedly, Liuyun gracefully got to her feet, seemingly wiping off any dust on her clothes. "Let's just end this here, it seems prolonging this will only cause more infighting, and we certainly wouldn't want any bad blood during the wedding of the soon to be Dihua's." She sighed tiredly.

The rest of the group slowly stood from their seats, perturbed by their aunt's sudden change of heart. Nonetheless, the group obediently got to their feet, bowing and bidding their aunt their goodbyes. Venti all but dashed out of the doors, Guizhong following behind him with her head held low. Baizhu simply disappeared.

Retuo was about to step out before Liuyun cleared her throat. "By the way, Retuo, I'm glad to see that you're finally growing up." She spoke softly, her heart swelling with nothing but utter pride towards her nephew's improvements. He had always been quite the rascal when he was younger, always picking fights with Xiao and Zhongli, somehow getting into scanty affairs and questionable company.

Retuo chuckled. "And what do you mean by that, Auntie? I'm still the same."

"Perhaps the person you've let into your life has finally changed you for the better, then." She shoots back at him, amused. The way Retuo stiffened was enough evidence to solidify her conclusion. The support of another could truly do wonders to a person, and she was glad it was affecting her nephew well.

"You think I can't change on my own, Auntie?" Retuo asked, casually raising a brow.

She shook her head as she walked towards him. "I'm not saying you can't change on your own, Retuo, it's just that I know that someone had to be cheering you on for you to do so." She patted his back. "Go after them, whoever they may be, I can see improvement in you, and if they're the reason for it, then they have my seal of approval." She smiled at him, her eyes crinkling.

Retuo's eyes widened. "How come you're so willing to give your mighty seal of approval to them when you haven't even met them, Auntie?" Retuo's intentions towards asking her as such remained in the air, undiscussed.

Liuyun pondered on her answer for a moment. Retuo was her nephew, Zhongli was her son. Zhongli needed to secure his place no matter what, and Retuo could casually live his life without consequences. Retuo had improved and become better, and Liuyun didn't know if her son's life had changed in the same way with his own partner. "Perhaps it's because I've seen the results myself."

She finally began walking out of the study, her shoes clicking against the ground. "Ponder about what I've told you, Retuo, and if you can, don't let them go."

Retuo was left dumbfounded as he stares at her retreating figure.

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Retuo felt his phone vibrate in his pocket as he walked towards his car. He carefully glanced around before fishing the keys out of his pockets, unlocking his car and entering it just as swiftly. He made sure to lock the doors and roll the windows all the way up this time, lest the paparazzi take a picture of him in his car and spring up some mafia-esque narrative.

He ignited the engine as he felt the phone in his pocket ring a fourth time, settling one hand on the steering wheel. He casually slips his phone out of his pocket and into the cupholder, checking the familiar caller id. He almost felt bad for smiling the way he was when he saw it, the nickname almost a glaring reminder of what he was doing dastardly wrong.

His aunt was wrong, he hadn't improved a single bit, he was still that bastard of a kid.

He sighed as the call finally registered on the car's screen. He placed his foot down on the gas and carefully began to drive into the road. The moment his car entered the lane, he swiped the screen to answer.

"Took you long enough Azh-da-ha." The caller jested, their chuckle echoing throughout the car's speakers.

Azhdaha smiled. "What's up, Osi?"

He was truly an asshole.

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"They said they should be around Zone E..." Zhongli trailed off as he held onto his suitcase, Childe following closely behind him. Liyue's airport was one he had not set foot into in a long time, and it was quite overwhelming to see just how much had changed in the span of a decade. He had been keeping his attention on his lover the entire time, not hoping to get lost in a foreign country's airport.

Childe looked towards the large painted letters on the wall, scanning each pillar for their particular zone. "We're pretty close to Zone E, so I wonder where they are-"

"Zhongli! It's been too long!" An oddly familiar voice cheered as an even more familiar head of blonde whisked past the rest of the exiting crowd. Childe basically froze as the said familiar head of blonde tackled Zhongli into a hug, the man's eyes widening as he returned her hug with a chuckle. He could recognise that head of flower-adorned hair anywhere.

"It's great to see you too, Lumine." Zhongli greeted, a soft familiarity easing into the timbre of his voice that made Childe's heart melt. To think Zhongli could make his voice sound so tender, he clearly missed his friends.

“You finally grace Liyue with your presence, Zhongli, with a guest too.” Xiao’s teal tipped hair came into view, and all Childe could think of was the sheer difference in height between him and his boyfriend, yet Xiao exuded a type of confidence that was more subdued when it came to Zhongli. It was honestly jarring yet very impressive.

“I must admit I’ve missed Liyue, it’s nice to be back here,” Zhongli stated with a satisfied smile, to which Xiao simply nodded.

“So are you going to introduce us to your guest of honour, or will I have to threaten him myself?” Xiao inquired rather harshly, his tone turning a tad bit too cold as it fell on Childe.

Childe cleared his throat, all eyes falling onto him. He can see the encouraging glint in Zhongli’s eyes as he stepped out of his shadow. “My apologies for not introducing myself I’m-”

Childe gets tackled into a death hug by Lumine before he can properly say his name.

## Chapter End Notes

Ehe, I do not regret a thing I'm a monster.

The plot will only thicken from here to the point that Childe's problems might be the least of anybody's concerns. I just took inspiration, I never said this was going to be a clean-cut CRA retelling with Genshin Characters. Anyway's, I hope you enjoyed it!

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

Autumn Break finally *\* falls to the ground\** The last few weeks have been very hard, but I'm glad to say I've gone through it!! Celebration came in the form of finally finishing this chapter. I was listening to Yoasobi's "The Book" Album while writing this and turns out it provided the right fuel to finish Ganyu's introsection.

Thanks for reading and commenting on this fic!! The Kudos and hits this fic has gotten has overwhelmed me, and I really appreciate the support!!

Anyways, onto the chapter. Hope you guys enjoy!! I promise I will put more focus onto Childe and Zhongli together on a date at some point, I just needed more worldbuilding to finish before finally doing so.

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

“You know, I never thought you’d know a guy like Childe, Zhongli...” Lumine whispered to the man as she shifted closer to his seat, nudging him as her eyes fell on the Snezhnayan and her husband, who were conversing about their college exploits, as Lumine had rightfully dubbed it. College was manageable because Childe made it so, and thus, she respected and owed him quite a lot.

For being there for her and Kaeya, for acting like the asshole that everyone hated, for his patience and willingness to go through all the crazy bullshit they went through in the early stages of their adulthood. There were many she respected him for, even if he would never admit that to his face. He was an asshole first, a compatriot and a comrade second.

“Whatever do you mean, Lumine?” Zhongli whispered back, masking it beneath a sip of tea, listening intently to each word that left Childe’s lips. He was quite concerned that water had seemingly materialised from thin air when Childe was back at university. He had never entertained the idea of Childe possessing a vision, or at least, the ability to seemingly wield one.

He wondered just how much of Childe he did not know, and how much the man himself didn’t realise either.

“He’s headstrong, confident and egoistic, with some sort of bloodcurdling lust for violence when you truly piss him off. He’s also a total softie for children and has some weird fascination with narwhals. With his personality, I never would’ve guessed that you’d end up hitting it off, much less meet.” She began, twiddling her thumbs as she did. Zhongli nodded, prompting her to continue. She was glad that Zhongli was just as great of a listener as he was a storyteller.

“Your lives are so vastly different. He works for Snezhnaya, you’re duty-bound to Liyue. He’s on foreign “affairs” among other affable things, while you’ll be stipulating and controlling this generation’s market the moment Ah Ma retires. You’re born with all this prestige and wealth, meanwhile, he clawed his way through Snezhnaya’s depths.” She sighed deeply and she smiled at Zhongli.

“Who am I kidding, you know full well the reason why I’m telling you all this...” Zhongli didn’t need to be told twice to understand the context of Lumine’s worries. Childe was everything to him, and the thought of losing him out of duty, of losing him due to his duty-bound contract, left a bitter taste in his mouth.

Many questions had plagued his head during the days that counted down to this very moment. Would Childe —after realising the struggle that is loving him— leave him? Would he —after meeting with the gaze of a woman with a crown of knowledge on her head and an iron fist— feel inadequate? He did not wish to trigger any insecurities within Childe during this trip, and the thought of his own family inflicting wounds that could not be healed with simple touches and douses of alcohol was haunting.

He knew that some of his concerns were farfetched, though he knew full well that these worries could very much reflect the reality of his situation. He was serious in pursuing Childe, yet he was also serious about taking his role as Liyue’s next Rex Lapis. He could lose one, he could lose both. But he knew full well that these doubts were just that, doubts, and though there may come a time where these will come into fruition, one factor remained.

He had full confidence that, if they worked together, they could pull through.

“I understand that our pairing seems unconventional and rather atypical, especially since you know both of us on a rather personal level,” He constructed his reply carefully, watching her eyes bore holes into himself, and then Childe.



“No shit,” She muttered beneath her breath, causing Zhongli to chuckle softly.

“But I believe that he is capable. He can enamour people, Lumine. I fully believe in his abilities, and if they can’t manage to find what I see in him, then I’ll make them.” He almost growled his final words, which made Lumine giggle.

“All this attitude, perhaps Childe is a bad influence on you.” She teased, watching the way Zhongli’s frown transformed into a look of confusion. She chuckled. “But if he can make you smile like an idiot, then I guess it isn’t too bad.” Childe and Zhongli as a couple didn’t seem too bad after all, seeing the results of their relationship laid out in front of her was the best example of that.

Zhongli could not agree more with her words. “Childe is extraordinary, I wouldn’t trade anything in the world for this. I would rather live a poor man knowing I’ve met him than living in this luxury without knowing he’d existed.” He admitted, a small smile on his lips.

Lumine couldn’t help but smile at the words of adoration that left Zhongli’s lips, she found that a genuine smile from Zhongli was rather infectious. Seeing such a wide range of emotion on the usually scholarly and stoic Zhongli was a sight that not many could bear witness to. The animated fondness that came with Childe’s name, the subconscious way his gaze would fall back on his lover. In the back of Lumine’s mind, she wondered if this was what Aether meant when she was acting like a total lovesick fool for Xiao.

“You’re waxing poetic, Zhongli, be careful to not say words you can’t live up to.” Lumine patted Zhongli’s shoulder as if Zhongli were her little brother and not a grown man in his prime. “You’re really sure that bringing him to the lion’s den is a good idea, no?” She had asked it rhetorically, subtly checking if Zhongli’s posture would show any signs of reluctance.

When she saw signs of none, she sighed and let the topic go, casually slipping back into conversation with Xiao and Childe. It was their problem to face together, not her’s, nor Xiao’s. She just hoped that they weren’t biting off more than they can chew with how affairs between Liyue and Snezhnaya currently were.

After all, those who come to the lion's den unprepared end up devoured.

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“Let me get this straight, so you two pretended to date back when you were in college so that people would stop pestering Lumine?” Xiao asked, absolutely bewildered at his fiancée and Childe, who had apparently been heavily involved in Lumine's life in a much more impactful way than just a “dorm mate”.

Xiao had heard of Lumine's college exploits, of the way they steered clear of her because of her headstrong behaviour and her willingness to get her hands dirty. People feared her unconventionality, and Xiao absolutely loved her to bits because of that, but that didn't change the fact that he never really knew why she had been dubbed as so in the first place. He was always curious, though he kept that to himself. He trusted that Lumine would tell him about it when she felt comfortable enough to do so.

He's horrified that the answer to that question came in the form of his childhood friend's Fatui boyfriend, who had garnered quite the reputation.

“Yep,” Childe answered as he bit off of his Zhongyuan Chop Suey. “That's a rough summary of one of our college escapades.” There was also that time they fought off some creep that tried to hit on Barbara, and that time he, Lumine and Kaeya ran through the college dorms proclaiming that the esteemed Diluc Ragvindr was giving out free wine to everyone. Mondstadt Uni was a great place, he never regretted a single day during his transfer.

“Lumine was what those assholes dubbed as a “prize catch”. She was rich, she was easy on the eyes, she had a personality that wasn't as dry as drywall.” He watched the way Xiao's eyes practically flared in disgust at the thought of Lumine being objectified. Childe almost wanted to tease the guy for it, if it weren't for the fact that said guy was driving them to their hotel, and he very much did not want to die before they finished their impromptu food trip.

“How come you never told me this Lumi-” Xiao sighed, asking the blonde, who had been muttering with Zhongli.

Lumine turned away from Zhongli to promptly answer Xiao. “Well, I did tell you I had everything under control.” She admitted sheepishly, hand on her nape. “It’s just that control came in the form of well...” She wore a shit-eating grin on her face, causing Childe to shoot a glare in her direction.

Zhongli almost chuckled at the childishness his companions expressed.

As Childe halted his bickering with Lumine —the blonde leaving to buy them all some more drinks and an extra serving of almond tofu— he placed a hand on Zhongli’s own, interlacing them. He shot a smile equally as smitten to Zhongli, to which Zhongli reciprocated with the same sentiment.

Xiao was sure that if you didn't see the absolute pure adoration each of them held for each other, you were probably blind and missing half of your cognitive functions. The fondness and sincerity in the way Childe looked at Zhongli, the way his ocean eyes seemed to melt, the man simply revelling with the other man’s company, and the other man simply exuding the same. It's as if they were lost in their own little world.

The Yaksha heir was always wary of Childe, of Tartaglia, the Eleventh of the Harbingers. He had been wary when he first heard the news of Zhongli being in cahoots with him, the photo the Guhua heir took from Fontaine enough of a red flag for Xiao to pass his verdict on Childe. He was a manipulator, all Harbingers were, it was practically etched into history that their efforts were always born from the seed of evil. Xiao could never forget that encounter with the Tsaritsa for as long as he lived.

Cold, calculating, unforgiving, as if all remorse had been burnt to ashes as if the cold of her country had frozen her heart.

He had not stopped worrying about his best friend’s well being ever since, even as he saw the man step into his and Lumine’s line of sight, said Fatui man following behind him, even as said man acted uncharacteristically from what he was expecting, even as Lumine jovially called him a comrade in a way she had only done to a few close friends of hers. He couldn’t shake the feeling that Zhongli was being tricked, that Tartaglia would stab him in the back and run away with all of Zhongli, from the fortune he held to the very last pieces of his heart of stone.

Many had done so in the past, and with Zhongli's status and power, it wasn't unlikely.

Doubt and worry clawed at him for his friend, fearing that the Fatui was simply playing the waiting game, gambling and strategically placing his cards down before striking. He had learned that many of the Harbingers were like that — if the way Venti absolutely detested one, in particular, was anything to go off on. And though he was not the best at showing these to him, they were always present. He did not want a repeat of history that Zhongli's Ah Ma warned about, he did not want Zhongli to be looked upon as an object instead of a person, and he most certainly did not want to pick up after broken pieces of his friend in the aftermath of such feared betrayals.

But somehow, all it took was the look in their eyes to convince Xiao that Childe most definitely wasn't using Zhongli. Childe looked absolutely besotted with his best friend, and his best friend adored and looked at Childe like he was some *recherché* artefact.

This did not mean he had stopped being wary of Childe as a person and Harbinger, but that was a different problem he would tackle at a later date. For now, when he looked at Childe through the lens of someone who would come to potentially wed Zhongli, he could say for certain that he was glad that his best friend had finally found someone who looked at him and only him, and not at the mountains of prestige, fame and wealth that came along with him. He was glad that his friend could find someone who'd cherish him dearly and most likely spend the rest of his life with, because Xiao learned firsthand how important strong and intimate relationships were, regardless of whether or not their nature was platonic or romantic.

He contentedly sighed as he took a bite of his Almond Tofu, basking in the sweet flavourful explosion on his taste buds, ignoring Childe and Zhongli, who was acting like some old married couple in the middle of Liyue's most crowded food district. He wasn't about to watch such a tooth-rotting display for that long. He was simply content in knowing Zhongli wasn't falling head over heels for a lying bastard.

He respected Childe for making Zhongli felicitous, but he would not hesitate to hurt the Harbinger if he ever approached Zhongli as a Harbinger, and not as his partner.

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Guizhong settled her gaze on the dresses in front of her, a frown on her face as she filtered through her wardrobe. She had spent quite a long time in her closet, using Qiqi's time at her daycare to carefully scrutinise each dress under her keen eye. Her grandmother had invited to all of her family, inviting them to watch the first glaze lilies bloom beneath the scent of tea. She would never turn down an invitation from her beloved grandmother, she would always have time for her. Everyone did, regardless of the circumstance, there would always be time for her.

Guizhong never really put much thought into why her grandmother was such a feared woman, only hearing the years of her rule over the commercial exploits of Liyue's earlier days. She had been taught time and time again of the way she ushered a new era of trade into the city that once relied on agriculture and fishing to compete in the international market. She had been taught time and time again of old traditions and the visions of the gods her grandmother had, about how Morax was pleased with his descendant's progressive outlook towards the city he built. There was no doubt that she was blessed by the God of Contracts and Commerce himself.

Perhaps her being the only woman out of her cousins had spurred her on to contemplate on the dresses she wore and maintain her image. She had the power, but it was not the same power that Zhongli held —being the actual grandson of their Ah Ma. She had to compete with her cousins, her circumstances and positions were fragile. The people around her were ravenous, with too many enemies and too little to trust.

Perhaps she was spending an unhealthy amount of time keeping everything under control. Perhaps she had forgotten the option of looking at herself and asking if she was happy with her situation and instead focused on maintaining the ecosystem that was her family of three and an extended family of even bigger proportions. If preserving her image meant she could smile happily at her husband before they went to sleep, or imprint the image of her daughter's wide-eyed smile, she would happily sacrifice her true comforts for this.

Even if the cracks were beginning to form as she dreads each minute of each hour that Osial comes home after the clock strikes seven, even if the unnecessary infighting and unwarranted rivalry brought upon her more problems and unneeded stress, even if, for once in her life, she wished to be selfish and cut herself off from all of this.

"You look like you need a break, Gui," Osial commented, entering her wardrobe with the familiarity that came with cohabitation. His gaze flitted between his wife and the rack in front of her. "Don't beat yourself up over a dress, you look beautiful in everything." He remarked, flowery words reaching Guizhong's ears and almost making her heart flutter.

Guizhong sighed as she returned one dress to the rack. “Of course you say that.” She smiled at him mischievously. If Osial noticed how her smile does not reach her eyes, he decided to pry any further.

Osial pressed his lips into a thin line. “How come you can’t take the compliment, Gui?” Osial slowly approached her, wrapping his arms around her and nuzzling his head into her neck. “You could show up to Ah Ma’s tea party in rags and you would absolutely captivate everyone.” He whispered into her neck.

Guizhong’s stomach flipped as the once familiar feeling of safety settled into her. Domestic bliss was something she had felt once with Osial, when the man still retained the same warmth his eyes held. This was something she should still be feeling as her husband wrapped his arms around her. Yet right now, as they shared such an intimate moment of trust and vulnerability, she couldn’t help but feel hollow. Her husband’s touch had just felt too cold for it to ever be loving.

She smiled at Osial. “You know I can’t do that, Osi.” She retorts, feigning a lovesick sap to her voice. She smiled and tried to feel his warmth, yet she couldn’t find it, the warmth from the pads of his fingertips had seemingly fled from his flesh. “But I’ll take your word for it.” Her voice almost failed her as the words spilt from her lips.

She was Guizhong, a businesswoman, a model and an aspiration, a mother to her daughter, a wife to her husband. She had everything because she worked to keep it that way. Because her image had been woven by her and only her because she had control over what the world knew about her, and what she wished to know about the world. She wished to become like her grandmother one day, with the ability to change tides and shift sands with her word.

Yet she also wished for normalcy at least once in her life.

Her phone rang in the middle of their shared moment of domesticity, the alarm blaring quite loudly, causing Guizhong to gently slide out of her husband’s arms. She checked her phone and silenced her alarm. “I need to pick Qiqi up from school.” She sighed out, catching Osial’s seemingly undivided attention.

“We can pick her up together.” Osial offered a smile towards her, his tied hair swaying behind him as he offered his hand to her. His lips were slightly quirked towards the left, a sign that his smile was—for once— genuine.

If she were a sensible person she would’ve refused. She would’ve refused this act they had put together, left this facade of a happy family and a successful businesswoman and learned to love herself again. If she weren’t so intent on following her grandmother’s footsteps to gain respect, if she weren’t so determined to maintain her perfect image, then maybe she would’ve been happy. Sadly for her foolish self, she wasn’t sensible, she just wanted to keep things under control.

Another crack formed in her psyche as she accepted his proposal.

The Tsaritsa’s gaze landed on Dottore, her calculating gaze falling on him as she sifted through his recent discoveries from Natianmen. She pulled out one of the files and set it on her table. “What does staying in contact with the Snake of Bubu have anything to do with Natianmen and Guyun, Il Dottore?” She all but commanded the doctor, who had been sitting across from her, lips slightly upturned beneath the mask as he was addressed in front of the rest.

He could see Signora’s eyes visibly upturn in interest, or the way Pantalone’s eyes lit up in recognition of the name. Everyone in the room had heard of the elusive informant, with most of their “activities” filed under “civil” work. He was an open consultant to all and gave stellar advice. At least one of them had ended up working with him one way or another, regardless of what they needed him for, he had always managed to deliver on his contracts.

It’s almost as if his entire life would follow the contracts he made.

“Your Majesty, recent developments within the Zhenjun Family of Liyue inevitably brought me to the only reliable informant we have.” Dottore briskly bowed, keeping his head low as a sign of respect for Her Majesty. “If you deem it so, I shall annul my contract with them and focus on other methods of collection?” He continued, knowing full well that he had chosen the right words.

“At ease, Dottore.” Her command was cold, piercing into them. She was no god, yet at that moment, she held herself as such. Her frigorific stance and bone-chilling commands were to be expected of the supposed descendant of the Archon of Cryo.

Dottore raises his head to meet her cold, icy stare. He stands tall from his spot in the middle of the audience chamber. “I simply wish that you disclose what you have discovered that a contract with the snake had to be enforced.” The Tsaritsa stressed his name. The risks taken by some of her Harbingers jeopardized operations, and though Liyue and Snezhnaya’s trade and foreign relations were on good terms, she knew very well that it was out of necessity rather than harmony.

Dottore’s slightly upturned lips pulled themselves into a grin. “Lady Ping is retiring as the head of the family.” He delightedly replied, a sudden giddiness in his throat. “And it seems our Eleventh failed to inform us of his relationship to the heir himself.” Dottore almost chuckled at the aghast look that Pulcinella shot him. He couldn’t blame him, Tartaglia was like a son to him, regardless of the distance he put between them to not make it seem like he favoured the young Snezhnayan.

“Our Eleventh...” The Tsaritsa trailed, her eyes glinting in amusement. “I see...what a turn of events this is, truly.”

The Eleventh could use this as a prime opportunity to destroy Liyue’s economy, seeing as he’s managed to seduce the one closest to its heart. She had always made sure her country came first, from technology to war, she was always a step ahead, and this was a prime opportunity. They would never get this lucky with foreign intel straight from the source itself. A single order to him and she knew he’d do it in a heartbeat, regardless of his personal feelings, regardless of the consequences that came with it.

Yet she wondered why she couldn’t let those words leave her mouth. She couldn’t understand why she was hesitating to give out this order, to have her Harbingers relay this to him.

“Your Majesty? Is something the matter? Is Tartaglia’s relation-” Pulcinella’s sudden interjection was promptly shut down by her, eyes steeling themselves into Pulcinella’s soul. He simply returned back to his chair, feigning disinterest.



She shook her head. “Tartaglia’s relation to the heir is unrelated to your plan, right Dottore?” She had asked him, addressing her minister of health once more. Dottore merely nodded.

“Then we shall leave it be.”

“Your Majesty, with all due respect, isn’t this a prime opportunity to-” Signora’s suggestion ended with a glare from the Tsaritsa. She knew that they were simply recommending these for her and their benefits, yet her decision remained unchanging.

“Knowing Tartaglia, if he had known of the fortune that came with the Zhenjun heir, he would have reported to us accordingly. His lack of correspondence means that not only does he lack any useful information for us, but he also lacks the knowledge of his identity as Rex Lapis.” She had painted the picture rather clearly for all of her Harbingers. She simply did not want to pursue this matter any further.

It’s not as if she wanted to create another civil dispute between her country and Liyue anyway, they could keep all that hostility in the past — when her Archon decided to plan an uprising against Celestia.

“Is this all we have to discuss?” She asked the room, waiting for another of her Harbinger’s to object or bring forth a new topic of discussion. The silence of the room was enough of a response to her. “Well then, I see no purpose in allowing this to continue any further. You’re all dismissed.”

They promptly rose from their seats, filing out in a lackadaisical manner, as if they had left their lives and personalities at the doors of her palace. She did not miss the rush that came with Dottore, his feet moving faster than it normally would for the lithe man. She did not miss the amusement in Colombina’s eyes or the grovelling of Scaramouche as he sauntered behind Pantalone.

Once they had all left her council room, a realisation had dawned upon her. It was rather obvious, and she found it rather embarrassing that it took her this long to realise.

She was simply reluctant because she cared.

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Ganyu meekly left the Guili office, the heavy words she had exchanged between Guizhong unsettling her as she took another step towards her car.

Her day had gone as usual, as being the Emissary of the Qixing and the main bridge between the Qixing and the Adepti was. She had many proposals and trades to oversee, and much more disasters to clean up after. She never complained about her workload though, she took pride in knowing her work allowed Liyue to thrive for another day.

However, she just wasn't feeling it today, not after what she had witnessed in Guizhong's office.

It was surreal, almost unnatural, the way her hair glowed beneath the light of the chandelier, or the piles of golden dust that laid at her feet. Her eyes radiated in a manner that should not be humanly possible. And though she spoke to Ganyu in the same calm and composed manner she always held, there was embitterment laced somewhere deep within, almost as if she was on the verge of breaking.

The words she had exchanged with Guizhong were far fewer than her usual. They did not indulge themselves in fine tea and china, nor did they discuss other, more mundane matters. It was a simple request from her, to watch over her cousin and his lover from her vantage as the Qixing's secretary, and it was nothing more than that.

Yet, with uncanny similarity of the history books to her, Ganyu could've sworn that the person she had spoken to was not Guizhong.

At that moment, she held herself much like the Goddess she was named after.

Ganyu shook such unrealistic thoughts out of her head. There was no use comparing the tangible and very alive Guizhong to a god that once roamed the land millennia ago. There was no use in wracking her head over the similarities of the books and paintings to the

present. There was no use mulling over the dust, and how the amount of it in that office was unhealthy. No use in remembering the gentle, ominous sway of Glaze Lilies in a bouquet.

Yet the scrunch on her feet as she sees the soles of her shoes covered in golden specks beneath the black rubber on her car lets her mind wander to dangerous territory. Just who were the Adepti? Why did they hold such power? Why had Rex Lapis entrusted his market to beings who were very mortal, yet granted the title of his greatest warriors and divine compatriots?

How much of history was accurate? How much of it had been hidden beneath a veil? How much did they truly know? Was Guizhong even aware of what she had been doing? Had overtime at the Jade Chamber finally caught up to her? Could she stop now, just for a moment? Could she be allowed time to collect her thoughts?

She sighed as she ran her hand through her hair, frustrated and confused. She dismissed the pinging from her phone, opting to run hands through her headpiece, attempting to remove the usual headwear to comfortably drive back. It didn't budge when she first tugged at it, only feeling an unusual sensation of bone and something more.

She froze when the headpiece didn't budge from her hair, panicking at the thought that she had gotten it stuck on her head. She tugged at it once more and sighed in relief as she gently placed it onto the passenger's seat. To think she almost panicked over something as silly as this, for her mind to jump to such conclusions as feeling actual horns on her head.

That would've been preposterous, wouldn't it?

And yet she couldn't shake the feeling of horns resting upon her head, and how it felt all too real beneath her fingers. How, for some reason, it had felt right to have those resting on top of her head, even if it was simply a lapse, a delirium from stress and work. That could be the only explanation.

She sighed once more, perhaps she should ask for a day off from Lady Ningguang.

Why do I make a select few (read: all) characters suffer at some point. I need help, truly.

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

I finally managed to push this chapter out after my horrible month. November was not it, my dudes. It was horrible, too many things piling one after the other. I want nothing to do with this month anymore. Christmas season pls come sooner ✨.

In other news, we'll be back to the standard bi/weekly updates for this fic! I am not giving up on this, not when this project is just full of exploitable plot points. This will be fun!

And, I hope people noticed the sudden change in rating. Skirting over brief discussions of violence and trauma didn't feel like it garnered a bump in rating, but I still put it up just in case.

Anyways, that's all for these notes! Happy reading!

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

For some unfathomable reason, Childe did not like Dragonspine as much as he initially thought he would.

He thought that maybe, the cold of Mondstadt's southern region would be a breath of fresh air that would remind him of home, and then he'd feel ready to traverse the slippery, winding steps. Perhaps, he would find himself sinking his boot-covered feet into mountains upon mountains of pure, Mondstadtan snow and feel the same nostalgia and familiarity he usually associated with the weather. He expected to sigh in relief and anticipate the familiar goosebumps and pinpricks he felt when he sat on a patch of dead grass or perched on a rock a bit too cold, yet enjoyable nonetheless.

Except he doesn't feel that the moment he and Zhongli get out of the "rental" car they drove in. Nor does he feel that as the looming steps of Kaeya's possibly multi-million mansion come into view. He simply feels a seemingly perpetual state of dread, as if the snow beneath him would cave in and make him fall and fall and fall back into the rotting abyss. In the place where the almost dead make their living, and where the shadows of the world's brightest covered the crimes of the surface.

Zhongli's gaze fell on Childe. "Are you feeling well? We can rest back at the hotel. I'm sure Kaeya's understanding enough, and I can tell my family they can't meet with you today--"

Childe shook his head. "I'm fine, don't worry. I'm just overwhelmed. Dragonspine really wasn't what I was expecting, you know? It's colder." He reassured him, and a part of that was true. Dragonspine was colder than Snezhnaya, but it wasn't because of the climate.

Zhongli nodded in understanding. "I'll trust your judgement then." He said with a smile and a warm hug—it was as if Zhongli was trying to convey a "good luck" and "you'll be fine" through his embrace. His hugs usually gave him more comfort than his kisses, and Zhongli made great use of this fact.

Childe grinned at him, eyes closed and crinkled. If Zhongli noticed the rather tense lines on his lips, he did not comment on it. Knowing Zhongli, he would associate them with nervous jitters than Childe fearing something as *harmless* as snow. That was probably the furthest thing that would cross Zhongli's mind, not when he was Snezhnayan born and raised. "See you later, love."

Archon's above, Childe was acting *sappy*. Being with Zhongli had certainly changed the way he viewed partings, regardless of their length. Farewells felt more like a reassurance than they were a finality when he was around Zhongli, and that was a pleasant feeling to revel in. Zhongli squeezed his shoulder reassuringly once more before he was content with leaving Childe's evidently anxious self.

Zhongli bid Childe goodbye before entering the car. The ginger watched Zhongli, waving to the man in the driver's seat before watching him drive away from the snowy boulevard, the sleek red car driving away until it was out of his periphery. Childe sighed as he stood in front of the massive gates to Kaeya's home, staring at the twirling, golden inscriptions on the fence gates. They were written in ancient Khaenri'ahn, Childe absently realised as a familiar letter caught his attention.

(Alberich. The gate had Alberich written into it in gold. It was jarring to see ancient Khaenri'ahn in plain sight, especially since the script had only ever been used back in the Abyss. Was it really such a coincidence that Kaeya ended up living in a place with his old surname inscribed into it?)

From what he remembered from Kaeya, he'd apparently managed to snag this place after his adoptive father died, him and his adoptive brother agreeing that Kaeya would be much better away from the Ragvindr Manor in the hub of Windwail Highland. It was a win for everybody, Kaeya could live here with his partners, who were Alchemists stationed in Dragonspine, and Diluc could run the winery in peace—though Childe knew there was more to it than just Diluc worrying over Kaeya consuming half the winery's stock.

He turned around and adjusted his sleeves before ringing the bell.

He simply had to wait for five, measly seconds before Kaeya, in all his revealing, annoyingly overbearing glory, came bolting out of the door, a feathered boa wrapped around his shoulders, effectively scaring the shit out of Childe.

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Unlike Childe's relationship with Lumine, he had known Kaeya way, way back.

They were both children then—Childe, who had been kidnapped by some guy named R-something, and Kaeya, a submissive, quiet child who had been around long enough to gain the favour of the higher-ups— and they were extremely terrified of their circumstances. One moment, Childe was running by the coast, a bucket of freshly caught fish in hand, the next, he had been knocked out and brought to a place Childe had never even thought existed.

The Abyss, that was what they had called that wretched place. A place for sinners, a place for the weak to become assholes, a culmination of all the world's faults and failures. The existence of the Abyss was pretty much proof of how lacking Teyvat's legal system was. It could quite literally be the biggest legal failure, considering how most of the Abyss' transactions were with people in the wealthiest sphere of the continent —like that Rhinedottir from the recently reestablished Khaenri'ah. When he had to do a diplomatic visit to the recently freed Khaenri'ah, it took every fibre in Childe's being to not freeze and shrivel into a mess on the ground.

It was hard to think of Kaeya without the memories of their accursed three months in the Abyss lingering right behind him, and Childe supposed that Kaeya associated Childe's existence with the Abyss as well. They had been together through most of that after all, the blood on his hands back then was shared with two—previously three— sets of hands.

Memories of the Abyss then mingled with the images of Skirk, of a girl just a few years older than Ajax and Kaeya. He remembered the expert way she'd wield a gun, and how she'd taught Childe and Kaeya how to properly hold a gun. He remembered hushed whispers about the don's son, and then he'd look to Skirk and only see pure horror. He remembered the mask that hid most of her face, the curved inked smile and the diamond patterns that littered the mask. Everything was covered, except for a portion near her left eye, which had been tattooed charcoal black.

He distinctly remembered that Kaeya's had been inked black too, and Childe shuddered when he knew distinctly why both Kaeya and Skirk had those —and why he didn't. Childe glanced at the eyepatch that covered Kaeya's eye.

"It looks good, right? Albedo managed to fix it up a bit. Sucrose embroidered the pattern, it's amazing what they can do." Kaeya admitted rather softly, fingers skirting over the elegantly embossed thread. He remembered when Kaeya's eye was covered with medical patches rather than soft silk. Now, it seemed to Childe that Kaeya didn't mind his patches as much as he did before.

Sucrose and Albedo must be miracle workers.

Childe smiled as he plopped down onto the couch, the faux fur linen lining tickling the exposed expanse of his nape. "I can't believe that after all these years, you'd end up here, in Dragonspine, with people you've committed yourself to. You basically threw away the chance of ever leaving Mondstadt by staying here."

Kaeya rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I never really pictured myself as the guy who'd settle in Mondstadt's mini Snezhnaya." He admitted, earning a snort from Childe. "But that doesn't mean that it was impossible for me to ever think of settling down like this." Kaeya smiled, the quirk of his lips genuine and relaxed, unlike the flirtatious smiles and seductive smirks he'd try to send to people back in their college days.

"You look happier," Childe noted thoughtfully. Kaeya had finally made peace with himself. He could feel it from the welcoming atmosphere of his home, he could feel it from the smile he held for the ones beholden to him, he could see it from the photographs and paintings and



flowers that littered the house turned home. Kaeya had found the happiness he was robbed of for many years. Good for him.

“And you aren’t acting like an asshole.” Kaeya teased, knowing full well Childe wouldn’t take offence to his jokes. Childe merely scoffed.

“Things change.” He muttered, making Kaeya snort. It was ungraceful, something that Kaeya had no intention of keeping hidden.

“Yeah, from what I’ve heard from Lumine, you’ve got yourself a boyfriend. See, you aren’t so hopeless after all.” Kaeya’s voice trembled with laughter as he dodged a pillow aimed at his head, the poor, hapless pillow falling on the floor with an unceremonious thud. He snickered at Childe’s flustered face.

“Oh fuck you-” Childe wheezed, and the feeling of dread he’d felt a few hours prior replaced with the familiarity of being around a friend.

Kaeya sauntered and plopped into the love seat beside him. Head propping up into his hand as he leaned on the armchair. “So, tell me, is this boyfriend the reason you’re here in the east?” The glint in Kaeya’s eyes was enough of a tell to Childe. His eyes were practically burning holes into Childe’s being.

When Childe nodded, Kaeya scoffed. “I’ve been trying to get you to visit me for years and you keep telling me you’re on some “diplomatic” trip across the sea or something, meanwhile all he has to do is hold your hand and suddenly you’re here.” Kaeya’s intentions with his words were as clear as day, the unspoken “You’ve got it bad.”

Childe pursed his lips into a thin line. “Actually, I’m here because it’s Lumine’s wedding. Apparently, Lumine was going to send me an invite if Zhongli hadn’t brought me as his date already.” He smiled. “Zhongli is the best man to Lumine’s fiancé. Small world.”

An incredulous silence washed over the two of them, Kaeya raising a brow at Childe, mouth agape. Childe merely shrugged.

The noise that came out of Kaeya was a mix of a gasp and a sigh, all combined into a squeaky cracked sputter. “Small world my ass Childe! Why didn’t you tell me you’re boyfriend was Rex *fucking* Lapis!”

Childe blinked, and Kaeya groaned.

“I’m sorry, he’s *who* ?”

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Childe had to stop himself from keeling over as Kaeya bombarded him with information that was supposedly “common knowledge”. The moment Childe showed confusion towards his boyfriend being the “Rex Lapis”—because really, Zhongli? Mr My Funeral Cheque can’t support my lavish spending habits? Nope. —Kaeya had gone on a roll. He was relishing in Childe’s stupidity, as he had gracefully put it, and had begun to unceremoniously drop insider info to the poor ginger.

“How did you not know??” Kaeya exasperatedly asked, running his hands through his hair in frustration as he rummaged around his closet, trying to find a suit that would make Childe less like a “potential threat” and more of a “good impression”. If Childe came to the Golden House in his *uniform* of all things, he wouldn’t even be able to set foot within the road to it.

Childe shrugged. “The man’s used my wallet more than he’s used his.” He rolled his eyes. “Besides, Zhongli skirts over the topic of finances. He doesn’t really care for that as much. I used to think he was simply being naive with what he’s doing but now...” Well, at least Childe had an explanation for his lover’s extravagant spending habits.

Kaeya groaned. “You should’ve known, Childe. Your boyfriend is probably one of the most influential people alive. You’ve been to every corner of the globe because of your job, and you somehow don’t realise your own boyfriend’s status.” He hastily pulled a red suit from his wardrobe, grabbing the corresponding dress shirt beside it. He pointed at Childe’s clothing. Off-white pants, a lack of any “proper” (read: formal-casual) wear, and what were those shoes! Childe would’ve entered the wolves looking more like a fraud. “The. Rex. Lapis.”

“Alright, I admit I’m stupid for not realising it sooner.” Childe sighed, giving in and letting Kaeya hear what he wanted. Kaeya nodded at that, mumbling a “*no shit*” beneath his breath. Truly, this was quite the oversight on his part. How did he learn more about his boyfriend’s heritage through his friend than he did his actual boyfriend? He was usually one to say that heritage and past didn’t matter—it still didn’t, one’s background barely never meant anything to Childe— but Zhongli could’ve at least told him that the grave he’d dug himself into would throw a slew of possible political and international problems.

Kaeya sighed. “At least, now, you aren’t as underprepared as you originally were. Thank fuck you insisted on coming here instead of speeding away to the Golden House immediately. Archon knows what would’ve happened had you shown up in your get up.” He shoved the outfit he had promptly thrown together for Childe into his arms.

Childe narrowed his eyes at that. “What’s wrong with the diplomatic suit?”

Kaeya looked taken aback by Childe’s utter lack of self-awareness, or maybe it was a Harbinger thing. How did one not realise how wrong it was to show up at a gathering looking like you just clocked out for the day. “Everything is wrong with the suit, Childe.” He started unwaveringly. “You’re going to his house to meet the parents, not sign a trade agreement.” He unceremoniously shoved the suit into Childe’s hands, a smirk on his face.

“Now try that on, lover boy. If this doesn’t work on you, then we’ll find the one that does.”

Childe sighed. This was going to be a long afternoon.

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Ganyu marvelled at the grand architecture of the Golden House, just as she had done time and time again in the times when Madame Ping had requested for her presence. The arching columns and golden lustre walls bore upon the proud fruits of generations upon generations of hard work, each to make the next of kin substantially more fruitful than the last. The gardens and ponds that eclipsed the drive to the manor were ethereal as if the god of dendro had come to grace the nature that touched the Golden House’s vicinity.

In her periphery, she could see the glaze lilies, nearly in full bloom, simply needing the sonnet of old to open the periwinkle petals in a wave of whimsical tones.

“Ganyu, thank you for coming here on such short notice.” Madame Ping began, her voice soft and welcoming. She had been seated in her gardens, seated in one of the numerous benches that the gardens possessed. She gently patted the spot beside her. “Come here, sit, there’s much we must discuss.”

Ganyu sat in front of her with aching familiarity. She had forgotten when exactly Madame Ping had become something similar to a grandmother to her, but she was quite glad about the support the older woman had given Ganyu all throughout her life. Some called it favouritism, and some detested her for being able to gain the respect of the “Keeper of the Bell”, but she knew full well that whatever Madame Ping was providing her, it wasn’t to benefit her career.

“Of course, Ah ma, I would never turn down an invitation from you,” Ganyu admitted. She respected her too much to refuse. Ping nodded, setting down a cup of tea for Ganyu. The golden lined china teapot glinted beneath the soft glow of the Liyuen afternoon. Their place in the gardens felt oddly picturesque in that aspect, crowned beneath sunlight and caped by the canopy of Cuihua and Ginkgo trees.

At the edge of her vision, she swears she sees a burst of bright, crystalised shards of watery blue.

She focuses on the sound, her eyes trailing to that spot on the roof hidden behind the thick canopy of golden leaves. She swore she had seen something akin to a snake burst from behind her, a jittering and maniacal laugh followed by the settling of rubble. She swore she had seen water move upwards, which shouldn’t have been possible, considering gravity existed and there certainly wasn’t anything that would jet water upwards from the roof of the house of the Adepti.

“Ganyu? Is there something wrong?” Madame Ping had stopped pouring herself her own serving in favour of checking on her. The older woman patiently waited for Ganyu’s response, seemingly content with allowing her tea to sit and cool for a while.

Ganyu hastily shook her head. “It’s nothing, Ah Ma...I just thought I’d heard something,” She began gingerly, only half-shaken from her stupor. “The sparrows are quite loud when they

wish to be, no?” She said with a smile

Madame Ping sighed. “You need not hide anything from me, Ganyu. I know you are simply being considerate, but you should know better than to smile at me emptily.” Her words felt surprisingly warm as if the tea had invaded her way of speech and all her words had become flowery elder, all-knowing script.

She averted her gaze from Madame Ping. “I apologise, I have just been feeling rather out of sorts these past few days. Troubling images have been filling my mind since-”

“Since you found out my grandson was in cohorts with that Harbinger, I presume?” Madame Ping finished for her, Ganyu falling silent as the words were stolen from her. She was aware that Madame Ping was a master conversationalist and usually knew what words to fit to give both parties a chance to speak their mind, however, Ganyu was well aware that knowing what the person before you wished to say was not part of being social.

It felt as if Madame Ping had read her mind.

Ganyu nodded, dumbfounded. Madame Ping had simply smiled at her, gently taking Ganyu’s hands into hers. “It relieves me so that you can be honest with me, and for good reason too.” She traces a sigil into Ganyu’s palm with her pointer finger, the insignia emanating a faint glow that wasn’t just a trick of the light. “I invited you here for a chance to discuss these very visions that you are experiencing. I do apologise, my child, if my sudden knowledge of your predicament bothers you to an extent.”

Madame Ping’s smile went from sympathetic to empathetic in a matter of seconds. The glowing sigil on Ganyu’s palm flickered to the beat of her heart, and she couldn’t help but curiously trace over the lines. “For the past few days, I thought I’ve been dissociating due to the sudden workload the Qixing received. The heavily anticipated Yaksha and Viatrix wedding created quite the riot in the foreign affairs and tourism sector, after all. But then...”

Ganyu vividly remembered Guizhong, eroding away as she sat at her desk, dust on the floor, golden specks of motes glimmering. Bloodied and trampled glaze lilies laid at her feet, along with billowing silken leaves and tattered, burnt emblems and books. She stared at Guizhong and saw the goddess she was named after, of a woman of knowledge and compassion, not the Guizhong that held her head high as one of the integral parts of Liyue’s Seven Stars.

Ganyu's voice failed her as the haunting image of a dying Guizhong filled her vision. She had been seeing several unusual things, and it honestly would've been easier to place the blame on stress and sleep deprivation. However, Ganyu was not granted such ignorance. Instead, it seems fate had wished for her to confront this truth with Madame Ping.

Madame Ping knew the look on Ganyu's face and carefully wove her words. "I usually see war-torn versions of the people I've cherished." Madame Ping began, her eyes on the cup of tea on the jade plated table. "I've seen my son with the horns of a Stag, Guizhong in the form of a fading, shelled husk, you in the form of Qilin, Venti as a wisp —nearly a cherub, and..." Her voice had lowered by volumes, heavily disturbed by the words that were about to leave her mouth. "I've seen my beloved grandson wear a crown of draconic horns."

Ganyu froze, the words Madame Ping had uttered inciting upon the parallels she had already suspected. It was impossible, by all logical means, such parallels should not even exist. However, to cite such a coincidence was not only naive but cowardly. What fool refused to see the truth in front of them? Ganyu may have been sceptical of this, but she knew it was a better explanation for the sigils and visions than anything else her brain could offer.

Hesitating, she managed to choke a few words out of her. "Ah ma, you can't be saying that..."

Madame Ping lowered her gaze. "I'm afraid so, my dear. I'm afraid this is set in stone."

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Kaeya gaped at the sight of the architectural wonder in front of him.

"It's a fucking palace. It's a multimillion, time eternal palace." Kaeya had said in mute awe, slowing down as he neared the bridge. "And your boyfriend decided to leave those walls and return to it with you in tow. Childe, do you have any idea what you just did?" Kaeya briefly glanced at his friend, who had been fidgeting with his suit the entire ride. Childe only rolled his eyes.

After multiple changes, they had agreed that the suit Childe was wearing looked stunning on him. Just the right shade of cool grey, adorned with blue and red embellishments that

emphasized his stature, with a low, thin, V-shaped collar, the top buttons purposefully placed a few inches below the chest. It was revealing, in a sense that it showed the slightest slivers of his toned chest, but not enough to be branded as an attention seeker, or heaven forbid a gold digger. To make things even better, Kaeya had managed to convince Childe to wear the corset, and Childe wasn't regretting it, because holy shit it made it work so much better. The pants matched the suit, and overall, Childe didn't completely regret his and Kaeya's fashion skirmish.

"I don't know what I just started, but I'm planning on seeing it through," Childe replied, eyes falling on the massive gates that separated the place from the rest of the world. He had thought that Ningguang's Jade Chamber was already impressive, the floating chamber a technological marvel and a reminder of Liyue's wealth, but it paled in comparison to the massive expanse of land that the Golden House had. Just goes to show that some things can't be outdone.

Kaeya sighed. "It'll do you some good to make some friends. You need to have a strong defence."

"How is friendship a strong defence?" Childe had blurted out rather foolishly.

Kaeya scoffed. "Childe, you know better than anyone what friendships can do in the long run. You, me and Lumine being friends can already improve your alarmingly shitty reputation."

"My reputation is *that* shitty?" Wouldn't be the first time, in all honesty. When he had started out at the Fatui, he wasn't well-received due to his seaside countryside heritage. The classism—and ageism—had been pretty prevalent for most of his life, especially during the adjustment period of his sudden promotion to Harbinger. If he was being honest, the sheer prejudice he experienced in his days in the lower ranks was probably the reason he was just a tad bit humbler than his other colleagues. Just a tad, he enjoyed spoiling the people he loved with the money he earned, after all.

"To this specific group of people, anyone beyond the Mondstadt-Liyue borders is below them. The rest of the world views you as a Harbinger, they see you as a domesticated puppy. Getting them to change their opinion matters, Childe. It matters so much that foreign relations hinge on it." Kaeya slowed down as the car turned into the entrance, the massive u-shaped foyer adorned with lanterns welcoming them with its faint golden-orange glow.

“Ah, we’re here. Good luck to you, Childe. This is probably the first time in your life you’re going to need it.” Childe frowned at that. Thanks for the boost of confidence, Kaeya. He truly appreciated the love and support. Glad to know he could quite literally be on the last legs of his career because of a goddamn dinner party. Kaeya squeezed his shoulder. “If it’s any consolation, Lady Guizhong is a saint to anyone except her brother, and Madame Ping isn’t as much of a stickler as she is believed to be.”

Childe deadpans at him as the car comes to a halt right in front of the doors. “You should stay and do damage control.”

“Oh, I’m way ahead of you, Childe. Why do you think I’m dressed like this?” He pointed to himself, wearing a navy blue suit, a sash draped from the chest and continuing behind him. Not one of Kaeya’s usual styles, but he had to admit that his friend made it work. “Now run along, you have a prince waiting for you.” He teased Childe, to which Childe only dignified with a roll of his eyes. He had been doing that much more ever since he entered Childe’s company, and they had only been together for a handful of hours.

Childe pursed his lips, inhaling deeply before opening the car door. Stepping out and turning around to face the front doors. His gaze scales the walls of the Golden Palace, the traditional Liyuen abode was absolutely surreal, ancient in a way Childe couldn’t put into words. It was as if he had entered a fragment in time, forever frozen and unshaken.

“Baobei.”

And just like that Childe’s world suddenly zeroed in on his god-like boyfriend, each step towards Childe grounding him. He probably looked like a gaping fish and Kaeya would probably send photos to Lumine, but right now, the possible embarrassment was overshadowed by his lover. Zhongli, who usually dressed in coats with fine lapels and vests woven with the finest of silk, had none of those extra layers on. Instead, he had worn a simple deep black suit, top buttons of the undershirt undone, no tie in sight. His hair was pulled into an immaculate half-bun, adorned with an intricate crown of geometrical geo sigils, the rest of his hair swaying behind him.

“And just when I thought you couldn’t surprise me anymore, you greet me like this. ‘Li, you are not good for my heart.’” He chuckled as he pulled his boyfriend into a hug, angling his



head to press a rather chaste kiss on his lips. The two of them weren't usually this affectionate in public, but he couldn't help it. Zhongli was stunning, divine, and Childe wanted to know what he did for Zhongli to look his way and say "*Yup, that's the one.*" He was hopelessly smitten.

Zhongli chuckled, and Childe felt himself transcend. Zhongli's chuckles and laughs warmed his heart. "I am quite certain you look more captivating than I am." He broke from the hug, opting to lock their arms together instead, but not before pressing a kiss to his hand. Childe could practically hear Kaeya and Lumine's endless jeers by the end of this, but fuck their taunts, he had Zhongli, and that was enough.

"Now then, shall we?" Zhongli asked Childe, his hair framing his face just right that Childe could pretty much see a halo on the man. Had he fallen in love with an angel? Was that the reason?

Childe nodded, taking the first step in sync with Zhongli. "We shall."

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Ganyu's gaze falls on Childe on accident. Truly, she had only gone out to the balcony to speak to Keqing, who had been complaining all about the different arrogant guests they had come across during the party. She had only leaned on the balcony a bit to breathe a bit of the fresh air when she had spotted Zhongli, who had welcomed his lover. She could finally see Childe, and to her relief, she was glad that her expectations of Childe had been broken—they were already broken when Xiao admitted rather reluctantly that the man was definitely smitten. Most of them hadn't believed what Childe had said then, and had continued to call Childe uncouth, arrogant, and seemingly against tradition—as if they weren't either, hypocrites, they all were—yet all she can see is reverence and respect in his stance.

Of course, that was until visions haphazardly attacked her, and next thing Ganyu knew she could see a bruised narwhal, bloodied water, the iron smell of blood. A lone horn, haphazardly torn, a mask of a jester smiling, taunting Ganyu and-

"Hey, Ganyu? You al- Oh, I see Zhongli really did invite his lover. Lady Liuyun will be so pissed." Keqing muttered beside her, placing a hand on Ganyu's shoulder. "I must say that

Zhongli must really like the guy if he invited him here. Nothing says “I love you more” than meeting the parents, or something.” Keqing rolled her eyes, before lightly shaking Ganyu.

When Ganyu did not respond, Keqing frowned. “Hey, did you see anything concerning? Should we be barricading the Golden Palace? Is this because of the-” Keqing stopped her rambling when she heard Ganyu sigh.

“It’s nothing, Yuheng. I’m just tired. We’ve been swamped with work and now we have to entertain more people.” She lied offhandedly, waving her off.

“I told you to rest, Ganyu. You’ve garnered 15 paid leaves ever since you became our Emissary and you still haven’t used one. After this, I’m going to force you to rest.” Keqing sighed, settling beside Ganyu. “You deserve it, Ganyu. You work too hard.”

Ganyu shook her head, running her hand through her hair. “I’m fine, Yuheng. I just thought I saw something. Let’s get back to what we were originally going to discuss.”

The Yuheng pursed her lips, finally dropping the subject. She crossed her arms. “Alright, if you say so. Let’s bury down one topic with another, potentially unsettling one.” She announced.

Ganyu could barely hear the words that Keqing was saying, her mind focused on Childe. A narwhal had been the symbol for the Snezhnayan warrior of old, Ajax, the first Tartaglia. It was by no coincidence that Childe held the title, and it was by no mere coincidence that she’d see slivers of an ancient being in a man that had managed to warm Zhongli’s heart.

If Madame Ping had seen a dragon in Zhongli, well, that would explain why Childe held a narwhal. This was but a cruel twist of fate set by Celestia, leaving many, many others to rot in the hellish loop of this amalgamated past-present back and forth. What roles everyone took in the grand scheme of things no longer mattered now that the ill-fated Dragon and narwhal have reunited. Monoceros Caeli and Vago Mundo. Madame Ping might faint at the sight.

After all, where phoenixes became a symbol of auspiciousness, narwhal’s bore freedom, and the ever lingering omen of death.

"Anyway's as I was saying." Keqing lowered her voice, whispering into Ganyu's ears. "I have reason to believe Osial is having an affair with Azhdaha."

Ganyu's headache worsens.

## Chapter End Notes

### **A couple extra notes!!**

1.) Viatrix is the name of Lumine's Constellation. Viator is the name of Aether's!

2.) The Abyss I'm describing for this fic can be comparable to Fire Emblem: Three Houses' Abyss. The Abyss is the Underground, the Black Market of sorts, and it was too good of an opportunity to pass out on. Of course, unlike in Fire Emblem, my Abyss isn't actually underground, but can actually be found in the remote remnants of Khaenri'ah's unrehabilitated parts.

-For even better visualisation, you could say my version of the Modern Abyss is a meld of Fire Emblem's with just a hint of Meteor City Dystopia from Hunter x Hunter.

3.) Mondstadt and Liyue's good relations are parallels to Morax and Barbatos, who chose unity and understanding in leading their people. It is not unusual to find Liyue's in Mondstadt and vice-versa.

4.) Ganyu and Madame Ping are the only people thus far that have seen visions. This is not to be confused with elemental visions, which are elemental manifestations. I promise you these will appear later on.

That's all the notes I have for now! Thanks again for reading!

**Here are a few notes on who's related to who:**

1. Zhongli & Guizhong and Azhdaha are cousins.
  - Zhongli is an only child.
  - Guizhong and Azhdaha are siblings.
2. Zhongli is Xiao's best friend.
3. Childe knows Lumine from college, and yes, Lumine has babysat Teucer.
4. Cloud Retainer is Zhongli's mother, I'm pretty sure you can guess who the grandmother is lol
5. Havria's Guizhong and Azhdaha's parent, there's that.
5. Hu Tao and Zhongli have a good relationship, it's just that Zhongli wants a break from Hu tao's pranks and coffin advertisements.
6. Is Xiao done with this? Yes, yes he is. He is done with the way Zhongli's family was slowly falling apart.
7. Venti and Baizhu argue as if their lives depend on it, surprisingly it was due to their similarities! Changsheng loves to get involved.

Thanks so much for reading the biggest brain rot I ever had to house!

Here's my [Tumblr](#) if you want to vibe with me in angst and shitposts,,

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!