

CHAPTER 13

Rei followed Kamiya Hiroto in something of a daze for the minute or so the man led him deeper into the woods. Once more they didn't speak, with the doctor seemingly content to simply walk just ahead of him for a time, his head moving slowly this way and that as he took in the forest around them.

They were well into the trees, the sun cutting through the density of the leafless branches in fading rays of light across their misting breaths, when Kamiya stopped.

Then finally spoke.

"I'm going to ask you a question, Reidon. I don't imagine it's going to be an easy one to answer, so do please feel free to take your time."

Rei blinked, yanked uncomfortably from his shell shock. He stared at the man's back, gloved hands still clasped behind him, grey eyes still on the trees.

"...Okay...?" Rei got out after a second, unsure of how else to respond.

Similarly, it apparently took Kamiya a moment to form his own words.

"... What needs to be done to make this right?"

The question hung in the silence between them for a long time, echoing soundlessly in the quiet. Rei felt the anger bubbling into life again with every passing second, but eventually he forced it down, forced himself not to let the fire overcome him. There would be time for that heat.

It just wasn't now.

"I think that would depend on what 'this' is..." He drew the words out slowly, deliberately. "Wouldn't it... uh... Doctor?"

Kamiya had half turned his face to listen as Rei answered, and at the hesitation in being addressed something a little like pain passed across his features.

"'Doctor' is fine. For now at least. But yes, that's a fair judgment. I suppose I am making the assumption that you have already deduced much of the situation, based on your last exchange with Jasper."

“A deduction isn’t more than a best guess without confirmation,” Rei answered coolly.

His heart was hammering again. He wished it wasn’t. Between that and the fury he was wrestling with it made it hard to figure out exactly what he was thinking—much less *feeling*—as he spoke.

Kamiya nodded again. “You want the truth,” he said simply. Not a question so much as a statement, but there was still a request somewhere in there.

Rei had to stop himself from yelling that he less wanted it and more had *earned* it. With blood, sweat, tears, and *years* of pain, he had *earned* it.

Instead, he decided to borrow a page from Aria’s book.

“You’re damn right I do,” he growled.

Kamiya swallowed. It seems an... odd thing to witness. From the moment they’d met Rei had had the distinct impression this man was generally one of acute inscrutability. An unyielding object who only moved when *he* decided to, and then moved with such terrifying force as to make whole planets flinch in response. And yet here Kamiya Hiroto was, clearly finding it hard to look him in the face.

For the first time, Rei began to wonder if there was more going on here than even *he* had wondered about.

All at once, the doctor turned to him in full, eyes moving to meet his again. Sure enough, there was a *will* there, an unbending, unshaking will.

And yet when the man spoke, his voice still had that edge of strain to it.

“Would you prefer I lay it out for you, or would you like to first tell me what it is you’ve already surmised?”

Rei felt his brow furrow. *There* was an offer he hadn’t seen coming. He hadn’t expected a man like Kamiya Hiroto to be forthcoming in *any* situation, much less one as delicate as this. Rei found himself, with as much a wave of confusion as renewed anger, having difficulty getting a sense of the man.

Maybe that was why the words spilled out of him before he could stop himself.

“I’m Kamiya blood.” He barely managed to keep himself from spitting out the words. “Probably your kid? By some affair you didn’t want coming out? Then again, maybe not. I thought I might have been some relative’s, some branch family’s, but I went back 200 years of public records and these—” he jerked a hand up to indicate his eyes “—seem to be almost exclusively limited only to the main line. Couldn’t find an example of them being passed on even a generation beyond those who marry out. So props there for making sure no one designs their kids without permission. At least you follow up with *them*.” He sneered at the irony.

Kamiya, on the other hand, only frowned as he listened, which was fine with Rei.

He had plenty more to say.

“I wasn’t wanted. Don’t know why, but I’ve got a guess or two. One more solid than the other, given whoever it was who left me at the hospital at least bothered to give me a *first* name before they bailed. And because I wasn’t wanted, I was forgotten. Or maybe you thought I died. Or hoped I did. I don’t know. Doesn’t matter. No one ever came back. No one ever visited, or even checked in. I was left behind, totally and completely. I was left behind.”

The tautness in the doctor’s face was more pronounced.

“That’s when we get the present, though.” Rei couldn’t help the fury from leaking out into his words, now. “That’s when we get to the *fun* part, Doctor. See... I made it. With the help of one *really* good friend, and then a couple more. I *made it*. I’m one of the lucky few, and the lucky *fewer* who did it missing two arms and leg, figuratively speaking.” His words were coming through clenched teeth. “I started to build a reputation. I started to gain just a *bit* of notoriety. People are beginning to know my name. Who I am. Not really sure how I feel about that yet, but it’s irrelevant. It’s happening. I have a future. For the first time in my *damn* life, I *actually* have a future. One with potential. One with promise. One *without* pain.” He grinned, then, a hard, angry leer tainted with the twisted hilarity of it all. Lifting an arm, he jerked the sleeve of his black-and-golds back with with other hand, revealing Shido and the scars that decorated his skin in an ugly pattern of faint slashes and faded dots. “*That* was a change, I have to tell you. I got good at not showing it, but these...” he patted the exposed arm to indicate the scars, “these *hurt*, Doctor. And a hell of a lot less than what they were *fixing*.” He dropped his arm, the sleeve slipping down to hide the skin and his Device again, relieved to let the man openly hear the disgust in his words at last. “And then— and *only* then, by some *incredible* coincidence—did your company decide to show their

face. Amazing. Miraculous, actually.” He glared at Kamiya. “Almost like I wasn’t worth your time until there was something to be gained from acknowledging I exist...”

He let the last words hang, let them ring into the quiet of woods. For a long time the pair of them stood some 10 feet apart, Rei working to bring his temper back into check while Kamiya’s face was a grim shadow that darkened his eyes almost to black. The man didn’t meet his gaze, though.

He was staring, instead, at Rei’s arm, taking it in like he couldn’t look away.

After almost a minute, Rei decided it was time to speak again.

“How’d I do?” he got out in a tone of mock-pleasantry. “Did I hit close to the mark, Doc?”

Kamiya started, looking to rise from some deep place with a wince. His jaw tightened, but when he spoke, whatever anger was woven into his words seemed hardly aimed at Rei.

“Jasper had you right from the start,” he got out hoarsely. “It appears I *did* go about things every way but the right one, didn’t I?”

Rei frowned at this, but the doctor was already continuing with another sigh.

“I cannot say you are wrong, Reidon. About any of it. There are some things you have misunderstood, but I can hardly blame you for that given what we—no,” he corrected himself with a real hint of frustration, “given what *I* have put you through.”

“I don’t know about that,” Rei growled, shoving his hands into his pockets in an attempt not to give away the shock of adrenaline the man’s subtle confirmation had brought with it. “It’s been eighteen years. That’s a *lot* of time to have missed seeing *anything* that would suggest I’ve ‘misunderstood’ so much as a minute.”

“Yes. Hence my... irritation...”

Kamiya’s voice was quiet—almost like he hadn’t meant for Rei to overhear him—but there was a resonance within the words that once again took him aback. The surprise was different, this time, though. This wasn’t an odd expression, or a strange look he hadn’t expected. This was... something else.

Power, Rei realized, his eyes dropping immediately to where Kamiya’s own hands—for once—were the ones in fists by his sides.

For the first, he saw the gleam then. The hint of multi-colored steel, black and a deep, blood red.

A Device.

“Wait... You’re a User...?” Rei muttered, unable to keep the astonishment out the question.

It took a second for Kamiya again to rouse from whatever place his thoughts seemed to have taken him, but when he did he looked down. Then, lifting an arm, he too tugged the sleeve of his coat back to reveal the band in truth. Rei wasn’t surprised he hadn’t noticed, then. The vysetrium was usually the thing that stood out, but against the dark steel Kamiya Hiroto’s gems were an onyx-grey, their thin lines seeming almost more intent on sucking the light from their surroundings than they did to shine.

Even Chancery’s true black gems didn’t glow like that...

“Is that so surprising?” the doctor asked. “I would have thought you might expect as much.”

“I didn’t find anything about that.” Rei was studying the CAD with a frown. “It’s not in your bio. Not in your history either...”

“Ah, well... Yes. That’s true.” Kamiya covered the Device again, and his hands returned to their clasped position behind his back as he seemed to regain a little of his composure. “My work... I don’t think you’ll be surprised to know that much of it is classified. Even within the ISCM. For that reason—and my own personal desire—my presence on the feeds is... sterilized, shall we say.”

“Uh huh...” Rei only just heard the man, studying him intently now, taking him in with a different interest. That infallibility. That presence or power... If he had to guess, Kamiya Hiroto wasn’t just *any* User. He didn’t feel like an S but... high As, maybe...?

“I... I did think you were dead, Reidon.”

The statement brought Rei back with the force of a lightning bolt. Immediately he forgot his momentary distraction, the reason why he was there—standing in the woods with a total stranger—snapping back into place all at once.

“... Sorry?” he asked quietly.

“I did—No, rather, to give myself *some* credit—I was *made* to think you were dead.” Kamiya’s face was still grey, but he seemed to be forcing himself to stand straighter, now, forcing himself to stand tall. “You were close with that guess, at least. Very close. However... you are not *my* child.”

Rei could *feel* his heart, now, could feel it hammering against his chest and the blood flowing and drawing from his very fingertips.

“Then... whose am I?” he got out, not so much as hearing the croak in the question.

To be fair, Kamiya’s voice wasn’t much more stable as he answered.

“My son’s. Keiji. I am not your father, Reidon. I am, however...” The man had to pause, clearing his throat before trying again. “I am, however... your grandfather.”

It was like the world itself had forgotten to move. One moment Rei thought his entire body would break apart, would shatter under the nervous, thundering force of his heart. The next, though, there was nothing. There was only electric emptiness, a numbing buzz that rang in Rei’s ears. He didn’t feel his own breath come on in uneven, throaty hitches. He didn’t feel his school bag slip from his shoulder as his body tensed, nor hear it fall to the frozen stone of the path with a *thud*. There was nothing *to* feel, nothing *to* hear.

There was only Kamiya Hiroto.

His... grandfather...?

“You’re... sure?” Rei heard someone gasp weakly through the fog. It took him a second to realize the question had come out in his own quavering voice.

Hiroto’s words, on the other hand, reached him like a horn in the night.

“I am. I had Abigail run the test three times. Three different labs. Then I had two more run it without telling her. As you get to know how much faith I have in my steward, I think that will tell you how certain I needed to be.”

Rei started returning to himself slowly, his words a little more conscious as the shock drew away little by little.

“But... how? Where would you... How would you get the—?”

“The material? It was provided to us by certain members of the ISCM.” Hiroto frowned again, his own voice becoming a little stronger. “There was... incentive applied, I admit. The military keeps a record of the physiological makeup of its assignee hopefuls. The successes and failures alike.”

Rei understood. “My Assignment Exam...”

“Indeed. I think you can imagine why it’s valuable data to have on hand.”

He nodded numbly. Of course it was. If anything, keeping tissue samples and genetic material was probably *invaluable* to the ISCM. It would allow them to compare the physical makeup of failures to successes, the changes over time to their Users, and even the—

Rei wrenched himself back to reality, unwilling to let his tumbling mind flee from the truth that stood before him.

“You’re... my grandfather.” He forced himself to say the words with conviction, like getting them out would make them easier to believe. “I... I’m... *your* kid’s... kid.”

It was Kamiya’s turn to nod, but he did so solemnly.

“You are.” His words were tight again. “Though I admit I have some discomfort claiming that title. Even less calling Keiji your father.”

The anger returned in a flare.

“And why is that?” Rei growled, readying himself for the worst. “Not something you would want publicizing, or are you just—?”

But Kamiya held him up with a raised hand.

“It is nothing of the sort, Reidon,” he said quietly. “My hesitancy comes purely from the fact that my inaction resulted in the life you’ve had until now. That... and the actual *actions* of my son.”

Rei’s mouth fell open then. Not so much due to the doctor’s words, though.

Rather, Rei’s surprise came as Kamiya Hiroto bowed, then. Bowed, with legs straight and body dipping towards the ground, so low that his head fell below the level of his waist. It was a deep, deliberate movement. There was something... sad about it, too. Something heavy. It was... heartfelt, Rei thought?

Heartfelt... and heartbroken.

“I am so sorry, Reidon. Truly. For my failures, and for those of my son.”

Kamiya didn't lift his head as he spoke, his straight hair hanging down till it nearly touched the ground, his narrow frame—thin but strong for a man his age—unmoving.

It took a long, long time for Rei to find his voice again.

“What... *did* happen?” he asked at last, finally getting out the last question—that last *essential* question—that he had hoped would be heard today.

Before him, the doctor straightened slowly. When he stood tall again, Rei was somehow unsurprised to find the man's eyes redder than they'd been a moment before.

“The details... are not kind, Reidon. Are you sure you want to know?”

Rei hesitated. He hadn't expected to, and it took him aback. Here they were. The answers he needed. He hadn't *wanted* them, somehow. Hadn't for years, now. It had been a long, long time since Rei had come to terms with the bits of his story Matron Kast and the other staff at the Estoran Center on Astra-2 could tell him. It had been a long time since he'd made peace with his last name.

But then Kamiya had come knocking, and the possibility of the truth had been a tempting thing. So tempting, in fact, that he hadn't been able to admit it to himself, much less anyone else.

And yet now... he was hesitating.

For some reason, in that moment, Rei thought of Viv. Aria would have been kind, had she been there to read his thoughts. Aria would have been gentle and encouraging, wanting him to be careful, to be *alright*, no matter what else.

Viv, on the other hand, would have told him to get over himself even as she shoved him across the line with both hands.

Rei could almost feel her standing behind him as he answered.

“Yes. Tell me everything.”

Kamiya nodded slowly, like he hadn't expected any other answer even if he'd possibly wished otherwise.

Then he sighed.

“My son is... a difficult man,” he started, very clearly choosing his words with care. “A *very* difficult man. It’s my fault. His mother—your grandmother, Reidon—died when he was very young. A casualty of that *damn* war.” Kamiya grimaced but kept on. “I wish I could say I did my best to raise him but... I do not know if that’s truthfully the case, in retrospect. I was absent, I think. Not as absent as some, perhaps, but more so than I should have been. My work... My work was—*is*—important, you see. At least that was what I told myself at the time.” He snorted, the first true lapse in decorum Rei had seen from the man. “And continue to, apparently.”

Kamiya seemed to ponder that for a moment, frowning up at the sky for a moment before continuing.

“As a result, as I said he grew up to be... selfish. Irresponsible. So much so that I almost feel better about my presence in his life. I truly do not think my not being there is cause enough to have made Keiji the sort of person he is today...” The doctor shook his head. “He’s not incapable. Not in the least. I don’t think you’ll be surprised to know the man who should have been your father is clever and quick-witted. In another life, I would have been proud to call him my son, proud for him to carry on the Kamiya name.”

“But... you’re not?” Rei asked in the brief pause that followed this statement.

Kamiya shook his head, his expression one of barely-suppressed grief.

“No, Reidon... No. It breaks my heart to admit it—and I do not know if I have ever done so out loud—but... no.” He took another slow breath. “Keiji... The money went to his head. Or rather I don’t know if there was ever much else *in* his head. I did not think I indulged him so as a child, but I admit I no longer know *what* to think now, seeing the man he has become. He is...” Kamiya winced. “There is no other word for it, unfortunately: He is a hedonist. Drugs. Debauchery. Expensive experiences and expensive tastes.”

“He sounds like a winner,” Rei muttered through his teeth.

Kamiya nodded, but didn’t answer otherwise. Instead, he grimaced again.

“Regrettably, his antics only got worse when he met Samantha.” He met Rei’s gaze, then. “His wife. The woman who, in turn, should have been your mother.”

An electric shock shivered up Rei's whole body, setting the hairs of his arms stand on end beneath his uniform. His breath caught in his throat, but he swallowed it down this time, unwilling to let his mind rush off into the numbness again.

"Samantha..." he repeated instead, trying out the name.

For some reason, it tasted foul on his tongue.

Not that Kamiya's scowl helped.

"Indeed. It was a 'shotgun' affair, as I believe the old Western adage goes. I'm not even sure where they met. I barely knew they were seeing each other before I learned they'd married. I suppose I should feel lucky they even told me Samantha was pregnant when they did." His anger faded, then, replaced with a somber chagrin. Once more he looked to Rei. "I... was not at your birth, Reidon. A company matter had diverted me—an issue at one of our plants, if I recall correctly—and I convinced myself at the time that there was no need for me to be there. That I could meet you after, and all would be well. That was my single greatest failure in this catastrophe, I think. Had I been there... Had I been *present*..."

Kamiya seemed truly to be struggling with himself now, swallowing with difficulty as a myriad of subtle emotions whispered across his stoic features. Anger. Grief. Shame. Rei even thought detected a hint of hope there, somewhere, but he was too preoccupied to care one way or the other.

"What... What happened?" he asked again instead, finding himself no less hesitant the second time around. Still... he needed to know. Desperately now, more than ever. Had he been unwanted or...

... or had they just thought him broken...?

The answer—in a stroke that was at once merciful and cruel—came brutally.

"To the best of my understanding—and I have few reasons to believe Keiji and Samantha were coy on the subject, this time—your 'parents' couldn't be bothered to do a full gene-panel before your birth." Beneath all the other emotions on the man's face, the anger was most present now, and his eyes were once more fixed on the arm Rei displayed his scars upon. "They—according to what they told me—'didn't see the point'."

The words hit Rei like kick to the chest.

“They didn’t know about my fibro...” he translated quietly, no longer seeing the old man before him. “And when they found out...”

“And when they found out, they decided they couldn’t be bothered with you *at all*.”

Some part of Rei’s mind registered the kindness Kamiya Hiroto was showing him. It was a small, distant part, but it saw the consideration taken in the bluntness of this answer, in the unvarnished truth handed to him without dance or fanfare. The doctor—his *grandfather*, he recalled with a dim measure of renewed astonishment—was placing his faith in Rei, was trusting that this was the right thing to do. Rei suspected he would appreciate that, soon.

In the moment, though... It just hurt.

It was Rei’s turn to look away for the first time. His gaze drifted from Kamiya to... anywhere. Anything. He looked to the trees, the stone, the sky. I looked to the last drifting hints of the sunlight still casting lines through his breath as it faded behind the skyscrapers of Castalon to the west, then the ever-drifting patterns of the skylanes far above, grown more distinct as the lights of the flyers began to show against the darkening day. He didn’t know what it was he was looking for, unfortunately.

Whatever it was... he was pretty sure he wasn’t going to find it.

“You... said you think they told you the truth ‘this time?’” he asked quietly of the air. “... What does that mean...?”

Kamiya’s voice was a growl as he answered.

“You need not know the details. Let us just say I can be *extremely* persuasive when I set my mind to the—”

“No...” Rei interrupted the man. He could imagine, of course, exactly *how* convincing the doctor could be if he needed to. He himself had stood in front of *plenty* of angry high-level Users when they chose to make the emotions known, after all.

But that wasn’t what he’d meant.

“I was... What did you mean by ‘this time?’” he clarified instead. “What did they... The last time, what did they...?”

He couldn’t finish the question. A pain had formed in his throat, one that was rising into his cheeks, sharper with every word.

Fortunately, Kamiya had followed his train of thought.

“They told me that you had died, Reidon.” The old man’s voice was gentle, a soft whisper that matched the light winter wind that cast its way steadily through the trees in that moment. “In childbirth. They told me you had died. They even...” his voice cracked for a moment. “... They even presented me with an urn, telling me it contained all that remained of my... my grandson.”

The breeze stung. For some reason, as it licked at Rei’s face, it stung. Not understanding, he brought a hand up, touching his cheek in confusion.

The tips of his gloved fingers came away damp.

It was long moment before either of them spoke again. It was a difficult silence, heavy and painful as each bore the shared weight of the cruelty that had been thrust upon them. To be fair, Rei wasn’t sure he *could* speak even if he’d wanted to, and in that moment he realized he’d made a mistake telling Aria she needn’t have come with him.

He would have given anything in that moment—*anything*—to have her there, to have her hand in his, to have her arms wrapped around him and her hair to press his face into as the tears continued to come.

It was Kamiya, this time, who broke the quiet first.

“My next sin I think, was lesser, but no less of a failure...”

Rei blinked at the gravel in the man’s voice, coming back to himself. The lump didn’t leave his throat, but he wiped at his eyes hurriedly with a sleeve before looking around at the doctor. Kamiya wasn’t meeting his gaze again, his face half-turned once more, away from the fading sun this time so that his features were cast in shadow.

“I... couldn’t believe them, you see,” he continued after a moment. “When they told me you had died. It’s something I struggled with for a long time. A *very* long time. I like to think it was the folly of grief, the inability to accept something so terrible but... I now wonder if I’ve had no faith in my son and his wife for much longer than... than I thought...”

He had to take another slow breath, an unsteady, shaky sound that countered his strong frame.

“I placed calls to the hospital where Keiji told me you’d been born, but I think he and Samantha foresaw that. They told me they hadn’t named you, so I had little more

than the date of your birth to go on. Worse, what few records I *did* manage to get my hands on all echoed their story. A baby with grey eyes, stillborn and unnamed. It's the primary reason I tested your blood against mine so many times. Money changed hands, you'll be unsurprised to hear. Even in this age of the MIND and all its influences, enough money in the right place can buy almost anything."

"Including falsified birth records..." Rei muttered. He didn't know why he believed Kamiya Hiroto. He probably shouldn't have. For some reason, though, he could help but believe this strange man who claimed to be his grandfather.

Maybe it had something to do with the dim glint of light against the man's own lined cheeks, barely visible against the shadows.

The doctor nodded, then continued. "Just the same, I couldn't let it go. I set a portion of the Corporation's servers to scraping the feeds for signs of you. The only time in my entire adult life I've leveraged the company's assets for my personal gain, at least until recently. A decision I and my foolish pride struggled with for years. *Years*. Until..." Rei saw the old man swallow with difficulty. "Until... I forgot, Reidon. Until I forgot I had done it, and I forgot... about you."

The words came hesitantly, painfully. As though he feared saying them allowed.

Rei was discovering, however, that he could not hold onto his anger. Not towards Kamiya Hiroto. Maybe he'd regret that, one day.

But for now... it felt good not to hate *someone*.

"That's how you found me." It had been a lesser question, but he was pleased to have the answer all the same. "I figured—if I *was* Kamiya blood—that you'd just been keeping tabs on me in case I *did* prove valuable."

Before him, Rei thought he saw the doctor's eyes close briefly, and his whole body seemed to relax ever so slightly.

Relief, Rei recognized.

"Precisely." The man still didn't look around at him, but his voice was steadier now. "It happened at the end of your Intra-Schools. Your fight with the Mauler. Logan Grant. Usually qualifying tournaments don't garner enough attention to have a large presence on the feeds but... well..."

"Yeah..." Rei answered wearily, remembering. "That fight... made the rounds."

“To put it mildly, yes. At least enough—” Kamiya Hiroto turned to face him at last, and Rei saw in truth the damp trail along the one cheek that face the sun now “—to let me find you.”

Rei was finding it harder to breath than he thought it should have been, but he ignored the discomfort, ignored the tightness in his chest. Instead, he simply stared at the doctor, at the man who was at once a stranger, and yet also the only family he had.

He didn't know what to make of that.

“So... What now?” he asked after a time, not sure what other questions he could ask.

Kamiya's grim expression tightened ever so slightly, but he straightened his shoulders and lifted his chin, as though reminded of his position and the place to he stood in.

“Now... I make amends, Reidon. Or do the best that I can to. Starting today, right now.”

Rei raised and eyebrow at the man. “By throwing money at the problem? By sponsoring me? If you want a headstart on getting to know me, let me save you the—”

“I have already admitted that I went about this in all the wrong ways.” Kamiya cut in gently, but firmly, dipping his head in apology once more. “However, I hope you will see this contract not as an attempt to buy my wait into your good graces.”

“Oh?” Rei snorted doubtfully. “Then how *should* I see it?”

“As a gesture of good faith. As a manifestation of my sincerity. Your sponsorship is not about waving money in your face, Reidon.” The doctor shook his head slowly. “It is about providing you with what you need to become everything you can be. It is about...” He swallowed hard again. “It is about... providing you with what your family should have given you from the start.”

The pain returned, heavy and sharp in Rei's throat. His hands were fists again, but not in anger this time.

Rather, he held them tight if only to keep them from shaking.

“... Maybe it’s better off those two didn’t have kids.” He said hoarsely, trying at a laugh. “Any brat of *theirs* probably would have ended up pretty messed up, given how they handle shit, huh?”

He had meant it as a joke, had meant it as a strained attempt at levity in a conversation that had at once raised him up and dragged him down, down, down.

He was taken aback—and a little alarmed—therefore, when Kamiya Hiroto’s expression shifted briefly to confusion.

Then right on into horrified realization.

“What?” Rei asked, suddenly concerned. “What did I say?”

For the first time, however, the doctor looked truly at a loss for words. His mouth opened, then closed, then opened again.

When he finally spoke, the man sounded almost frightened.

“Ah... Err... Yes, well... About that, Reidon...”