

# Metamorphosis (with Satoru Gojo)

Synopsis:

## **Arc One: Unwanted Gifts: Chapters 1-**

2003. On one fateful night, Ayako Nakajima becomes forcibly entangled within the web of the Zenin Clan. Soon after, she discovers the harsh reality of the world she lives in and the Zenin Clan, a patriarchal clan filled with dated and oppressive traditions. Alongside this revelation, she learns the reason behind the chaos she now finds herself in: Satoru Gojo. With the confrontation between her and the Zenin brewing, Ayako begins to unravel the secrets of her past and most importantly, learns to confront her present.

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## Chapter One: Unwanted Gifts: the drums of the heart

*August 19, 2003*

To say that everything went well that day is horribly wrong and completely misguided. A month after her birthday, Ayako Nakajima was clueless to the future that awaited her.

She stood alone in the kitchen, doing day-to-day chores so her mother, Suzume, didn't have to. Although she had just turned 13, helping her mother around her house made her feel much more mature and older than she was. But deep down, she knew that she *was* still a child and shouldn't have this much responsibility. *It's all her fault anyway.*

Disregarding her thoughts, Ayako swiped away at the gathering dust on the countertops. Her mother had told her to clean the house for the guests that were going to stay for dinner. Who those guests were was not known to Ayako. Sweat gathered across her forehead and throughout her blonde hair as she diligently worked at the dust.

She continued dusting, slowly walking around the countertops and then moving to the various other shelves around her mother's house. It was overly tedious and unnecessary, but her mother considered it necessary for their guests who were to arrive soon.

As she wiped the mahogany brown shelf clean, she heard the front door slide open behind her. She stayed diligent and kept working, resisting the urge to turn around. She knew it could only be her mother but a part of her really wanted to see for herself.

"Ayako, go to your room and stay there until the sun rises."

The flat, monotone voice didn't surprise Ayako. These guests were really causing a ruckus in her daily routine. Her daily chores had doubled, including dusting, mopping, and overall cleaning her mother's house. It was an annoyance but unfortunately not one she could speak out against.

"Mom, I haven't even finished yet." Ayako said, turning from the almost clean shelf to Suzume who stood behind her. With a short glance, Ayako looked her up and down and realized how big this actually was.

For once, her mother was not dressed casually but in a soft, violet kimono. She had way too much makeup applied, her lips being stained red, and her blonde hair was braided into a bun. Ayako would even call her pretty if she wasn't her mother. This recent look was a violent clash with the typical image of her mother.

"Don't talk back to me, Ayako! Go to your room now and go to bed at once. I don't have time for your insolence; the guests will arrive soon."

Ayako flinched at the tone in her mother's voice. Although it was a common tone that she heard way too much to be normal, but it still pierced her heart every single time. Her eyes trailed down to the wood floors and were held down.

She nodded and shuffled to her room. The door slid shut behind her and she slid down to the floor with her back against the door. Hidden underneath her longer than usual bangs, tears stained her cheeks like ink on white parchment. She kept her cries quiet, never loud enough to disturb the peace of her mother's home.

She quickly wiped away the tears as fast as she could. She didn't want to risk the chance of her mother walking in and seeing them. After the yelling Ayako didn't think she could take anything else and not lose her mind.

Surprisingly, only a few minutes later, she heard voices from the main room of the house. She could barely make out any of their words, but she knew the visitors were male. She assumed there were at least two of them from how the conversation sounded. Luckily, her door blocked out the sound enough that the voices were indecipherable to her.

She gripped her white dress as she tried to eavesdrop, but if she wanted to hear anything, she would have to be outside her room. Ayako scoffed as she realized that would never happen. Her room was directly connected to the main area, and she would be seen instantly. It was a lost cause to eavesdrop. She knew she should be in bed already anyway. It was what her mother ordered of her.

Suddenly, she heard one of the men begin walking over to the hallway her room sat off in. Ayako quickly, albeit silently, rushed into her closet and left the door cracked, enough to see but not enough to be seen. It was a practiced trait, but she was slowly growing out of hiding and instead starting to face her demons.

Her door slid open, and the man entered. Ayako's eyes quickly scanned him thoroughly. Short dark hair and a clean-shaven face. He was definitely tall, almost reaching the height of the doorframe. She watched as his eyes scanned the room.

"Oh Suzume, you didn't tell me you had another guest." The man said, staring directly at one of her dresses that was hanging out of her clothes basket. *Dammit, she'll get on my ass for that; it's improper to be that untidy.*

Ayako watched as her mother quickly rushed in front of the man and investigated the room as well. She watched the obvious shock fill her face at her disappearing act.

"Well, Zenin-san, I... she's my friend's daughter. She's been staying since her mother died. I wanted to be charitable to a lost cause." Ayako watched her mother speak quickly. It was painfully obvious it was a lie. Maybe because I've lived with her my whole life. *But... Zenin-san... Who are you?*

Ayako saw as he wandered into the room, easily pushing past her mother. He quickly grabbed one of the picture frames off her wall and looked intensely at it. It was a picture from her mother's thirtieth birthday. Her mother had forced it to be hung, with the supposed intent of showing that they had a good relationship. *Apparently, it isn't something that can be shown through actions but rather objects.*

"Cute girl. You wouldn't happen to know where she is now, would you?" The man asked, dropping the frame to the ground and looking towards her mother. The frame shattered on the wood floor, making Suzume flinch.

“She uh.. left for a friend’s house.”

The man, Zenin-san, shook his head and looked towards the closet. His eyes suddenly found Ayako’s in the small crack she could see through. She quickly dodged away from the crack, hoping he didn’t see her, but she knew it was probably too late.

“Don’t lie, especially when I can sense her cursed energy.”

Ayako gasped at his words. *Cursed energy? What is that?* She tried to inch further back into her closet, but it wasn’t deeper than a few inches. Her hands reached onto the door and held it closed.

The man began slowly walking towards the closet. Ayako couldn’t see outside anymore but she could hear her mother having a scuffle with the man. For every bit of connection they had, Ayako didn’t feel any guilt for leaving her out there. There was no remorse within her.

Ayako felt a loud slam and then the footsteps toward the door began again. She felt the force of his hand on the handle from the other side and she gasped at his strength. Even with all her force, the door slammed open without a challenge. Without the door to lean on, Ayako fell forward towards the man.

He quickly sidestepped as she fell. Luckily, she caught her footing and looked around the room. Her eyes went as wide as saucers as she found her mother lying on the floor a few feet away. Her nose was bloody, and her makeup was ruined by her newly acquired tears. It was another fresh look that she had never seen on her mother. *Fear.*

Ayako felt the man grip her hands as he stared directly at her. She shook as he stared at her entire being; she felt his intense strength and she couldn’t help but feel the same as her mother. It was something she always felt in her mother’s house, but this time, she wasn’t afraid of being beaten, she was afraid of death.

“What kind of thing are you?” The man asked as one of his hands reached up to her cheek. She tried to turn away, but she couldn’t escape the huge hand. She felt the gloved hand grip her cheek and his thumb rubbed circles into her skin. It felt disgusting, and she couldn’t help but look away as usual.

The fear had overtaken her ability to speak. That fear turned her stoic. That fear turned her into a statue. Flashes from her past couldn’t help but appear. *Her mother’s soft hand slapping across her cheek.* Even with just a subtle touch, her cheek bloomed in pain. A sore ache filled her face, but as earlier, she stayed silent and endured. It was all she could do, and Ayako knew it.

She felt his thumb reach down toward her lips and she recoiled back, trying to avoid it but his hand held her close. She could almost envision the mother of her past whipping her cheek with her hand repeatedly. That rough memory seemed so close now. It flashed a deep red in her head. Her breathing turned heavy at the subtle pressure of the thumb on her lips.

“Zenin-san, stop it! Leave Ayako alone!” A weak whisper came from Ayako’s side. Ayako’s eyes went impossibly wide at the shout. Her eyes looked to the side and saw her mother. For the first time in her life, Ayako saw an emotion she’d never thought she’d see. *Regret.*

The thumb left her lips and the man let go of her hands. Ayako quickly put space between her and the man. She lingered near the side of her mother. Although painful memories of her mother constantly flowed into her head like a waterfall, she was like a lighthouse in the encapsulating dark that she couldn't ignore.

"So, her name's Ayako. Hmmm... Can't you take a little joke, Suzume?" A voice softly said from behind her. She jumped and looked towards her door. Another man stood there smirking. The same short dark hair stood present on his grinning face. His eyes were held with lust as he looked Ayako up and down. She felt her stomach roil in disgust just by being in the presence of the man.

"So, *Ayako's* the package?" The man leaning on the doorframe continued. She hated the sound of her name coming out of his mouth. Ayako heard a grunt of approval from Zenin-san behind her. She quietly stepped backwards toward the wall furthest from all of them. She put as much distance between her and them as she could, but within her small room, it was practically impossible.

Her voice felt so far from her as her eyes danced between the two men. Inside her head, she could hear a siren. It was a gut instinct so prevalent inside her calling for her to stay far away from them. All she could feel was danger, and it shouted desperately at her to run as far and as fast as she could.

Her eyes trailed down to her weak mother on the floor.

"Please, Zenin-san, you don't have to be so-"

"We aren't being rude, Suzume. She's Zenin Clan property, she belongs to the clan, and we are here to retrieve her. You should know this already; you *know* who her father is."

Ayako watched as her mother used up all the willpower inside of her to stand between her and the Zenin men. Her hands formed fists in front of her and she quickly shifted into a stance that seemed closer to Taekwondo than anything Japanese. It felt almost empowering how her mother finally seemed to actually love her. To *want* to protect her.

"She's mine, Zenin-san. You won't be taking her."

The sudden influx of importance filled Ayako. A newly lit fire was burning deeply within her. She felt empowered by more than just her own will. She felt the will of her mother flowing throughout her, enough that her eyes looked up onto the Zenin men in her room without fear.

"She belongs to the Zenin Clan, Suzume. You knew this when you laid with him."

Suzume shook her head rapidly. She lost her fighting stance as Ayako watched an emotion possess her fully.

"I didn't know shit! He lied to me like he always does. You should know that he would never tell me something as complicated as this back then," she desperately shouted, waving her hands around. Ayako thought back on her father, and the mystery once again threatened to take over her.

Recently, it dawned on Ayako that she couldn't remember practically anything from her childhood. Ayako blamed it on infantile amnesia, so it wasn't like she'd remember her father, but from the way they kept talking, he was a lot more important than she thought. She couldn't remember his

name, his face, or anything about him. But after this event, she knew he must be related to these Zenin people, biological or not. He had to be, or this 'belonging to the clan' talk wouldn't make any sense.

"It honestly doesn't matter what you know. You won't be a problem after today." The man near the closet said. He picked up a vase from Ayako's bedside table and dumped the insides out onto the wooden floors. The sunflowers inside fell slowly to the floor and were quickly squashed by the man's feet.

"Last chance, Suzume. Back down or else." He said, his right hand holding the vase high into the air. As if out of a fantasy novel, a blue aura erupted out of the vase and glowed brightly. Ayako gasped at what she was seeing. The aura quickly filled the room and summoned pressure onto Ayako and Suzume.

A deep feeling of obedience quickly fell onto Ayako. It filled her brain and almost pushed her down onto her knees. She could tell this pressure wasn't mental, it was physical. Whatever this aura and pressure was, it was definitely real. Relying only on her own willpower, she stayed strong and stood up as straight as she could under its power.

Ayako quickly saw her mother do the same and shake her head. The man smirked and threw the vase up high into the air. Ayako quickly saw the blue aura triple in its amount and power. Right as the vase reached its peak, the man jumped and kicked the vase with the side of his foot towards them. The vase flew faster than her eyes could keep up with and next, she heard a big boom right beside her left ear.

The first thing she noticed after the kick was that her mother had just vanished instantly. One second, she was there, and the next, she was gone. A loud crash erupted from behind her, causing her head to snap back towards the noise.

Ayako's eyes widened in shock as she surveyed the scene before her. A large, jagged hole had been torn through the wall, and a pile of shattered bricks and pieces of wood lay strewn about the room. Through it, Ayako could see her mother lying there motionless amidst the destruction. Bright red blood oozed from her wounds and pooled around her body, and Ayako felt a loud scream rise up from her throat at the sight. Her heart pounded rapidly in her chest as the realization of what happened slammed into her.

She leaped through the splintered wood and raced towards her mother. When she reached her, she stopped in horror. A thick, rough piece of wood had penetrated her mother's abdomen, pinning her to the ground. She shook as she knelt beside her mom, slowly lifting her head and meeting her gaze. In that moment, she saw an unmistakable sorrow shining through her eyes.

"Sorry," her mother barely managed to whisper out, before her eyes felt vacant. They stared off past Ayako unfocused on anything. Despite the intense feelings of hate and contempt she held for her mother, tears managed to make it past her eyes for the second time that night.

"It's her own fault then." The voice behind her caused Ayako to jump in her own skin. Her face quickly flickered to the man. He was flanked by the other man who stayed far and simply watched. This other man's arms were crossed as he frowned at the scene.

“You murdered her,” Ayako whispered as she slowly stood from her mother’s corpse. The man started laughing. Ayako was shocked at his complete lack of empathy or care. He was practically the devil.

“You murdered her!” Ayako screamed. She didn’t know where the strength to scream came from, but it erupted out of her throat and filled the room.

The man shook his head as he picked up a piece of wood that had fallen from the wall and held it up high into the air. The blue aura quickly reappeared on the piece of wood.

“Come with us without a fight and I won’t have to use my technique on you as well.”

*Technique? Cursed energy?* Ayako had no idea what was going on. She assumed that the blue aura had to be what he called cursed energy. And his technique being whatever he did to make that vase triple in its cursed energy. Ayako remembered him saying that she had cursed energy earlier, so it must be something held within a person, not something external.

So, she smirked as she realized that he must be applying his cursed energy to an object and is somehow able to triple its amount by throwing it into the air. It didn’t exactly make sense but after only seeing it once, she was intrigued to be able to understand it that much.

It happened as suddenly as her mother was getting knocked away. A deep flash of blue filled her head and she remembered. For what had been blocked in her mind for so long, she could understand now. She remembered something from her childhood.

A man with black hair who looked unsurprisingly like the men in her mother’s house. He stood in front of her in that memory holding a sword.

*“Cursed energy is born from negative emotions. You can use it to see curses and use Jujutsu. You were born to me, so that burden weighs heavier on you. I’m sorry for that.”*

Along with that core memory, others of similar nature filled her head. A pain suddenly burst from within her skull and her navel. Blood quickly traveled down her nose, flowing as fast as a waterfall.

“And I thought I’d have to attack you, but you’re weakened by just my very presence.”

Ayako reached up and wiped the blood from her nose, ignoring the man. Just by glancing at the blood, she could feel cursed energy radiating it. Just by her gut instinct, she could tell it wasn’t her blood or her cursed energy.

But she knew it shouldn’t matter too much, since she should be able to easily defeat them with her techniques. *My technique?* It was as sudden as the memories came back, they had stopped flowing in. She was cut off from her knowledge about the world around her. It was then she knew that something had cursed her, preventing her from remembering the world these Zenin came from. The world her father originated from.

Anger filled her body as cursed energy flowed passionately throughout her entire body. She flowed easily and quickly into a battle stance that was born out of habit. She didn’t have to think about it at all; it was entirely natural.

She saw the man gasp as he realized that she was preparing to fight. He quickly raised the piece of wood higher as he stared at her stoically. Her breath came out heavy as she analyzed the room. It was like she had unlocked another mind. Her brain was working harder than it ever had. As if it was running at 120 percent.

“What’s your name? I want to know the name of the man I’m about to kill,” Ayako asked, and a smirk adorned her face. Her body was surrounded in an aura of pure red. She felt so empowered. And she had never felt anything like this before, besides the new memories that sat within her head.

“Hitoshi Zenin. I think we’ll be seeing a lot of each other in the distant future.”

Ayako didn’t react to his statement; her whole mind was on ending him. She quickly dashed forward towards Hitoshi. Without thinking, cursed energy flowed down into her feet. With each step towards Hitoshi, small red drums appeared and unraveled onto the ground. Engraved on each drum was a glowing yellow sun. They were made of pure cursed energy and a figment of her Innate Technique. She didn’t know what it did, but her muscle memory told her exactly what she needed to do to kill him.

When her feet landed on each drum, a deep roar filled the room coming from each of the drums. She felt the cursed energy inside of her double with each roar that screamed around her. The sound of war drums filled her head, and she could only think about the blood flowing through Hitoshi’s head and how much she wanted to see it. She wanted to *brutally* kill him.

When she had stepped the red drums six times, she jumped into the air and her hand formed a fist, which was cloaked in her immense cursed energy driving straight towards his chest. The look of shock on Hitoshi’s face made a cruel part inside of her laugh. Although she was terribly frightened of them, she could only see red. All her inhibitions were gone and contempt towards them had taken their place.

But right before she could hit the shocked man, her entire body shuddered, and then stopped. She watched as thick blue bands maneuvered around her and held her in place. She was quickly wrapped within these cursed energy strings. She was held in the air, her feet far from reaching the floor. *Dammit, if only I wasn’t 5’6!*

The strands came from the man behind Hitoshi. She assumed these strings were his Innate Technique.

“Hitoshi, don’t stand there frozen or we’ll die!”

Hitoshi broke free from his shock and dodged backwards closer towards the other man. Ayako noticed that he stood far enough from his strings to not touch them, but close enough to be able to group up on her.

“Thanks, Masato,” Hitoshi said quietly as he stared at the mess that Ayako was in.

Ayako started wiggling in the strands. She was wrapped up for only a few seconds, but once the strings encountered her cursed energy aura, they began to melt. They quickly faded away into the air around her, and Ayako dropped to her feet.

“Dammit Masato, your technique is so weak!” Hitoshi screamed as he prepared himself to face off against the now freed Ayako.

Ayako smirked as she found the counter to Masato’s Innate Technique: contact with another’s cursed energy. It was pitiful even for their supposedly strong clan. The thought about the clan came but she had no idea what it meant. It felt like there was a person deeper in her mind that held all the answers and memories, but she was cut off from it. And this person could intertwine with her present thoughts. A frown filled her face as she attempted to remember more but she realized it was futile.

*Although... attacking did seem to bring back some old memories.*

Ayako immediately began charging the Zenin duo. This time, the drums wouldn’t form. She realized that her Innate Technique must have a limit for how much it could double her cursed energy output. It was six times at its maximum, which wasn’t a lot, but it could mean the difference between life and death.

She jumped in the air again attempting the same attack on Hitoshi. Not frozen and caught off guard as before, Hitoshi quickly dodged the left and barely touched the side of Ayako’s body. Suddenly, all her cursed energy exploded in her body. She went flying through the wall back into her bedroom.

She landed hard on the ground and rolled a few feet further. She leaned to the side to spit out multiple mouthfuls of blood. She felt sore all over and real pain bloomed across her body as well. She heard Hitoshi approaching her. She looked to see him kneeling, looking directly into her eyes.

“You’re very beautiful when you’re angry.”

Ayako suddenly felt like she was going to vomit. An intense feeling of disgust overtook all her pain. She quickly sat up and began to scoot away from Hitoshi, attempting to avoid his hand that slowly went towards her face.

Suddenly, strands of cursed energy wrapped tight around her. Ayako worked quickly to melt them away but before she could, she saw Hitoshi stepping away, throwing a pillow into the air. She gasped as she realized he was about to use his technique.

She raced to dissolve the binding pieces of Masato’s cursed energy before she was hit. She was too focused on dissolving them to even try to dodge the pillow that was racing towards her head. It collided with her, and she recoiled back into the ground. Her head knocked against the bed frame on the way down.

Hitoshi approached her unconscious body and was breathing extremely heavily. He rested his hands on his knees as he stared confused at her body. He heard Masato approach behind him.

“Did you really need to go that hard, Hitoshi? She can’t be that experienced to be able to face off against you, a grade one sorcerer?”

## Chapter Two: Unwanted Gifts: the Zenin and Satoru Gojo

*August 19, 2003*

“Did you really need to go that hard, Hitoshi? She can’t be that experienced to be able to face off against you, a grade one sorcerer?” Masato asked as he stared at Hitoshi who stood over the unconscious Ayako. Masato saw Hitoshi frown at his words but he stayed silent and stoic.

Masato knew the comment would make him angry. It was like ripping a bandaid off, it stung deeply for Hitoshi. Although it quickly faded soon after the comment. Masato knew how the Zenin Clan worked, he was a Zenin himself after all. Once Hitoshi entered Kyoto Jujutsu High, he was promoted to grade one instantly after defeating a grade two curse. Masato knew the reason for the whole debacle and the current mess, the Zenin Clan needed stronger members who wouldn’t be fodder to Gojo Satoru. Even if they are lying about the sorcerer’s strength. It’s all about appearances these days.

In his opinion, this whole thing was unnecessary and he’d rather stay home but the Clan Head ordered it. He ordered them to retrieve Ayako and bring her to the clan compound. He didn’t supply a reason for it but everyone knew the truth.

“Of course, I did. She’s really a rowdy thing. It’s what she needs.” Hitoshi said, leaning down to pick up Ayako and lifted her over his shoulder. Masato sighed at Hitoshi’s words and finally let his eyes scan her up and down. Her short, shoulder length blonde hair which obviously came from her mother. Green eyes that came from her father.

He watched as Hitoshi leaned through the hole in the wall, somehow managing to avoid the sharp edges himself and keeping Ayako from harm. He walked through the door instead. *Dumbass.*

Because of taking the longer, but much safer route, he was a few paces behind Hitoshi but it didn’t concern him. He shoved his hands in his pockets as he looked over the damage caused in the Nakajima house.

Obviously, there was the huge hole that Hitoshi had caused and then the death of Suzume. Masato really didn’t wish for her to die, he wanted to be in, grab Ayako, and leave. But Hitoshi had to walk around with his cock out, swinging it around with the full force of his overwhelming ego. He was a cookie cutter male, no real personality to call his own and it bothered Masato in a way like nothing else. Especially since he was always paired up with Hitoshi for missions.

Masato exited the house and left the door open. It was purposeful as was everything else they did. The open door alerted neighbors of a disturbance, ~~their deaths~~, and Suzume would be found dead, and Ayako would be reported missing. But soon with the help of some money, ~~bribing~~, the case would be pushed under the rug and Ayako would be dead to the world. Masato knew this cycle all too well; he’d participated too many times.

They walked through the neighborhood, taking in the rancid smell alongside the numerous amounts of trash lingering on the streets. The streetlamps had died a long time ago which left the street

only under the moonlight. Masato looked at Hitoshi who was shaking under the weight of Ayako. He saw that his knees were going to buckle soon if he didn't take a break.

"Do you want to switch off?" Masato asked, kicking a pebble off into one of the alleys between the houses around them.

"I can handle this just fine!" Hitoshi yelled, not even daring to look towards Masato.

Masato let out a *hmm*, letting the conversation go silent. They walked in silence as Masato stared at Hitoshi. He knew Hitoshi felt the pressure of the entire clan bearing down onto him. Without him or the clan heir, Naoya Zenin, they wouldn't have any power from the younger generation to put up against the Gojo Clan's heir, Satoru Gojo.

Masato shook his head. He could never get rid of the memory of their first encounter many years ago

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*Masato was walking along a path near the main Zenin compound. The Zenin's, Gojo's, and the Kamo's were having a huge meeting regarding Satoru Gojo. Satoru had just turned five, only a few years younger than himself, and awakened the Limitless technique and the Six Eyes. He was the golden egg of the Gojo's.*

*Limitless was an Innate Technique passed down through the generations of the Gojo Clan. It allowed the user to bring infinity into the world, which allowed them to distort reality at their will, if they were good enough with the technique. Although only truly known to the Big Three Sorcerer Families, Limitless could only be mastered if the user also had the Six Eyes.*

*The Six Eyes, another hereditary technique in the Gojo Clan, gave the user bright blue eyes, which allowed them enhanced perception and the ability to truly see and feel the cursed energy around them. Only one user could be born with the gift that is the Six Eyes at one time. Masato thought it was overpowered as shit and he knew everyone else did as well, but no one was brave enough to say it to the Gojo Clan's faces.*

*With both, Satoru Gojo was destined to become the strongest sorcerer in the world if he stayed alive long enough to mature to that level. Masato had heard his parents discussing the absurd amount of times people had tried to assassinate him before he reached his prime and became an unstoppable force within the Jujutsu community.*

*Masato had spent many afternoons alone while the clans discussed Satoru Gojo. It sickened him how this one single kid could take away his parents for so long. As much as he tried to be a better person than half of his cousins were turning out to be, he wanted Satoru Gojo dead.*

*Thinking so vividly about Satoru Gojo, he hadn't noticed a kid in front of him. By the time Masato realized what he was about to do, he had already stumbled into the kid. But instead of the kid falling to the ground, it was Masato that fell on his ass.*

*He looked up and was caught in the gaze of bright, shining turquoise eyes. The way they glowed captured his eyesight and he couldn't look away. The boy snapped in his face and Masato redirected his eyes down and away from the child's eyes. He stood up and looked at the kid seriously.*

*White hair fell down around the kid's face as he looked up at Masato. Masato was stuck wondering how he was the one who had fallen when he towered over the kid.*

*"You should watch where you're walking. They might kill you if you even tap me the wrong way."*

*Masato gasped as the image of the kid combined with the hatred towards Satoru Gojo in his mind. His hands shook as he realized how fucked he really was.*

*"You're Gojo-sa-"*

*"Satoru Gojo, the strongest sorcerer in the world!"*

*The cheerful, arrogant voice that came out of the child sparked fear deep within him. Masato knew that if this was how Satoru acted as a child, then his arrogant ass would be just as bad as the Zenin in the future.*

*"Gojo-sama, where are your parents?" Masato asked, as he cautiously looked around the near vicinity. Masato was afraid one of the Gojo Clan members would catch him speaking to Satoru and then he was dead for sure. It was one of the reasons he used the -sama honorific. He was afraid of anyone hearing him not use it.*

*"They couldn't stop me from escaping if they tried. I'm too strong for them! No one is brave enough to kill me here in the Zenin compound. If someone did, the Zenin would be accused and a Jujutsu War might start all over little old me~."*

*Masato was eerily disturbed by how arrogant and fearless this kid was. He knew that if the Zenin wanted to kill him, they'd throw everyone at Satoru. And then once he is dead, they'll have a scapegoat already prepared so the Clan can stay alive. His hubris was blinding his thoughts and it clearly showed. But it didn't matter now.*

*Satoru had obviously already figured out at least some of the Limitless technique since he could put up infinity between himself and Satoru. With the Six Eyes, he could have extremely precise control over how much cursed energy he used. And then, he could keep up the infinity technique indefinitely until help arrives.*

*"Can I touch the infinity?" Masato asked, holding his hand slightly in the air in front of Satoru. His hand shook in the short space between them.*

*Satoru grinned like a psychopath and nodded repeatedly. He was clearly excited to show off his Innate Technique. He was practically buzzing in place and Masato couldn't help but be a tiny bit afraid. Masato reached out and just a few inches from Satoru's face, his left hand just stopped moving. He pushed with all of his power, but his hand stood frozen in the air. It felt like he was pushing up against a solid brick wall.*

*Masato suddenly pulled his hand back and he felt the cold, sticky flow of cursed energy fill his fist. He then thrust his hand towards Satoru and just like before, his fist stopped inches from ever reaching him. It was sickening how much power a little smiling child like him held. He pulled his fist back and let it drop to his side. It never stood a chance of hitting Satoru Gojo and they both knew it.*

*In reaction to the actual attack, Satoru fell to his knees, laughing hysterically. Masato's gut fell as he realized a six year old child was already stronger than him. He knew he was only a few years older but he knew he would never stand a chance against him in a real fight.*

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Masato looked up towards Hitoshi who was breathing really heavy now.

"Look dude, just hand her to me."

Hitoshi sighed and let her fall down into a bridal carry before passing her to Masato. Masato took hold of her and grunted as he took on the immense weight of the girl. She was a bit heavier for her age than he thought she'd be but he stayed strong and kept her in the bridal carry as they walked.

Masato realized that Ayako was a lot more beautiful than he had seen previously. Her beautiful face was hidden behind that face of anger from earlier.

"Ah, Masato! Have you fallen for her charms already? She really is beautiful. Naobito-sama will approve." Hitoshi said, laughing between his words. Masato felt even worse than he did earlier.

He knew that Hitoshi was as bad as any normal Zenin, but asking for marriage without even the other party being awake? It was horrific, but he just sighed.

"Given up already?" Hitoshi let out another spur of laughs before continuing, "Good. She's all mine, just as Naobito-sama promised, although he did want to see her first before he fully approved."

Masato gasped and said, "You already asked? You didn't even know who she was."

Hitoshi shook his head and answered, "No~. I knew she was a girl, same as you. That's enough for me. If Naobito-sama wanted her in the clan, then she must be as beautiful as any normal Zenin girl."

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*August 20, 2003*

Taking in a deep breath, she opened her eyes and sat up from the futon she was tucked into. The room she was in was as pitch black as the night sky, but she could tell that it was definitely daytime. The few rays of sunlight peeking through the curtains to her right proved it.

She pulled the covers off herself and she stood from the futon. She had never slept on a futon before but it was practically the same as sleeping on a mattress in a bed frame. She noticed she was in the same white dress as she was last night. *Which means they haven't touched me at all. Good.*

She slowly shuffled to the sliding door in the center of the wall across from her. She slid it open a crack and peaked around outside. She quickly jumped back as she came face to face with Hitoshi Zenin.

"I see you're awake. You shouldn't sleep in so late, it's not good for you."

Ayako stood a few paces across from Hitoshi. Her hands quickly began to tighten into fists. As they did, little tiny red drums unraveled in front of her fingers. The tips of each finger slapped across the batter b of the drum, directly on the golden sun, and the drums screamed six times throughout the room.

Hitoshi grunted as the sound reverberated around him. Ayako noted the sound was like nails on a chalkboard and although she knew it probably hurt like hell to Hitoshi, the sound didn't affect her one bit. It was as if there was a funnel and it was aimed directly at Hitoshi. He slowly took a few steps back and stood closer to the doorframe than he did it to her.

She gasped as she noticed blood trickling out of his ears in slow streams. *It must be a part of my Innate Technique. The weapon of sound....*

“You’re dead, bitch!”

Hitoshi reached down to his hand and pulled off the three silver rings that adorned them. Ayako noticed they had diamonds across the front and she watched as he held them up high. Before he could activate his Innate Technique, Ayako dashed towards him but suddenly she was frozen in place.

It felt as if she was detached from space. Similar to a broken record, she skipped a single second and was blasted back by a punch filled with cursed energy. She landed multiple feet back and looked up to see a blonde man standing next to Hitosh with his hand held out towards her.

Ayako prepared to fight him and stood up, but suddenly as she focused on him, all of her multiplied cursed energy from the drums faded away. She could feel it leaking out of her, but then another memory clicked in her head like a correct puzzle piece.

*“Focus only on me, Ayako, or else you’ll never get anywhere. The second your focus is drawn elsewhere, your technique is useless.”*

Ayako let her toes tap against the ground as she stood, summoning the red drums six times. Just as they did earlier, the warcry that filled the room caused the blonde man to twitch. But this time, Hitoshi stood freely without getting hit by the soundwaves, even though he was directly in their path. After the soundwaves, she felt her cursed energy amount double six times. It flowed through her and even created a cursed energy aura around her that glowed a deep sapphire.

Ayako smiled as she figured out more about her own Innate Technique. It would be easier to fight now since she realized that her technique can only be targeted on one person at a time, then it would need to be reset.

Suddenly, she took a few steps back. She felt a hollow ache growing along her muscles. She frowned as she realized her technique wasn’t unlimited. She ignored the slight pain in favor of watching the new man that had attacked her.

“So, you think you’re strong? You’re nothing and I’ll show you why.” The blonde man grunted out as suddenly faster than she could see, he kicked her through the window. She flew out the building and landed into the koi pond below.

The iridescent water thoroughly soaked her hair and her clothes entirely. She quickly crawled out of the water and wiped the water from her eyes so she could see. Ayako heard a loud thump as Naoya landed behind her. Now on grass, she spit out multiple mouthfuls of blood. It felt like twenty people had punched her stomach simultaneously. Despite her endless pain, she quickly stood and faced across from him.

Around them, a few dozen Zenin circled them and held weapons that ranged from swords, staffs, and daggers. From all of them, Ayako could sense the cursed energy emitting from them.

“Naoya-sama, do you want help?” one of the guards, dressed in a full back wielding a staff, said.

“Don’t you dare intrude on my fight! This is between me and Ayako herself. I wanna fight *his* daughter.” Naoya said. Ayako watched as the lingering crowd backed off but still kept a close watch on

the two of them. It was hopeless to escape but she knew if she could give him a few bruises then she would be fulfilled.

Naoya suddenly smirked and just as quickly as before, he took off towards Ayako.

*“You’ll have to watch out for Projection Sorcery. Whenever in contact with a Zenin who has it, always plan out your moves before you take them. If you can, you’ll stand a fair chance even if you can’t keep up.”*

The memory from her past awakened in her mind. Her muscles moved on their own, a plan already in mind. Her fist was dragged in front of her stomach to collide with Naoya’s approaching fist.

A sudden spark of electricity ran through her veins as they touched. She was still launched by his fist but she could see a crescent shaped mark created with her cursed energy imprinted on his fist.

She crashed into the ground and quickly rose to her feet to see Naoya staring down at his fingers. She gasped as more memories filled her mind. It seemed as if the more she learned about the Jujutsu world, the more she would remember from her past.

“What did you do to me, you witch?” Naoya screamed, as he forced cursed energy throughout his hand, yet the mark stayed stagnant upon him. It glowed a bright violet and resisted all of his attempts to remove it.

*“You’re different from them. Firstly, you’re my child.” The man laughed as he spoke but then continued, “And secondly, Ichika is always with you, even if you don’t believe that.”*

Ayako smirked at his reaction. She knew that the mark could never be removed. It was impossible unless he either died or she allowed the mark to dissipate. She finally had the edge over him and it was so rewarding. Although, what the mark did was kept from her memory, she knew that he was screwed now.

“Doesn’t that make us all witches?” Ayako asked, as she prepared herself for him to use Projection Sorcery against her. She knew that once he started moving with it active, he couldn’t change his path. She just had to see enough of it to attack. She only needed one good punch.

Naoya shook his head and said, “Only the bitches like you.” Ayako wanted to laugh but all of her focus was on Naoya’s movements. The words went in one ear and out the other.

Just as she predicated, he went in a straight line directly towards her. Since he had touched her, she must obey the laws of his technique as well. She had to go with every movement she thought of. Right as he moved, she jumped to the left, avoiding his quick dash. Right as he passed in front of her vision, she thrust her fist directly at his body.

Although he moved too quickly for the punch to land, he still went flying towards the Zenin that had crowded around them earlier. She could see her cursed energy gathering around the mark on his fist, yet it was more rigid and jagged than usual. *But I didn’t even hit him.*

*“However you obtained that second technique doesn’t matter. You’re the one still standing and now you must use it. Wherever you mark, you’ll definitely hit them, no matter what.”*

Another memory came unraveling in her head. As much as she liked understanding the world better, the worst headache Ayako has ever had wasn’t exactly the best tradeoff.

Suddenly, the Zenin began surrounding them, ignoring Naoya's orders and a few even ran towards Naoya to check on him.

"How did-... you hit me?" Naoya said between his grunts of pain. He stood up although his legs were extremely shaky. Ayako stood in the center of the circle of Zenin men that was quickly getting smaller.

Ayako quickly let the mark dissipate as she watched Hitoshi and an older male with a full head of gray hair approach Naoya. The older man was draped in a brown yukata with a black sash around his waist. He held a gourd in his left hand as he stopped in front of Naoya.

"Embarrassing. I can't believe my heir lost to *her*. Go home Naoya." The man said.

Naoya grimaced as he looked down to his feet. Ayako watched as Naoya picked at his bright blue kimono. It was then she noticed that all of the Zenin were wearing traditional Japanese clothes such as Kimonos and Yukatas. *Just like mom.*

Naoya crossed his arms and left the group, disappearing within the main house. She watched as the older man finally turned towards her.

"You beat my Naoya. What's your Innate Technique? I watched the whole fight. I understand the first part with the drums and increasing your cursed energy output. But what is that crescent mark?" The man said. He slowly began approaching Ayako as she slowly backed away.

"Who are you?" Ayako asked, redirecting the conversation away from the topic of her Innate Techniques. She knew she couldn't hide how she was shaking or how her cursed energy automatically traveled to her fists. She'd much rather face her mother than have to face all of these Zenin.

"Your Clan Head, Naobito-*sama*." Naobito-sama said. His voice sounded rougher than the cry of her drums. Although Ayako would never admit it to his face, the small gray mustache he had was absolutely disgusting. *Maybe it's my bias though.*

"You.." Ayako started but spewed on by the numerous amounts of kimonos around, visions of her mother's corpse appeared in her head. The piece of wood that pierced her stomach, the countless liters of blood that leaked into her wooden floors, and the memories of the ~~abuse~~ brought her out of that trance.

"You sent them to kill my mother. Why?" Ayako finished. Her hands were still clenched into fists and her knuckles turned white.

Naobito-sama laughed in her face at the question. He quickly took another sip from his gourd and said, "She was an obstacle that we got rid of. Once we found out you were *Toji's* daughter and that he had left the two of you, we knew that we just had to have you."

The word *Toji* caused her to gasp as more memories filtered into her brain. The visions of a man in a black shirt holding a sword. A scar on the side of his lip. The smile of a man with jet black hair. Tears came to her eyes and dripped down her pale cheeks. She fell to her knees as it came back to her.

There were still gaps in her memory such as topics surrounding the source of her two techniques and *Toji* himself, but she finally had a clear image of how he looked.

Suddenly, she felt a crippling ache from her skull and her navel the same as she felt the night before. She realized that whatever was keeping her memories from her had something to do with this intertwined pain. It was then her birthmark came to mind. She's had it as long as she can remember and if her memory was to be trusted, *which it shouldn't*, her birthmark should be around the space on her navel where the pain originated from.

It was then she noticed that blood had been flowing down from her nose the entire time. She looked down and she was covered in it. It had fallen and stained her white dress. *It looks like m-*

"Hitoshi, bring her to the medic and then come meet with me."

Ayako looked up and saw Hitoshi walking over. He quickly picked her up and just started walking away. Ayako let him hold her as she got lost in her mind remembering her father.

*Who was he? Where is he now? And why did he leave?*

They didn't walk far before Hitoshi softly dropped her onto a hospital bed. The soft, silk sheets woke her from the lingering memories of Toji Zenin, her father. *I finally have a name to put to his face.*

She watched as Hitoshi pulled a chair from the hallway into the room with her. He sat down next to her bed and just stared directly at her. He slumped back into the chair and stretched his legs as he sat.

Ayako worked up the courage to look over to Hitoshi and ask, "What was Toji like?"

Hitoshi smirked at her question.

"He was... very self-absorbed. He was way too sarcastic for his own good, especially if you ever fought him. He left the Zenin Clan last year but I had the honor of speaking with him a bit and even sparring with him. He was very physically strong, but he had zero cursed energy. Because of that, he was very weak compared to any competent Zenin member."

Ayako nodded at every word. It seemed like it fit the image of him that she held.

"I don't remember anything besides how he looked." Ayako admitted, looking down to the porcelain tiles on the floor.

At that, Hitoshi suddenly sat up from his chair. He leaned closer to Ayako.

"What do you mean you don't remember him? He left the clan last year to see you. That's how we even know you exist. You don't remember what happened after he came into contact with you?"

Ayako started sweating at the thought. She thought that she had everything figured out, but it seemed that everything was much further out of reach. She slipped her legs under the blanket of the bed and pulled it to her shoulders. The blood had stopped and turned a muddy brown. It stuck to her skin and made her feel so much worse.

Suddenly, a knock reverberated throughout the room. A woman entered the room and she was dressed in a white lab coat.

"Ayako, I'll be back. Makoto Zenin will take care of you now." Hitoshi said, as he swiftly stood up and carried his chair out of the room. He reached out and shut the door behind him.

Once he had left, Makoto had walked to another room and opened the door, revealing the inside. From the bed, Ayako could clearly see a shower inside and Makoto set down a bag, which she assumed had an extra set of clothes. Then, Makoto approached her and her hands shined in a white aura.

“Reverse Cursed Technique. It’ll heal your internal and external injuries, if you have any.” Makoto said. *Reverse Cursed Technique?*

“I’m assuming from your face that you don’t know what that means. Great,” Makoto sighed, “it’s just positive energy created by multiplying cursed energy by itself. Seems easy enough, but there are only a few people in the world who can. I’m the lucky one to be owned by the Zenin.”

Ayako ignored the strange comment and allowed her hands to touch her navel; the aura quickly spread throughout her. As her body was pumped with positive energy, it felt ice cold, similar to an ice bath. Although, to her, it felt amazing. The aches in her navel from the memories and Naoya’s punches had completely gone away. Alongside the disappearance of her pain, the ache attacking her muscles from technique overuse vanished as well.

“Did Naoya get his hands on you? At least once a week, someone gets into a fight with him and then they end up here. And I have to deal with it. It’s really annoying but no one dares to be the one to try and stop him.”

Ayako nodded and stayed silent. It seemed as if Makoto was against Naoya entirely but she didn’t want to take a risk by speaking out against him. *But I can ask other things.*

“Is Naoya the Clan Head’s son? I didn’t want to be embarrassed in front of him.”

Makoto nodded as she moved her hands onto Ayako’s head and pushed positive energy throughout her skull. Ayako sighed as she finally felt relief from the rampant headache that had been going on since her fight.

“He’s a real dick as I’m sure you already know. I’m sorry that you got dragged into all this Zenin crap. They’re all real big assholes and have even bigger egos.”

Ayako frowned at her words. She knew that every Zenin she had come across so far was horrible but if they all were, she didn’t know if she could survive a whole week here.

“If it makes you feel any better, there is at least me to talk to. If you’re gonna try to escape this hellhole, try and do it before tomorrow. Right now, they’re preparing a room for you in the main house. Once you get moved in, it will be impossible to get out without alerting any of the guards from the Hei, the Kukurū, or the Akashi units.” Makoto confessed as she stepped away from Ayako. Malito looked terribly sad and as if grief had fully filled her face.

“You’re fine. Go take a shower and then change into the clothes Naobito-sama provided. Good luck.” Makoto stated as she swiftly left the room.

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Only minutes after Hitoshi left Makoto’s office, Masato walked alongside Hitoshi as they entered a large room. This room was often known for meetings with other clans or even between the strongest Zenin. It wasn’t a room that Masato often was in. He had only been in here three times beforehand. The

first time was when he was granted the rank of grade two. Without a very strong Innate Technique, it is much harder to climb the Jujutsu ranks.

The second time being when he was assigned as Hitoshi's partner for normal Jujutsu missions. And the third time being when Naobito-sama had given them the permission to retrieve Ayako Zenin. And now he was for a fourth time and he had no idea why. But he assumed that Hitoshi knew everything that was about to go down.

At the head of the table within the room sat Naobito-sama. He was obviously still in his drunken stupor but there was a gloomy air around him.

"Sit, my dear friends!" Naobito-sama said, raising his arms to welcome the two fellow Zenin. They sat across from each towards the opposite end of the long table. They both stayed silent as was tradition; they were waiting for Naobito-sama to begin the conversation himself.

They sat in silence for a full three minutes. The whole time Masato couldn't help but tap his foot quickly, albeit silent across the floor. He noticed Hitoshi across from him messing with the corner of the scarlet tablecloth. They even heard Naobito-sama taking massive sips from further down the table. Eventually, he relieved them of the awkward silence.

"Thank you for waiting. I wanted to finish my drink before we got into all the finer details. I'm sure Hitoshi knows why we're here. But honestly, Masato, you don't need to be here. This isn't another mission debriefing, you're dismissed." Naobito-sama said as he stared down the table directly at Masato.

"Naobito-sama, if you will, I'd like Masato to stay with us while we talk. I've grown to trust him over the years now and I want him to hear this, just so he doesn't get any ideas." Hitoshi said. Masato saw the smirk clear as day on his face. Whatever this was, Masato knew it couldn't be good especially when it probably involved Ayako.

"If you insist," Naobito-sama took a deep breath before he continued, "We've gathered here today to announce the arranged marriage between Hitoshi Zenin and Ayako Zenin. Unfortunately, there will be no ceremony as we wouldn't want Toji or Satoru to find out and cause any trouble. Secondly, when Ayako Zenin turns sixteen, she and Hitoshi shall conceive a child."

Masato started to sweat as Naobito-sama began his speech. By the end, he felt like was gonna vomit it right there on the scarlet tablecloth. He couldn't stop seeing the vulnerable blonde girl lying in his arms. *But what can I do?* Masato knew he stood no chance against any strong Zenin. He'd have to do what he has done his whole life and look the other way.

He wanted to wipe the smug grin off of Hitoshi's face. *It's as he predicted last night. Ayako is screwed.*

"If they fail to produce a child with a Jujutsu potential similar to Satoru Gojo, then she shall conceive a child with my son, Naoya, and hopefully they can produce a child similar to Satoru Gojo." Naobito-sama finished.

As much as Masato wanted to turn around and run away, he couldn't ignore how the smug grin fell from Hitoshi's face. He slammed his fist on the table, stood up, and screamed, "That's not what you promised!"

Masato couldn't help but grin at Hitoshi. He watched as Naobito-sama and Hitoshi fell into a verbal fight that was obviously going nowhere. *It's useless to engage with a drunken man since he can't even fully comprehend his own argument, how can he comprehend yours?*

Eventually, Hitoshi decided to just sit back and stay silent. Masato looked back over to Naobito-sama to see him pull out a completely different gourd and take another sip. Eventually, he set it down on the table, a few drops of the alcohol spilling onto the scarlet tablecloth below.

"Both of you, leave now, you both stink." Naobito-sama muttered. The two of them stood from their seats and pushed them back into the table.

"One more thing, Naobito-sama. I talked with Ayako earlier and she doesn't remember her past at all, especially last year."

All of a sudden, his black gourd clattered to the ground and the alcohol within spilled out as he stood up quickly.

"What do you mean she doesn't remember the ma-.... I see. Don't tell her anything. The less she knows, the more we can control. You're dismissed." Naobito-sama said. He slumped back into his tall golden chair and picked up the gourd from the floor. He desperately took a sip of what was left of the alcohol inside.

Then, they began walking for the door. Once they made it outside of the meeting room, Hitoshi reassured, "Well, at least Ayako will be mine. And don't you get any ideas. I saw just as clearly as I see you now that you found her cute and you definitely still do."

Masato sighed.

"I don't care enough to try and steal her from you."

Hitoshi nodded, receiving his assurance from the answer.

"She's all mine. With her hand in mine, we'll birth a child stronger than Satoru Gojo. He'll stand no chance against my new family, not after what he did."

It finally clicked for Masato why Hitoshi chased so heavily after Ayako. It was to complete his dream of topping Satoru Gojo. It was similar to how he first met the kid. Satoru Gojo had run off while the Gojo Clan Head was speaking with the Kamo and Zenin Clan Heads. That day, he happened to come across Hitoshi and Naoya and obviously, they started to brawl.

Even with their all powerful Innate Techniques, they didn't stand against the much smaller and younger Satoru Gojo. Ever since then, Masato had noticed that Hitoshi had only been focused on obtaining more power for himself. And it seemed that Ayako was his next avenue towards it.

Later that day and now wrapped within a silk blue kimono, Ayako stared out of the window towards Hitoshi who was lingering around the koi pond. After their fight, the window was quickly repaired by a few Zenin while she was with Makoto.

To her surprise, Hitoshi was actually feeding the koi and he obviously cared more for the koi than her. Her knuckles turned white as she squeezed her hands into fists. A frown sat upon her face as she pondered on their situation. Hitoshi had told her everything before leaving to let her process *their* future.

In a few years, Naobito-sama guaranteed that she would marry Hitoshi Zenin and then they would produce a child who could rival Satoru Gojo and the current heir and who happened to be the Clan Head's son, Naoya Zenin. She assumed that Naoya had no idea of the plan since it would put him out of power, but she was sure he could at least sense it.

The cozenage within this whole plan made her sick and not to mention, her part in the plan that she wanted nothing to do with. She was still underage now and would still be when the marriage would happen. *And I will still be when I have to bear a child.*

She stumbled back away from the window and fell to the ground. Ayako hit the ground hard but sat there staring at her hands in her lap. She knew from her short fight with Hitoshi and Naoya that she stood almost no chance against them. *Unless I can catch them off guard, maybe?*

But it didn't seem likely. They were extremely protective of her and had guards, from the Hei and the Kukurū, situated all over the estate. They wouldn't just sit by if she tried anything against Hitoshi or even.. herself. The thought caused her gut to sink to new depths. She didn't think she had the will to go through with such a self-destructive plan like that, especially not after seeing her mother brutally murdered.

She still couldn't get that look of regret and fear which sat eternally on her face. She never saw what they did with the body, but she knew they had probably disposed of it in a way that would never be found. It all brought her back to the central thought in her head. *Is my mother really sorry for having the Zenin over? Is she really sorry for beating me?*

Ayako suddenly shook her head, rejecting the poisonous thoughts. They felt like drips of hot magma scorching her skin. She knew that even if she was sorry for everything she did, it wouldn't make up for all the trauma she now had to deal with.

A sudden image bloomed in her mind. The loud snapping sound of a belt alongside the sound of shattering plates. A phantom sting erupted on her cheek as tears began to drip down her cheeks like the storm clouds brewing up above. Even dead, *she* still managed to haunt her.

The last words of her mother laid flat on her tongue as she shook with her tears. Her arms wrapped around herself while she sat. The whole conversation with the Zenin last night replayed in her head like a broken record. It was ever present and there wasn't a single moment where she couldn't not think about it.

*"She's mine, Zenin-san"*

Suddenly, laughs burst out of her throat as the reality of the world dawned on her. She wasn't Ayako Nakajima. She wasn't Ayako Zenin either and her mother didn't love her for a single second. *She never really wanted to protect me.*

Ayako knew the truth as if a light bulb flickered on above her. She knew that her mother only protected her because of her value. She wasn't a person to her mother or the Zenin. She was an object worth more than diamonds or gold. The extreme power of her dual techniques and her heritage, it was all worth something since she could have kids. *Not because I'm strong but because I could produce an even stronger male child.*

The thought was disgusting to her because she was still underage, but she knew the Zenin didn't care. She had heard the soft whispers of the maids around about the Gojo Clan's miracle child, Satoru Gojo. It was because of him that the rush for power was so prevalent within the Zenin. They wanted, *needed*, someone to match him, someone who could give Satoru a run for his money and even win. She knew that the Jujutsu higher ups definitely agreed and so did the Zenin Clan Head.

Her gut sunk even deeper at the hopelessness. She was trapped within a home of misogynists and rapists who wanted her not because of her potential but because of her reproductive organs.

## Chapter Three: Unwanted Gifts: the pit, the excess of blood, and what I think of you

*August 20, 2003*

Similarly to before dinner, Ayako stood in her room looking out the window. No longer did rays of sun stare into the room, she was completely shrouded in darkness. The clouds from earlier had been pouring nonstop and she had been dwelling on what Makoto had said hours earlier.

*“Once you get moved in, it will be impossible to get out without alerting any of the guards from the Hei, the Kukuru, or the Akashi units.”* She had already failed and ended up in the main house despite her words, but she still held just a touch of hope.

Ayako just needed a reason to get out of the house, then with some good luck, she knew that she had a small chance of escaping, and it was all because of one thing. She had discovered her second technique. She knew now and back then, it was definitely different. She could tell by the way the cursed energy within the techniques felt.

While using her drum technique, her cursed energy felt smooth and fluid, it flowed as fast as a waterfall. But when she used the marking technique on Naoya, her cursed energy was slower. It was rigid, jagged, and it felt disgusting, it was like putrid sludge slowly falling out of a pipe.

She had the basic rundown of how they worked. She quickly summoned one of the drums in front of her and looked it over. The batter head was unblemished and the color of ivory. Directly in the center of the batter head was a golden sun. It was a rather simple engraving, but she didn't know why it was there. She understood that the drums were a part of her Innate Technique, but the sun had no connection to it.

She then remembered the mark from her second technique that appeared on Naoya's hand. It was a crescent shaped mark like the moon. She realized her techniques must be directly connected to the sun and the moon. To her, it made sense since her drum technique was flashy like the day while her marking technique was discreet like the night.

Suddenly, the bedroom door slammed open as Hitoshi rushed in. Ayako jumped, managing to bump into the wall. She quickly unsummoned the drum and pulled her cursed energy back in.

*“Are you trying to escape already?”* Hitoshi said as he slowly stepped towards Ayako.

Ayako turned around and spread her arms out so Hitoshi could see she was doing nothing.

*“The thought never crossed my mind.”* Ayako protested.

Hitoshi shook his head lightly as he closed the door behind him. He shuffled over to the futon and sat down. He patted the area next to him on the futon, looking in Ayako's eyes.

Ayako shook her head. *“I'm not sleeping there. Anyways, I still feel horrible. You shouldn't have let Naoya attack me.”* Ayako admitted. She brought her hand to her stomach and held it as if she was still in pain.

“Makoto didn’t fully heal you?” Hitoshi asked while he slipped his legs under the blankets. He looked at Ayako’s stomach seriously.

“I don’t know. She just used Reverse Cursed Technique quickly and then practically pushed me into the shower. I think she was in a hurry.” Ayako supplied while moving to lean against the wall.

Hitoshi sighed as he stood from the futon.

“Come on, we’ll go visit Makoto again. This time, I’ll make sure she does everything right. You’re important to me.”

Ayako couldn’t help but feel actually sick at his comment. She knew that she wasn’t really important, just their potential future child was important.

“Look, I can go myself. I already know the route from earlier. I wouldn’t want to disturb your sleep Hitoshi.”

Hitoshi frowned as he looked her up and down. He replied, “I don’-”

“I’ll be quick Hitoshi, I swear.”

Hitoshi sighed again and nodded.

“She’ll probably be sleeping in the room above the office. Check there.”

He moved out of her way and Ayako quickly rushed out of the room. She silently shut the door behind and started to make her way to the main house’s ground floor. She softly stepped down the numerous steps until she reached the floor below.

Ayako didn’t exactly have a plan to escape the Zenin compound, but she knew Makoto must have some idea. Makoto made it sound like she had been here for years so Ayako put all of her faith into believing that she must know a way.

She quickly slipped on her shoes at the door and grabbed an umbrella. She stepped outside, opening the umbrella simultaneously. The heavy drops pounded on her umbrella as she swiftly walked to Makoto’s office. Ayako kept her eyes to the ground so she could avoid any massive puddles. If she failed in any way, she’d rather not be thoroughly soaked as she was earlier with Naoya.

In less than five minutes, Ayako arrived at the small quaint house that held Makoto and her tiny infirmary. She walked to the sliding entrance door and knocked a few times. Although Ayako waited a few minutes, Makoto never appeared to open it. *Is she not home?*

Ayako let herself in and flicked the light on. She closed her umbrella and left it resting beside the door.

“Makoto? Are you home?” Ayako asked in the reclusive air. She slowly, albeit quietly walked through the small office area and then into the room filled with hospital beds. And yet, Makoto wasn’t here. She slowly walked through the building towards the back. Residing alone in the far back corner of the first floor was a small spiral staircase that led upstairs.

Ayako slowly tread up the stairs and entered a giant room. It was a huge living space with a kitchen on the far side.

“Makoto?” Ayako called out again. On the various tables around the room, there were dozens of magazines and newspapers. On the opposite side of the room with the kitchen was multiple tall, sable bookshelves. They were absolutely overflowing with books, so much in fact that they had spilled out onto the neighboring floor. On the floor they were stacked at least ten high each. Weirdly enough, there were many different types of lockets around. Ayako didn’t dare to even open one. That would make her feel horrible, but the excess of jewelry was a little peculiar although not strange for a girl to have.

Ayako quickly stopped scanning the entire room. It felt wrong to be intruding on what was clearly Makoto’s one and only private space. Ayako sighed and moved towards the one door in between the kitchen and the large mountain-like bookshelves.

She knocked multiple times on the door, but no one answered; the house was as silent as her walk to Makoto’s place. Ayako slid the door open and flicked on the light within. The light quickly ignited, blasted the room with its vibrant, encompassing glow.

Makoto wasn’t here. Ayako sighed, quickly shut the door, and made her way back downstairs.

It was obvious to Ayako that she would have to quickly plan her escape herself and get out of the massive compound. It definitely wasn’t going to be easy, but she had to since if she stayed, she’d be forced to do things she’d rather not do.

Right before she exited the building, Ayako’s eye was caught on a small metallic table beside one of the beds. On top of the table held the usual medical supplies which made Ayako grin. She reached out and grabbed hold of one of the tools and left the building.

She didn’t have a plan, but she knew that if she could beat Naoya, the clan’s heir, then she should be decently strong. She didn’t mind having to fight her way out as long as the guard squads, the Hei, the Kukurū, and the Akashi, didn’t catch onto her already.

She started sprinting towards the closest wall that separated her from the outside world. She had already seen them throughout the day. They were massive thick stone walls at least 5 feet in width. She assumed if she received the maximum amount of cursed energy from her drum technique she could jump completely over the wall. *Or I could destroy it?*

As she ran, she quickly realized the hard way that she had forgotten the umbrella at Makoto’s. She frowned but kept running, even managing to dash right through a large puddle. Her blue kimono was already entirely soaked, and her hair was almost as well at that point. It was too late to try anything to stop her getting soaked, not when she couldn’t turn back.

It slowly began to grow into her vision on the horizon. When she approached, it felt to her like the massive wall kept growing but Ayako knew it was a trick of the eye. She noticed the bottom half of the wall was covered in hundreds of metal plates. Besides that, it was just like any normal stone wall.

She guided the cursed energy into her feet and with each step, the screeching of the drums roared into the world. She gasped as she saw the metal plating on the wall beginning to bend. *The drum’s sound waves!* She quickly reached her maximum drum count and channeled her overabundance of cursed energy into her feet. She jumped and quickly scaled the wall.

Now on top of the wall, she looked back towards the Zenin compound and frowned at the sight. Hitoshi was already close behind her. He stood below her now, watching her. His classic proud smirk was easily visible even over ten feet into the air.

"You're not a good liar," Hitoshi said as he slowly began to approach the wall. He continued, "Do you *really* want to end up in that hospital bed again? It's not hard to make that happen."

"Too bad I won't be around for that!" Ayako shouted and turned towards the other side. She quickly dashed towards the edge. But all of a sudden, she knocked into something and fell down onto her back. She groaned and stood back up quickly. Ayako looked around but saw nothing in her way.

She reached out her hand and gasped as it was stopped three feet in front of her. She tried punching the wall, but the invisible wall was definitely stronger than the stone wall she stood on.

"Stop trying Ayako, it's a curtain." Hitoshi explained from beside her. Ayaka quickly dodged further in the opposite direction on the wall. She was so caught up by the invisible wall that she hadn't even heard him scale the wall.

"A curtain?" Ayako asked while she quietly activated her drums with her hand behind her back. It took less than two seconds for her to tap four out of six drums. She remembered the first night that she used her Innate Technique that no sound waves were produced. So, she understood that they weren't a necessity and could be deactivated.

"Yes, it's a barrier technique. There are a few curtains surrounding the Zenin compound, but this one was made with *you* specifically in mind. We can't just let you leave that easily. I keep forgetting you don't know a lot, but I like that, it makes you malleable."

"Then it's settled." Ayako muttered as she started sprinting towards Hitoshi. Hitoshi quickly jumped off the wall and Ayako frowned as she sensed his cursed energy grow larger. She looked down at him as he landed, skidding across the ground.

"This fight isn't worth it Ayako!" Hitoshi yelled. Ayako shook her head and quickly clapped her hands together, aiming directly at Hitoshi. Between her hands were the last two drums needed to reach her maximum drum count. The soundwaves from the two drums combined into a massive blast funneled directly at Hitoshi.

Ayako winced as she could hear the metal beneath her creaking again under the pressure from the sound waves. Although the massive symphony of sound didn't negatively affect her, she could hear how loud the two combined roars were. She could barely hear herself breathing under its gigantic weight.

She watched as Hitoshi raised his left hand to try and protect himself. Although, she knew that he knew that it was practically useless. Her eyes widened as she watched as all of the rain around her began to vibrate due to the massive influx of sound around them.

She shook her head to clear her thoughts and dove off of the wall. She raised her heel in the air and directed cursed energy into her leg as it came barreling down onto Hitoshi. Hitoshi dodged back right before her leg tore through the space he was just standing in. The ground around Ayako exploded,

filling the area with a small dust cloud. She pulled her leg from the ground and looked over to the shaken Hitoshi through the mist

She sensed that he had a large portion of his cursed energy surrounding his ears. She smirked as she understood exactly why. She instantly dashed towards him again and guided cursed energy into her fists and her legs. In less than a few seconds, she arrived in front of Hitoshi and punched his stomach before he could counter.

He flew back multiple feet before he landed on his feet. He stumbled another few feet back before he stood straight. Hitoshi spit out a tiny bit of blood before smirking. Ayako observed as he pulled out a short stick, imbuing his blue cursed energy into it. The stick quickly morphed into a bo staff a tiny bit shorter than Hitoshi.

He spun the staff around him while running towards Ayako. Ayako dodged back right before the staff struck her. It slammed into the ground and was stuck at least a few feet into the ground. Hitoshi quickly freed the staff and began running at her, spinning the staff again. Ayako retreated again as Hitoshi approached.

She sighed as she had no choice but to retreat. The staff struck the ground causing the ground to explode similar to how she did earlier. She stopped retreating around a dozen feet away, watching as Hitoshi pulled the staff from the dirt.

"It's your technique, right? You spin it and every time a part of the staff is higher in the air than the bottom half, you can generate cursed energy from the tip's potential energy. It's why you would use a staff instead of a sword. The style fits your technique perfectly." Ayako explained while slowly stepping towards the nearby Zenin houses.

Hitoshi smiled and said, "So, you're observant too. Ultimate Airtime Influx. One of the greatest techniques of the Zenin currently besides Ten Shadows and Projection Sorcery. And it's mine alone."

Ayako nodded but started uncontrollably laughing.

"Then, how have I almost beaten you multiple times?"

"I'm not in my prime yet. I haven't even graduated Kyoto Jujutsu High yet either. I'm still a first year student!"

"That doesn't matter, and you know that too."

Hitoshi jumped towards her, swinging the staff directly down towards her. Ayako raised her left forearm to meet the staff while her right hand raced towards Hitoshi's stomach. She divided her cursed energy into two portions: one for defending against the staff attack and the other to hit Hitoshi.

The blunt staff smacked against her forearm causing Ayako to grunt in pain. It clouded her vision, but she managed to keep her right hand on track. Her open palm smacked against Hitoshi's stomach with the full power of her drums. She heard Hitoshi gasp in pain as she reached out with her left hand and grabbed hold of the tip of the bo staff. She pulled and retreated with the bo staff in hand.

From a few paces away, Ayako saw the purple glow of a crescent imprinted onto his stomach. Unconsciously, she spun the staff around and launched herself towards Hitoshi. Although it was quite

amateurish, she swung the staff towards the crouching Hitoshi. She noticed his eyes expertly kept up with the increased speed from her cursed energy. His arms reached up and curled around the staff's tip. Ayako quickly dropped the staff and dove under Hitoshi's arms. She launched the full power of her fist directly into his stomach.

As she punched, she felt a second more rigid set of cursed energy flowing alongside her fist into Hitoshi. It was like a static shock between Ayako and him. She could feel clear as day that her punch was doubled - first, her actual fist with the drum technique, and second, the second technique replicating that exact punch through the mark.

Hitoshi was launched forward faster than her eyes could see. He crashed into the ground and a loud boom rang through the area. An enormous dust cloud swiftly formed in the open field surrounding her and Hitoshi. It obscured her vision with its thick brown density.

She turned around at the sound of quick, albeit loud footsteps and the heavy, muffled breathing. Ayako frowned as she could hear Hitoshi around her, but the dust cloud was still heavily obscuring her vision. It was then that she noticed the steps were gradually getting closer to her, and his fast sprinting was stirring up the dust around her. She couldn't find him and definitely not beat him at this rate.

But suddenly, a memory filled her head. It was longer than the rest, and she could clearly remember when it happened: last year.

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*Ayako stood in the middle of a large circle with her eyes tracing the environment around her. Her hands were balled up into tight fists as she constantly spun around, searching the trees around her for movement. She whipped her head back to get her long blonde hair from blocking her vision.*

*She channeled mass amounts of cursed energy throughout her body as she waited for any significant sound, the cursed energy practically felt like giant rapids. Suddenly, she heard a branch crack behind her, a rustle of the bushes to her left, a thump to her right, and a loud bang in the trees in front of her. She closed her eyes, to eliminate one sense, and make her others stronger.*

*She knew how her father liked to train her. She just had to figure out what was the real noise and which of the others were fake. The loud bang was obviously fake, an extremely loud noise to lead her astray. No one trying to sneak up on her would allow such a loud noise to occur.*

*Her mind sifted through the possibilities. The thump to her right sounded like a fallen branch and could've been someone falling, but she knew her father wasn't weak or clumsy enough to fall in a forest. She took a deep breath and thought about the last two choices. It was either the rustle to her left or the cracked branch behind her. They both seemed plausible, but it was less a test of her senses and more a test of logic. If her father was sneaking around a forest, he would always travel in the branches to be less visible.*

*She turned around towards where the branch cracked and suddenly saw a blur of black traveling towards her. A staff snuck out of the blur and smacked her across her face. Her head was knocked to the side, and she collapsed onto the stiff dirt below her.*

*She looked up and saw her father standing above, looking down on her. His staff was leaning on his shoulder as he smirked.*

*“You don’t have to hit me so hard like that.” Ayako muttered, rubbing her stinging cheek. She could already feel a bruise forming. Even while reinforcing her body with copious amounts of cursed energy, his attacks always bruised over.*

*“How else would you learn? When I was your age, I completed this training exercise a lot faster... and better.” Toji responded with his gruff voice. Ayako pushed herself to her feet and looked at him. She watched him absentmindedly spin the staff around himself.*

*“I still have to go to school, you know? It’s hard enough to hide all of the bruises. I don’t need another.” Toji scoffed and started walking away.*

*“I don’t have time to hear your complaints. If you don’t want another bruise, then react faster when we train. That’s what all of this is for after all.”*

*Ayako sighed and rubbed her cheek again and looked down to her arms. She pulled her sleeves further down to hide more of the numerous bruises lingering on her arms.*

*As he walked away, Ayako heard him start muttering to himself but couldn’t pick out many of the words. But she did manage to pick out a few: “to take down Satoru Gojo.”*

*She didn’t bother to make sense of his mutterings as she didn’t know a Satoru Gojo and slowly began to walk the other direction from her father back to her mother’s home. She frowned as she realized that just like all the other times, he wasn’t coming home with her.*

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The memory hit her like a car crash. She could already feel the blood running down her nose, but she quickly wiped it away and ignored it. A horrible ache that felt like magma scorched her skin, it felt similar to her headache from earlier. It seemed that whenever she encountered something similar to her forgotten past, a memory would come back.

She shook the thoughts away and focused on the many noises that surrounded her. It seemed as if her father had trained her for this exact moment: to fight Hitoshi and the Zenin Clan. The sprinting from earlier had vanished and besides from her own breaths and the pouring rain, she couldn’t hear a single thing.

All of a sudden, she heard a thump from behind her. As much as she wanted to sense Hitoshi using cursed energy, there were now two signals, *both felt like Hitoshi’s cursed energy*, buzzing around her and she couldn’t tell which one was Hitoshi and even who the other was. The thump matched with one of the cursed energy beacons she could sense behind her.

With how massive the cursed energy signal from behind her was, she desperately wanted to turn towards it but that memory with her father kept coming back. Although it seemed like Hitoshi, since he was so straightforward and direct, but he wasn’t stupid. She remembered how he said earlier how his technique was one of the best within the clan. She didn’t exactly believe that but since he

apparently had such high favor with Naobito-sama, he must be trained just as well if not better than most Zenin Clan members. He wasn't that stupid to make a noise if he was trying to sneak up on her.

She stayed watching the other silent cursed energy signal. Ayako wasn't surprised when it suddenly came rushing towards her. She quickly punched her left palm with her right before the figure could escape the dust and attack her. The full power of her own attack filled her but the pained grunt she heard from the dust made her smirk. *Now I know where he is for sure...*

She dove into the dust cloud and punched Hitoshi in the face. He went flying out of the dust cloud and she raced after his body. She exited the dust cloud and saw him lying a few meters away. Before she could stop it, she puked out a mouthful of blood. She fell to her knees and reached for the new aching pain in her stomach. She gripped the silver dagger that protruded from her gut.

Ayako couldn't help but think about how similar her situation was to her mother. And it all came back to the man in front of her: Hitoshi Zenin.

"I got you!" Hitoshi yelled while laughing, "You *need* to learn not to try anything under me and I think this worked. But... maybe one more lesson could *help* you out."

Hitoshi stumbled over while gripping his stomach. Her mark had long vanished with her new gut wrenching pain. He grabbed at her short hair and began dragging her. Ayako tried to resist but the pain from the dagger and the aches from her techniques had built up. It wasn't long before Ayako found herself being dragged into a new building she'd never seen before. Before she could react, she was thrown down a large set of stairs which led into a massive concrete room.

"This is the disciplinary pit for all Zenin Clan members. You'll stay here until I believe you've fully learned your lesson. Try not to die, it would look bad on me if you did." Hitoshi explained, quickly leaving and closing the doors at the top of the staircase.

Once the door closed, Ayako could unexpectedly sense so many cursed spirits within the room. They all hid behind the various pillars in the room and were waiting for an opportunity to attack. Ayako slowly began to climb the staircase again, desperately trying to escape. After a few minutes filled with pained grunts and the loss of blood, she made her way to the door.

It was then she saw that there was no handle on the outside of the door. It looked like a plain concrete wall. She could sense the wall was filled with unreal amounts of cursed energy. *Likely another curtain...*

Ayako sighed and turned around. Her sight was suddenly filled with a huge green mass. She powered her legs with cursed energy and dove to the side, barely avoiding the attack.

"Blood... there's so much blood..." The green mass cried out as it crashed into where she once stood. Its face was heavily deformed and looked saddened by the blood leaking from Ayako. Its hands grabbed at the sanguine liquid and stared intently at it.

From the various memories she had received recently, she knew that gigantic mass to be a cursed spirit, or simply a curse. Created by the various negative emotions that leak out of non-Jujutsu Sorcerers, they seek to kill humanity as their one and only goal.

Ayako knew that the curses followed a ranking method identically to the ranking method used for Jujutsu Sorcerers. Grade Four was the lowest which led to Grade One being the highest that one can achieve on their one merit; special and unique cases within the Jujutsu world were called Special Grades.

She couldn't tell what grade this curse was yet, but it looked quite powerful since it could speak. *Although it can't properly communicate. So, it must be below Semi-Grade One.*

"Blood... blood.... blood..." The curse screeched as it started barreling towards Ayako. She quickly pulled out the scalpel she stole from the infirmary and filled it with cursed energy. She didn't have a single chance to use it against Hitoshi but using it to save her life against a curse seemed good enough. She stood and waited for the curse to get close.

Only now a few feet away, Ayako dashed towards it, meeting it head on. She barely dodged its first punch and slashed the side of the curse with the scalpel that was infused with cursed energy. With half of its torso now gone, the curse began to dissipate, and it soon was exorcized. Suddenly, the sharp end of the scalpel snapped off of the handle. *It seems that if too much cursed energy enters any inanimate object, it will just break.*

Ayako sighed and let out multiple intensive breaths. Although it should've been easier to kill the curse, she still had a dagger sticking out of her side. She noticed that a lot of the curses that didn't have much cursed energy were still hiding behind the pillars, but the stronger ones were now slowly approaching her.

She threw the broken scalpel to the ground and stood her ground. She drew her focus to the closest curse and allowed her drums to summon under her feet. The roars of the drums shot towards the curse, throwing him back a few feet. Ayako took a deep breath and jumped off the steps towards the fallen curse. She pulled back her fist and shoved it through the curse's head.

The curse quickly disintegrated, and she stumbled to the floor. Ayako screamed as she reached down to her stomach. The fall had pushed the dagger further into her stomach due to her negligence. She could now clearly feel more blood spilling out onto the ground. She tried to stand but her feet slipped on the blood that had soaked the concrete.

Ayako faceplanted into the floor and her face was drenched in the sanguine liquid. She somehow managed the strength to push her head from the floor and take multiple deep breaths. She heard the curses approaching but her focus was taken entirely by the need to stand. She forced herself onto her knees, but simultaneously, Ayako felt the massive force of a large foot kicking her gut.

She flew from the impact and hit the large concrete wall behind her. She slid to the ground and blood dripped out of her mouth. The strain on all of her muscles from her technique was immense and it didn't help that her stomach felt like it was being burned. *I need to survive. Reverse Cursed Technique?*

*"Reverse Cursed Technique. It'll heal your internal and external injuries, if you have any."*

Ayako forced herself to sit and lean against the wall. Her eyes happened to land on the many curses who were slowly making their way over. *It's all classic predator and prey.*

Ayako knew how the curses were acting. It was all a way to make her *fear*. To make her so afraid she'd lose her grip on how to fight. She shook her head to clear the obvious fear that was filling her. *If I fall to what they want and fear, I'm already dead because I have accepted that I will die.*

She knew she only had one more method to live through this: to learn Reverse Cursed Technique. She remembered how Makoto had said that only a few people in the world could do the technique. Although Makoto was a little witty and definitely book smart, she wouldn't lie about something like that. Ayako slowly reached down to her grip and gripped the dagger. All she could hear was her own screaming as she quickly pulled the dagger from her bleeding gut. The sound of the dagger pierced her scream, the squelches were gut-wrenching and almost made her puke.

She placed the dagger aside and looked down at her hands. They were entirely covered in blood, no skin was left showing. She placed her hands onto her massive wound and tried to channel positive energy into herself. After a few seconds of nothing happening, Ayako pulled her hands away for a second. She remembered that Makoto had covered her hands in the technique *before* she had tried to heal anything.

She held her hands in the air in front of her and tried to produce positive energy. Ayako sighed as her attempts didn't work. She should've known that it wasn't possible. Only a select few could ever hope to learn such a miracle and she wasn't the one.

*"It's just positive energy created by multiplying cursed energy by itself."*

Ayako's eyes brightened at the memory. She linked her two hands together and channeled cursed energy into both. At the intersection of her hands, she pushed the cursed energy into itself and folded it on top of itself. The cursed energy was resisting her pull and push as if they were the same ends of a magnet.

She grunted as she put more force into the fold and now the cursed energy began to be more pliable. Although it was still repelling itself, it started to spin into a circle with the other half. The two halves of the cursed energy began to slowly spin like yin and yang.

At first the spin was slow, but over time it began to speed up. She felt her head get dizzy, but she kept all of her focus on the spinning cursed energy. If she got this correct, the dizziness wouldn't matter in the end.

Eventually, they began to mix together. Ayako felt something similar to electricity forming between her hands. She flinched back as her hands began to warm up due to the reaction forming in her hands. *Warmth? No...*

Ayako distinctively remembered Makoto's Reverse Cursed Technique being ice cold. This thing forming together in her hand was like an intense fire and was still speeding up. Sparks of red electricity sparked out of her hands towards the area around her.

She gave it one last push to fold in on itself so she could make positive energy. Her hands flew apart and she was blasted back into the wall. She pulled herself from the imprint in the wall and stared at her hands. *It's not for me, I guess.*

Her eyes suddenly looked to her right and saw a hand flying directly at her. The massive grotesque purple hand collided with her head and Ayako flew through the air. She landed on the ground roughly and rolled with the blow. Now laying on her back, she stared at the roof of the disciplinary room. She felt more of her blood forming a puddle around her.

Ayako suddenly felt her breathing speeding up. She could clearly see how the world was beginning to fade away. But she fought that feeling with everything in her body. If Ayako didn't try her hardest, then she would never see the future that she wanted. She could never get revenge for her mom and for keeping her here. The only thing keeping her conscious now was the deep-rooted hatred for the Zenin Clan and its cursed ways.

She leaned up and saw the same purple curse barreling towards her. It was running like a monkey on all fours towards her. She couldn't stop looking at the curse's deformed face. Its mouth was wide open with no teeth anywhere in sight. The weird thing was its eyes. They looked haunted, fearful, and ~~regretful~~. Ayako couldn't help but be sucked into more memories.

The thing that pulled her from the fate of her life flashing was the large cursed energy signal she could now feel in the room. It was so large that all the curses suddenly just stopped. The signal was speeding towards the purple curse faster than she could see, slamming into the ground in front of her.

It summoned up a dust cloud around them and she couldn't see a thing. In the end, it dissipated after a few shocks, but her shock faded into resignation.

Hitoshi Zenin.

He looked back at her with a proud smirk on his face.

"You seem ill? Would you like *my* help?"

Ayako sighed.

"I need to hear you say it."

"Please help me." Ayako muttered.

"Ah? I didn't quite hear that." Hitoshi asked. Ayako noticed he couldn't keep the glee off of his face. This was more painful than the dagger through the stomach or the loss of her mother. She didn't want to say anything, she wanted to seal her mouth shut and throw away the key. *But... If I die, then Hitoshi will never get what's coming.*

"Please...." Ayako whispered.

Hitoshi stepped closer to her and knelt down in front of her. He reached to her chin and held it up as far as it could. She felt his poisonous thumb on her cheek and she wanted to reject it. With this new arrangement, Ayako couldn't avoid his brown enigmatic eyes. It felt like he could see her weak soul and she felt so exposed.

"Say it like you really mean it." Hitoshi said as he squeezed her cheek.

"Please help me!" Ayako screamed. Tears had already started falling down her cheeks. Hitoshi quickly pulled his hand away, avoiding the leaking liquid.

“Alright, don’t worry, my dear. I’m here to help you, Ayako.” Hitoshi said, reaching up to pat her head. He jumped to his feet and stared at the curses. They were all fearful of his cursed energy, it was painfully obvious. They hid behind the same pillars as earlier and tried their hardest to not show their presence, but they did a horrible job.

Hitoshi looked down and picked Ayako up. Ayako hated that she was in yet another bridal carry from him, but she couldn’t actually walk out of here herself. Her feet were too weak, and the excessive blood loss made her woozy. She felt Hitoshi began to run and jump using cursed energy and soon, they were long gone from the damned pit.

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*August 21, 2003*

“Hitoshi!” Masato yelled as he approached Hitoshi outside of Makoto’s infirmary. The sun had yet to fully rise, and Masato had somehow woken up to the chaos within the compound. Although he should’ve known it from the start, it all led back to Hitoshi.

“What did you do?”

Hitoshi looked over and stopped leaning against the outside of Makoto’s home. Masato couldn’t help but notice the shit eating grin on his face. His arms were crossed, and Masato hated how smug he had become in less than 12 hours. He could almost imagine his fist hitting his face but he would never actually do it.

“Ayako tried to escape. So~ we fought a bit and I taught her why she will *never* escape. I think she’ll come to accept this new life very well after today. I didn’t do anything *too* bad.”

“The amount of blood staining the entire compound says otherwise.” Masato muttered. He didn’t mean to say it louder than an indecipherable whisper but the annoyance in front of him demanded more.

“She *has* to learn just like any other Zenin! If that’s through pain and suffering, then that’s how it is. She’s *my* wife now since Naobito-sama ordered it. I can do what I want with her, Masato.”

Masato felt ill. All of them weren’t even adults yet and Hitoshi was so proud of *this*, proud to be the husband of a teenager. They were teenagers too but it didn’t make it any better. It made Masato so disgusted with him, but he couldn’t do anything, Naobito-sama had allowed this after all.

Masato crossed his arms. “It’s still not right. She was about to die; you took it too far.”

Hitoshi was only a few feet away from him, but it felt like an entire galaxy away. Masato leaned over Hitoshi’s shoulder and peaked into the open infirmary behind him.

He couldn’t see Ayako but he saw a glimpse of Makoto and she was covered in blood, although it obviously wasn’t hers. *Ayako...*

Masato wanted to say something, but Hitoshi continued, “It’s what was needed. She was rebelling and tried to escape. I took the right course of action here.”

Masato sighed, gripping his fists together tightly. "You have to be... more careful. If she dies..."

"I know!" Hitoshi grabbed Masato and spun him around. He then pushed Masato into the wall. "I have it all under control!" Hitoshi let go of Masato, letting him slide to the floor. "When Makoto's done, bring her home. I don't have time to deal with you."

Hitoshi turned and walked away. Masato sighed again and his rigid figure melted off all its structure; the tension in his face had drained away like water in a sponge. He waited until Hitoshi was out of sight before standing and making his way into the infirmary. He walked inside, making sure to slide the door shut behind himself.

He passed through the office before walking into the actual infirmary. He saw Makoto standing over Ayako's body. Ayako was unconscious on the bed, although she looked fine. Makoto, on the other hand, was gripping the silver locket around her neck. Her breaths were labored, and her posture was stiffer than Masato had ever seen before.

"Makoto..." Masato said from behind her. Makoto startled, screamed, and stumbled away from him falling into another hospital bed.

"Don't scare me like that Masato! You know I get really immersed in my work." Makoto exclaimed, jumping to her feet and playfully hitting Masato's shoulder.

"Sorry." He spotted the emerging wrinkles on her forehead and sighed. He stepped behind her and reached up to her shoulders. He began to massage them as he looked over her shoulder onto the sleeping Ayako.

Makoto admitted, "I know we all got days off from school to deal with 'private clan matters' but I'd actually rather just go."

Masato nodded. "I'm sure Gakuganji-sensei would prefer that. He's probably bored out of his mind without us three there." Masato took a pause to giggle, then he continued, "But you know if we go, then we have to deal with Hitoshi head on."

"I know. He took it too far with Ayako. But I'm sure sensei would shut him up if he started doing anything annoying in class."

Masato moved his hands to try a different massaging technique. "You know he'd just send us on a mission so he wouldn't have to deal with our shenanigans. On the other hand, is Ayako fine?" He smiled as he heard Makoto let out another sigh.

"Physically, yeah. I've gotten even better with Reverse Cursed Technique, there's not even a scar on her body. But... Hitoshi put her through the ringer mentally." Makoto sighed. "First, he killed her mother. Then, he made her his wife and is forcing her to have a child in a few years. And then, he left her alone in a room of curses after stabbing her. All within two days."

"Ever since we found Ayako, she's all he thinks about. It's unhealthy. It's not like he was any better before but-" Masato explained as he moved his hands to lightly massage her head.

"Hitoshi is an even bigger dick now because of that?"

“Yep.” Masato confirmed, popping the p as he spoke. “You should get some sleep. I know you’ve been working all day yesterday and now today at six in the morning.”

“You’ll help her when she wakes?”

“Of course. Hitoshi obviously won’t help. It’s up to me.”

At that, Masato felt her finally relax through his massage. He knew that Naobito-sama had been working her hard to get better with Reverse Cursed Technique. He could admit that it would be nice to have their own private healer, but he didn’t want it at the expense of her teenage years.

“Alright. Goodnight? Or is it good morning?” Makoto asked with a smile. It seemed that her worries had finally fallen away with Masato present.

“Goodnight and morning to you as well.” Masato laughed as he watched Makoto ascend to the second floor.

She vanished up the staircase and although she was gone, Masato occasionally heard footsteps from above him. He smiled and sat on the other hospital bed opposite Ayako. He laid down, although he was careful to keep his shoes off the bed and in the air. Enough time had passed that Masato could feel the sun’s brilliant rays begin to peek through the windows and onto the beds.

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Ayako woke to a peaceful silence. She opened her eyes and looked at her surroundings. The white walls of Makoto’s infirmary stood around her. It was a welcoming sight and Ayako couldn’t help but sigh. She laid her head back down and tried her best to sink into the mattress. But bright, brilliant rays of the sun suddenly attacked her waking eyes.

“It’s morning?” Ayako muttered. Ayako reached up with her hand to cover the sun from her eyes. She heard shifting from a bed and soft footsteps around her. The sound of sliding curtains filled the room until suddenly the sun’s rays vanished into thin air.

She lowered her hand and watched as one of the men that helped in killing her mother was with her.

“You’re Masato Zenin? Where’s Hitoshi?” Ayako expected that she would wake to the vicious eyes of her savior. It burned her soul that she couldn’t save herself. She wasn’t strong enough to break the curtain and she wasn’t strong enough to kill the low leveled curses.

She watched as Masato nodded and responded, “Hitoshi’s home. Are you... ok?”

“I’m fine.” Ayako quickly said. It was so obvious to her that her voice sounded rushed. The two words had practically shrunk into one syllable.

“Look, I don’t believe you and I don’t even think you believe yourself.”

Ayako’s breathing started to pick up. All of a sudden, the room felt like it was boiling. She felt like her gut had collapsed in on itself. She couldn’t dare to look up at the confrontation brewing beside her. There were so many weights pulling her head down: ~~her mom, her dad, Hitoshi, and the Zenin Clan~~ ~~itself.~~

Her eyes dialed in on the hospital gown on her body. The light, teal blue color. The way the gown fell onto her body, the way it rubbed her skin. It suddenly felt extremely itchy, and she wanted nothing more than to rip it off of herself. It all made her want to d-

“Ayako?”

She jumped at the sudden voice in her ear. She threw the arm off of her shoulder. Ayako hopped off the hospital bed and backed herself up to the wall. By the time she could comprehend again, Masato was already slowly moving closer again with his hands held up into the air. She was thankful for the gesture but for some reason, there was *fear* in her. *Fear* from him.

“I’m sorry Hitoshi did what he did. I’m not going to hurt you like that. I’m really good friends with Makoto, the doctor. I’m her classmate at Kyoto Jujutsu High, do you know what that is?”

“A school... for Jujutsu Sorcerers?” Ayako asked. She stood from the wall and faced Masato. Although she was afraid, she had to stand her ground, otherwise she’d lose just like she did to Hitoshi.

“Yep.” Masato took a few steps back and sat on the other bed, but continued, “Look, what Hitoshi did was really wrong, and someone should’ve stopped him.”

Ayako nodded. It was obvious to her and surprisingly to him as well. *Does he understand too?*

“Have you... been in the pit?” Ayako slowly made her way back to her bed. She didn’t sit, but she was close enough for her knees to bump against the bed frame.

“Just about every Zenin Sorcerer has. It’s more used for training purposes, but as Hitoshi showed you, it can be used to.. punish people by trapping them within. As horrible as it is, the pit serves its purpose.” Masato said. She could tell he was reliving that experience. His knee was endlessly bouncing, and his eyes were unfocused on the world around them.

“How can you say that?”

“That’s all I’ve known. It helps with getting combat experience and has personally helped me. Even if you were extremely hurt, you took out a grade two curse. You’re strong.” Masato sighed. “I’m sorry, I know the Zenin Clan sucks, but there is *some* good here. There is no bad without the good, and no good without the bad.”

Ayako’s mouth thins into a flat line. She honestly can’t bear to listen to the nonsense spewing from Masato’s mouth. *If he was in a situation like mine, I’m sure he’d have a very different opinion.* She heard him inhale deeply suddenly.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry you’re here. I’m sorry you can’t escape. I’m sorry for it all.” Masato lamented. He dropped to his knees in front of Ayako and dropped his forehead to the floor in a dogeza. “I’m so fucking sorry. I feel so horrible for what I helped Hitoshi with.”

Ayako watched as his whole body shook as he spoke. She could hear him sniffing and crying.

“It’s all my fault. If I hadn’t helped Hitoshi on that night, you... probably wouldn’t be here. You would be free... and away from Hitoshi. Away from all of this shit.”

She opened her mouth to respond yet no words could free themselves from her throat. It felt like she had been stabbed by Hitoshi again, the pain felt much more grueling than it actually had. But eventually, the few words she had slipped out easily.

“You’re... sorry? You’re sorry?! You can’-”

“I hate them too! But I’m not strong like you, Hitoshi, or even Naoya. What could I ever do against them? I feel so guilty for helping bring you here. I cannot fight the Zenin, so I just suck it up and do what I’m told. Makoto does it, every Zenin here who hates the way things go does it. I’m sorry but that’s how we survive under Naobito-sama.” Masato sat up from his dogeza. “If there was another way, I believe someone would have found it already.”

Ayako saw the excess of tears pouring down his face like the storm the night before. She hated that she could actually tell he was sorry. Her hands gripped the sheets beneath her until her knuckles turned white. *Why do you have to be sorry? Why can’t I just blindly hate you too?*

“You do know that I’ll never forgive you?”

“Yes, but I still needed to apologize. It’s what’s right.”

“I’m not one to just give up under oppressive means. I won’t forgive you, but.. I have to live past this. I can’t quit now when hell is the only thing that awaits me. How can I fight back and not you?”

Her frown flatted as she noticed him repeatedly bowing again in a dogeza,

Masato shook his head rapidly. “You’re strong. You somehow have two different Innate Techniques, and you can even put up a fight against Hitoshi and Naoya. I’ve... never been able to. My technique just isn’t meant for that. I don’t have the innate talent you three have.”

“That’s Zenin bullshit and deep down you know it too.” Ayako sat down on the bed. Her feet ached with every second she stayed standing. “Hitoshi said my father was weak and that he had zero cursed energy. But he wasn’t weak, I remember that enough to know. If he was as weak as Hitoshi says, then why am I so important? Why would the Zenin want mine and my father’s genes?”

“They’ll never admit it, but Toji is probably the strongest Zenin currently alive. They rejected him and pushed him so far that he left just because he had no cursed energy. The Zenin will only care for you if you are a male with a strong innate technique like Hitoshi and Naoya.”

“Wait, what happened last year? With Toji? Hitoshi mentioned it but my memories are all fuzzy. Although, I remember we recently moved toward the countryside around that time but not where we used to live.”

Ayako slid her feet off the other side of the bed, facing Masato. She felt her bare feet touch the hard, cold floor. She shivered in place as she awaited his response.

“Naobito-sama said I should never tell you, something something about control. But you deserve to know. Last year, Toji was unsatisfied with the clan’s treatment of him and he left.” Masato paused and sighed. “A few months ago, we found out Toji was visiting a supposed wife and a daughter. We sent around thirty people after him and they all died. It’s known as the Massacre of Saitama,

Saitama being the city you and Toji used to live in. Right after, Toji vanished again and left you and your mother behind. That's when we were sent to take you."

"He killed them all?" Ayako sat straighter; her eyes fully focused on Masato.

"Yes. The Zenin aren't the best people, but they.. don't deserve what happened. The scene there was *certainly* gruesome."

"You were there, Masato?" Ayako asked, her tone softer now.

"Yes, that was around the time when I started at Kyoto Jujutsu High. Me, Makoto, and Hitoshi were and still are the first years. We were sent to the scene because of Makoto's ability to use Reverse Cursed Technique. But... everyone was already long dead. It was horrible. Most of them were either dismembered or disemboweled." Masato replied.

It looked as if his throat was suddenly filled with vile slush about to erupt out of his mouth. She wouldn't blame him if he puked, since it looked like he had to. Ayako looked down at her fiddling hands. She felt absolutely disgusting. It felt like everything her father did, she had helped partake in too.

"Do you know if... I helped him?"

"We had only arrived after the whole thing. The only one who would know is your father and yourself if you ever remember it."

Ayako frowned again. She had remembered herself training with her father earlier, although it didn't mean anything on its own. She knew how he was from that short memory; she could still feel how he was. *If he is as I think, then wouldn't he force me to help him in the name of combat experience?*

"When we lost Toji again, they shifted their eyes onto you in hopes to find Toji. But you obviously don't remember anything. And now with Satoru Gojo rising in power, they'll do anything to keep up. I hated helping so much, but you're already stronger than me and I've been training for years. I could never stand up against the Zenin Clan or even Naobito-sama." Masato admitted. He stood and slumped onto the bed. She watched as he leaned back and collapsed into the small mattress.

"That's not a good way to think." Ayako responded.

"It's not bad if it's the truth."

"Why do they fear Satoru Gojo so much?" Ayako asked. She felt bad for all the questions but he was the only one who would answer honestly.

Ayako had already heard many things about the miraculous Satoru Gojo, but truly, she didn't know who he *really* was. Although, the memory with her father from earlier kept playing in a loop.

"He's gonna be the strongest sorcerer for sure. And he's already proven himself to oppose the old Jujutsu traditions. He's everything the higher-ups hate."

"He's standing up against everything. Why can't you?" Ayako rebutted. *Satoru Gojo against the world? Maybe he isn't as bad as I thought..*

"Strength, Ayako. Without sufficient strength in this world, you can't do anything." Masato confessed.

"I can't accept that. With enough willpower, you can."

“I wish, but this is how it is. Hitoshi brought you a kimono to wear. It’s in the bathroom. He wants you back home soon.” Masato muttered as he stood. He began to walk towards the exit.

“You’re really gonna sit down and let all this shit happen?” Ayako yelled. She stood from the bed and approached him. Her knuckles were pure white as she stared at him. Masato suddenly turned around.

“I tried. You don’t know how many times I’ve tried to change things. But every time I even slightly go against Naobito-sama’s wishes, I end up in the pit, same as you did. I’m terrified of dying, especially when I’m the disposable one.” With each step, Masato walked closer to Ayako. “It’s not like that for you. You’re *worth* something.” Masato clarified, practically in Ayako’s face.

His eyes were filled with a venom Ayako hadn’t noticed their entire conversation. She looked up into his eyes and didn’t back away like earlier. “So are you.”

“If you say so, I’ll be waiting outside.” Masato said, turning around. He exited the building and shut the door with more force than Ayako thought he possessed.

Ayako frowned as she realized that he just went along with her to leave. He was antsy and his feet were dancing to leave. She stared at the gray door. *Why don’t you believe in your own worth?*