When a Light Goes Dim

by Kiwik

Summary

Kagami goes to America to visit his father and comes back in ruins. Aomine tries and gets him back on his feet.

Notes

WARNING WARNING WARNING. This fic deals heavily with depression, anxiety, and suicide. Please do not read if you're easily triggered! But if you do choose to read it, you have been warned! I didn't want to write much for the summary for fear of spoiling it so you'll just have to read to find out what happens!

Also, this is my first fic in awhile (and my first fic on here) so please be kind! I have no beta and I write whenever I have the free time!
Chapter 1

Kagami was never one to complain about his life. After all, there really wasn't much to complain about in the first place. He had patched things up with Tatsuya before Seirin's win during the Winter Cup, his relationship among his teammates had gotten even stronger, and after participating in Jabberwock's crushing defeat, he could admit that his relationship with the Generation of Miracles were on better terms—or so he believes. He still finds them almost unbearable to deal with—namely Aomine—However, the exhilaration he feels whenever he gets a chance to play during their meet ups with Kuroko was something he couldn't deny.

His daily routine hasn't changed much. Unexpectedly, he and Aomine got along well enough to play more one-on-ones. He'd wake up early on school days, go (sleep) through his classes, go to practice, and head to Maji Burger with Kuroko before going home to crash. During the weekends he would occasionally meet up with Aomine to play basketball. Kagami always found himself looking forward to those days. Scheduling them was always a pain though, he had needed to rely on Kuroko to be the messenger, something he and Kuroko were currently in the middle of doing.

"Sho, did he respond yet?" Kagami asked, both hands occupying a burger, while he took turns alternating bites from them.

"Kagami-kun, please mind your manners. People are staring."

Responding with a grunt, he put down one of his burgers and wiped his face messily. Glaring back at light blue eyes who seem to be enjoying the faint giggles and murmurs from strangers who sat around their booth. He raised an eyebrow expectantly, waiting for Kuroko to finish sipping his milkshake.

"Well?"

"Yes, Kagami-kun. He said he would meet you at the usual court around 12p.m Saturday."

Slumping back in his seat, Kagami nodded and resumed eating. That was typically around the time they'd play before parting ways a few hours later.

"Ah, he sent another text," Kuroko started again, pressing buttons into his phone. "Aomine-kun wants you to make him lunch."

"Tch, hell no."

"Kagami-kun-"

"Ugh, why should I? He's making this such an expensive habit," Kagami argued, taking another angry bite out of his burger. It's not like Aomine was one to openly compliment his cooking; but even though he knew Aomine enjoyed his food, it was still tough to cook for the guy. He's only ever wanted teriyaki burgers and those always took extra effort (and money) to make. On the other hand, the trouble seemed to be worth it whenever he saw Aomine's usual nonchalant expression change into something full of satisfaction and delight, albeit he would try and hide it. It was rather endearing, but Kagami would never admit that.

"This seems to be something you will have to speak to Aomine-kun about," Kuroko says, pressing some more buttons before handing his phone to Kagami. "Here, I called him."

He nearly choked on his burger. Before Kagami had a chance to react, he heard Aomine's low
voice from the other end of the line. "Hello?"

'I hate you,' Kagami mouthed to Kuroko who looked off to the side, drinking his milkshake casually. Talking with Aomine over the phone was another difficult task he didn't particularly enjoy doing. Sure, he may enjoy listening to Aomine's low husky voice but that thought was always short-lived. Most times their phone calls always led to arguments and pointless bickering. He had told Kuroko many times that speaking with Aomine over the phone was troublesome. Kuroko, never seemed to care.

"Hey," Kagami mumbled.

"Hah? Kagami? What the hell are you doing with Tetsu's phone?"

"S'not my fault! He called you and handed the phone to me." Kagami grumbled. His eyes darted back to Kuroko who was still looking out the window. He looked so god damn peaceful, it irked the hell out of Kagami. How dare he sip his milkshake so tranquilly. He heard Aomine mumble something inaudible- but he made out 'Damn, that Tetsu. I'm really gonna kill him later-

"Whatever, just hand the phone back to him. I can't deal with you right now."

"Fine, I didn't want to talk to your dumbass in the first place!"

"Who the fuck are you calling a dumbass you bastard!" Aomine snarled, "Just you wait, I'm gonna wipe the floor with you on Saturday, you'll be-- Ah wait, Kagami before you go.."

"What now?" Kagami sighed overdramatically.

"You gonna make me lunch or what?"

Kagami's never hung up on someone so quick.

The walk back home had taken a bit longer than he had hoped, he had stopped by the local grocery market to buy ingredients to make lunch for Aomine and him for their one-on-one on Saturday. Sighing in disappointment, he stuffed the ingredients into the fridge and threw himself on the couch. I caved in again. Pulling out his phone, Kagami set the alarm for early morning Saturday so he could get started on the burgers, mentally making a checklist of to-do's in his head.

He stayed sunken into his couch for a few more minutes, eyes roamed over his empty apartment. He'd hate to admit it, but occasionally he'd find himself feeling a bit lonesome. Kagami would often wonder what his life would be like if his father had kept the initial plan to move in with him. He'd wonder if they'd have lively chats, if his father would show up to his games, celebrate his victories with him, give him advice on basketball, or eat meals with him. Shaking his head, he dismissed the thoughts. It's not like his father and him were ever close anyways. He grew up with his mother for a small portion of his life and a nanny for the rest. His father was often too busy with work to spend time with him.

After going through the rest of his nightly routine, Kagami got comfortable in his bed and whipped out his cell phone, updating himself on the latest basketball news. He was starting to get sleepy when his ringtone jolted him awake, his hands flailing in surprise had the phone crashing down on his nose and he groaned in pain. 'Who the hell is calling at this hour?' Rubbing his nose, he picked up before he checked the caller ID.
"What?!" He barked.

"Oh? Haha, is that how you answer your father's phone call?"

"D-dad?"

On the way to school, he couldn't keep himself from bumping into things. Kagami's mind was a bit muddled from his conversation with his dad from the night before. It was very brief, but it just seemed so odd. Kagami knew in the back of his mind that his relationship with his father was a bit complicated. Their conversations weren't frequent. His father would send him monthly letters containing Kagami's allowance, but that was the most of it. It was very rare for him to get a text from him, let alone a phone call. It was weirding him out, the way his father had spoken to him as if it was the most natural thing to do.

"Hey Taiga, did I wake you?"

"Uh n-no, I was just about to sleep though. Is everything okay? You don't usually call." Kagami didn't mean to let that last part slip. It was almost as if he meant to guilt trip him. But upon hearing his father chuckle, he'd guess he wasn't bothered by the comment.

"Ahh, well. I thought this conversation would be better to have over the phone," He heard his father shift a bit. Faintly in the background, he could make out another voice. "If you're sleeping soon, we can have this conversation tomorrow. It's about 11pm your time, right?"

"Uh, yeah. Okay. I'll talk to you tomorrow then?"

"Mhm, I'll call you around 10pm your time. Sleep well, Taiga." And with that, he hung up.

Kagami didn't realize it would be bugging him so much. For some reason, he couldn't shake such an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was distracted during class, wondering what had possessed his father to call him. Was it urgent? If it was, he would've had that conversation then. Did his father miss him? It didn't sound like it. Oh crap, what if he realized that he'd been spending more money on Aomine's stinkin' groceries? Ah, but he didn't sound angry either. What if-

Suddenly, a sharp pain in his rib stirred him out of his thoughts.

"Gwah!! Shit, what the hell Kuroko?!" Kagami shouted, rubbing at the side where the little demon jabbed. Eyes watering he turned to him and gave him the meanest glare he could muster.

"Kagami-kun, I've been calling your name for the past five minutes. It's lunch break now," A slight scowl on his face. "Is something the matter? You seem rather distracted today."

"I'm fine, just had a weird night," Kagami shrugged. "Don't worry about it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, yeah. Now can we eat?"

Kuroko didn't say anything for a few seconds. His eyes examining him. Then he let out a hum of agreement and sat down, pulling out his bento. The thing that Kagami liked most about Kuroko was that he didn't pry. He really appreciated that.
"Summer break is starting next week, isn't it?"

"Oh you're right! Wonder what Coach is gonna have planned for us." He said, pulling out his BLT. He couldn't wait for summer break. Summer break meant sleeping in, going to the beach, basketball, basketball, and more basketball. He wondered if Aomine would have more time to play one-on-ones with him too. That is, if coach didn't spring any summer training camps on him. But even so, he wouldn't mind. Riko's training regimen was definitely strenuous, but he enjoyed the constant activity, and he enjoyed spending time with his teammates.

"Do you have anything planned for summer break?" Kuroko inquired.

"Mmmm, not really. Just play basketball, I guess."

"With Aomine-kun?"

Kagami thought about that for a bit. He'd really like to. He always felt bad dragging Aomine out to meet him for games, though. He wasn't exactly sure Aomine enjoyed their one-on-ones as much as he had. For the most part, it was always Kagami who asked Aomine to play games with him. So Kagami just shrugged. "He'll probably be too busy." Which he knew was a lie. Aomine was one of the laziest beings on the face of the planet and he knew it.

"You can always ask him Kagami-kun. You meet him in two days."

"I don't know."

"Why not?"

"Cause he always seems unhappy to meet me."

"That's just his face, Kagami-kun."

"Yeah, well. He always looks constipated."

Kuroko tried his best to stifle his laughter. He cleared his throat and coughed. "You're not being honest with yourself, Kagami-kun," a bit of twinkle evident in his eyes and Kagami briefly wondered what the look was for. "And honestly, I'm sure Aomine-kun enjoys your one-on-ones. He just doesn't show it."

Kagami snorted. It seemed like all Kuroko and him talked about lately was Aomine. It irked him a bit and he wasn't sure why it did. So he let the conversation die.

Practice that afternoon was brutal. Coach had tripled the drills saying, 'Just because it's almost summer doesn't mean you're allowed to slack off!' By the time practice was over, he'd just wanted to grab Maji Burger and go home and relax. But Coach had other plans. She had called a meeting in the gym.

"Alright everyone, listen up! I'm sure you're all wondering about the summer holiday," Riko started. "We'll be having training camp at the beach!"

'The beach? Fuck, yeah!'

'Imagine all the girls in bikinis'

'I'll get to relax on the hot sand and tan my buns~'

Kagami could vaguely hear the murmurs of the underclassmen in the background and he wanted to
laugh. He shook his head. Boy were they in for a rude awakening. Riko had then went on to tell them the training camp would last for only two weeks before dismissing them. The underclassmen immediately running up to Kagami, asking him for details on his first summer training camp, and what it was like.

He wasn't exactly familiar with the concept of senpai and underclassmen. Having grown up in America, they didn't have that. The way the first years were being overly polite was a bit suffocating and uncomfortable for him. So he awkwardly tried shooing them away before excusing himself when he realized that escape wasn't going to come easy.

First years are scary, He thought to himself, before picking up his belongings and headed outside, where he saw Kuroko waiting for him.

"Sorry for the wait, Kuroko. They wouldn't leave me alone." His shoulders slumping a bit and he exhaled loudly.

Kuroko smiled and patted him on the arm. "They really respect you."

"Eh? What for?"

Kuroko rolled his eyes. Sometimes Kagami was way too dense for his own good. "Are you ready to go eat?"

"Ahh, sorry Kuroko. I just want to grab some food and go home. I'm beat."

"It's alright, Kagami-kun. I'll see you tomorrow then."

Kagami waved goodbye to Kuroko, ordered out at Maji's and was on his way home. He had planned to sleep a bit earlier but remembered that his father would be calling him later. Shit, I forgot about that.

He ate quietly. His television was on some random channel, playing an American sitcom. He'd glance at the clock from time to time. He still had an hour left before his father was supposed to call. Strangely enough, he felt himself getting anxious. There was no way he was going to sit around for one hour. He tapped his foot impatiently. I could do my homework. He thought. He sat there a bit, then shook his head. Guess I'll just clean. Once it got closer to 10pm, Kagami got himself ready for bed. He was getting comfortable on the couch again when his phone rang. Right on time. His father was always known to be a bit of a perfectionist. He let it ring a couple times before he picked up.

"Hello?"

"Good evening, Taiga." His father said. His voice sounded different compared to last night. Almost serious. As if he meant business.


"I'm tired, just woke up not too long ago. And you?"

"I'm good." He responded plainly. He bit his lip, it was really hard to have a normal conversation, it felt incredibly awkward. He wondered if his father thought the same.

"Wonderful. Well, Taiga I just wanted to talk to you about something."
Ah shit, here we go.

"Uh, okay, yeah sure."

"You're not in trouble," his father said with another laugh, seemingly sensing his son's discomfort. "I wanted to know what you were planning to do for your summer break. It's coming up soon, right?"

"Yeah, next Monday. Coach planned another training camp, so I guess that's what I'll be doing for the first couple weeks."

"I see." His father muttered thoughtfully. He was quiet for another minute. Kagami opened his mouth to ask why when his father spoke again.

"How about coming home for the summer?"

Kagami was suddenly taken aback at the question. He struggled to find something to say. Kagami had made decisions to visit America briefly in the past (all basketball related reasons.) But this was different. His father had never asked him to return home. For anything.

"But the training ca-"

"I didn't mean for it to come out in the form of a question." His father interjected. "You will come home for the summer, Taiga."

Kagami closed his mouth, opened it again, then closed. He wasn't sure what the right thing to say was in this situation. It's not like he didn't want to go, but at the same time, he didn't want to go either. However, he also didn't want to risk angering his father, something he hadn't done in years.

"Uhm, can I ask why?"

His father went quiet again. Ok, maybe that wasn't the right response. Maybe his father really did just want to spend time with him. Kagami felt a slight pang of guilt.

"I want you to meet somebody, Taiga."

Kagami choked, making incoherent noises at his father's answer. Was his father trying to set him up with someone?

"W-w-w-hat?!" he managed to sputter. "I'm only sixteen! I'm not ready for marriage!"

His father's sudden booming laughter filled his ears upon hearing his son's crazy reaction.

"No, no. I mean," he said in between fits of laughter. "I want you to meet someone I met."

Kagami frowned. His father met someone? Was that the voice he heard in the background the other night? He couldn't imagine his father being the romantic type at his age. Just thinking about it gave him chills. So weird.

"I know we don't talk much about your mother Taiga but well.." his father cleared his throat before continuing, "When she..when she left, I thought I would never find true happiness again. I finally did and I would really like you to meet her."

Kagami still didn't know what to say.

"We can finally be a full family again," he said. "Taiga, I just want you to meet her. We can all
spend some time getting to know one another."

He pondered a bit on the right words to say. His father was right when the subject of his mother came up. His opinion on his mother was anything but positive. He assumed his father felt the same way. They haven't spoken much about her since the day she left. He didn't remember much of the details. But he could recall his father's dead eyes, the nurses next to his bed had their mouths drawn in a thin line. All he knew was that his mother never visited him once in the hospital, she just left. She never came back.

"I guess," Kagami finally responded, reluctantly.

His father let out a sigh of relief. "Good, good. I bought you a plane ticket. Your flight is set to leave next Tuesday. She'll be coming with me to pick you up."

"Alright then."

"I'll call you the night before, Taiga. Sleep well. We can't wait to see you."
"Again Bakagami?!"

The redhead looked at Kuroko with pleading eyes. He was on his knees, his arms shielding himself from the wrath of Riko who stood towering over him holding a paper fan. She held it up again, threatening to give him another whack when Hyuuga came running up.

"Whooooaaa, what's going on?"

"This idiots going back to America during break." She huffed out. She crossed her arms and shot Kagami a death glare. He instinctively flinched and covered his face again. He knew he had a habit of breaking this type of news to her last minute. But this time he could honestly say it wasn't his fault.

"What?! Don't tell me you're trying to skip out on training camp." Hyuuga said, frowning.

"Coach, I think Kagami-kun has a reasonable excuse," Kuroko said. "Also, when have you known him to slack off on anything basketball related?"

"My father didn't really give me a choice in the matter," Kagami added. "I was planning on calling Alex later today. I think I can at least continue training with her while I'm there."

Which was true for the most part. More than ever, he just wanted her company throughout his stay there. It would give him a good excuse to not spend much time with his father and his new lady.

Hyuuga and Riko let out a frustrated sigh and Kagami shifted uncomfortably on his feet. He really didn't like causing trouble for them. The ace knew full well that his team relied on him heavily. He couldn't help but feel guilty.

"Sorry." he muttered.

Riko held up her hands to rub at her temples. "Alright Kagami, I understand." She gave Hyuuga a look, both nodded at each other before they returned their gaze on him. "I'll let the others know."

"You better not slack off over there Kagami!" Hyuuga said, pushing his glasses up.

Kagami smiled and gave him a nod. When has he ever.

Moments later, Riko gathered the team together to give them the announcement. The underclassmen had whined about it. Half of them upset that Kagami would be relaxing with hot
American babes, while the other half were disappointed because they were looking forward to watching the ace train. Riko made a huge show of telling the teammates that she wouldn't hesitate to kill him if he came back with no drastic improvement. Luckily, Kagami had managed to escape before the underclassmen had a chance to crowd him again.

"That was rough." Kagami grumbled as he walked through the school's entrance. Kuroko chuckled next to him.

"Well, at least they let you go in one piece right?"

"Barely."

They walked in silence for awhile, basking in the evening summer weather, appreciating the other's company before stopping by a nearby park sometime later. Kagami settled himself on one of the swings. Kuroko doing the same.

"So Kagami-kun. When does your flight leave?"

"Tuesday morning."

"I see." Kuroko paused. "Coach says we leave for the beach Sunday night. I guess I won't be able to see you off."

Kagami rolled his eyes. "I'm not a kid Kuroko. You don't have to see me off. I'll only be gone for a month. I'll see you when I get back."

The light haired boy smiled and stood up. Walked in front of Kagami and held out his fist. Times like these, Kagami was really grateful to have him around. They've had their fair share of disagreements but they worked well together. He took pride in their friendship. Kagami gave him a toothy grin and returned the fist bump.

"I'll see you in a month, Kagami-kun."

"Yeah."

The next morning, Kagami was startled awake. His cell phone screeching loudly. For a second, Kagami contemplated going back to sleep when he suddenly remembered he had made plans with Aomine today. Muttering to himself, he dragged himself up and shuffled to the kitchen.

He had messed up a bit on the burgers. The buns were slightly burnt (one more charred than the other) and he had accidentally overcooked the meat by a hair. The redhead typically took his cooking seriously, but he didn't feel the need to care too much today. Whatever, Kagami thought. He placed the better looking burger of the two into Aomine's container and stared down at it. He frowned. Aomine's lunch box seemed a bit empty. Running a hand through his hair, he suddenly remembered he had bought banana milk during his last grocery trip. Kuroko had told him awhile ago that it was one of his favorite drinks. Smiling to himself, he stuffed the banana milk into his
lunchbox and finished packing his own.

When it got closer to 12p.m Kagami took a quick shower and packed up his gear. After double checking to make sure everything was unplugged and off, he jogged to the meeting place and shot some baskets while waiting for Aomine. He was early. Ten minutes early in fact. He knew he'd be playing by himself for the next twenty or so minutes since that bastard was always late.

Tossing the basketball in the hoop, it bounced off the rim and he clicked his tongue in annoyance. He ran after the stray ball when a voice from behind called out to him.

"Wow, today's gonna be another easy win."

Kagami snapped his head around and frowned. "Fuck off! I'm gonna kick your ass today!"

"You say that every time," Aomine sneered, setting his bag down. He jogged over to Kagami and held his hands up, gesturing Kagami to toss the ball over.

"You're early today, Aho" Kagami said, passing Aomine the ball.

"Satsuki woke me up early today and she was nagging me. Didn't want to deal with her so I left." He shrugged.

"You're an ass."

"You're one to talk. You're always complaining that I'm late, anyways. Be grateful."

Kagami rolled his eyes. "Whatever, we gonna play or what?"

They play for a couple hours before Aomine complains of being hungry. Naturally, Aomine wins two out of the three games, but he doesn't complain. Kagami was secretly glad he was able to have another heated game with Aomine. It allowed him to de-stress a bit.

They both are sprawled out on the ground, panting heavily. The summer heat was brutal around this time of year and he was drenched in sweat. The redhead grabbed his shirt and fanned himself, desperate to cool his midriff. He felt gross. Kagami sat up and leaned his head against the bench behind him. He faced toward the sky and closed his eyes, allowing the slight breeze to give him just a little bit of relief. Aomine joined him a moment later.

"Food." He demands.

"Let me rest first, geez." Kagami responds, unmoving.

Aomine doesn't answer, so Kagami turns his gaze on him. He's a bit surprised to see Aomine staring at him, an unreadable expression on his face. His dark blue eyes scrutinizing him and Kagami just raises a single eyebrow in response.

"What?"

Aomine shrugs and turns back around. "Nothin'," he mutters.

Kagami doesn't press further, but still feels a bit bothered by it. Grabbing their lunch boxes, he hands Aomine his before digging into his own. He regrets packing only one burger for himself. His other containers were either in the machine waiting to be washed, or packed. He was, without a doubt, going to be buying more food later.

"Nice. You packed me banana milk." Aomine says. Kagami glanced over to see a childish grin
adorning his face, he couldn't help but feel a little flutter in his chest. Aomine definitely looked younger when he was smiling. "How'd you know I like it?"

"Kuroko." Kagami says in between bites.

"Figures."

They finished the rest of their meal conversing lightheartedly. Kagami spoke most about how his struggles with the underclassmen, how he felt like they were gonna eat him up alive every time they swarmed around him. Aomine had laughed and told him that there was no way that was possible since Kagami was 190 cm of pure ugly. They went back and forth many times. But Kagami had laughed and enjoyed himself. It was easy being around the blue-haired male. They've fought frequently but Kagami never had to worry about holding himself back when it came to Aomine. It was strangely liberating.

Kagami was gathering his things when Aomine walked up to him. His face dawned with the same expression Kagami witnessed before when they were leaning on the bench. He didn't quite look angry. Instead, he looked focused. Similar to the expression he wore during basketball, yet somehow it was different.

"Oi, Kagami. Do you-"

Suddenly Kagami's cell phone chimed loudly in his bag, making the both of them jump. Fumbling to get it, he checked the caller ID and held up a hand to Aomine, who stood there looking frustrated. "Need to get this," he mumbled.

It was Alex. He had tried calling her the night before but she wouldn't answer, so he left her a message, asking her to call him back whenever she could.

"Taiga!~" she exclaimed, "I got your missed call. What's up?"

"Alex," He couldn't help but smile at her voice. "I just wanted to let you know that I'll be in America for my summer break. Was wondering if you could help me out with some training."

"What?!" Alex gasped. He could hear her groan a bit through the phone. "Taiga, I'm in Hawaii right now. I won't be home for another 3 weeks."

Taiga frowned. Hawaii? What the hell was she doing in Hawaii? Well, it wasn't odd for her to be taking vacations during the summer. But still, she was the only one there that could make him feel more comfortable.

"I'm sorry Taiga. I'll be visiting you and Tatsuya when winter comes, though. Okay?" She said.

He nodded sadly, then realized they were on the phone. "Yeah, okay." It couldn't be helped. He'd have to go through it alone. "Have fun, Alex."

They said their goodbyes and he hung up. It's fine, I can handle it myself, he thought. He almost left without Aomine until he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Why do you look like you just got rejected?"

Oh, right. He'd forgotten to tell Aomine he'd be gone for a month. The redhead thought about telling him for a moment, but decided against it. It's not like Aomine ever asked him to hang out anyways.
"It's nothing, don't worry about it." Kagami said, he hoped he didn't sound too disappointed. He held up a hand to wave goodbye but Aomine interjected before he was able to say anything else.

"Wait a minute Bakagami."

Kagami lowered his hand and looked at him, a quizzical expression on his face.

"Wanna play again this weekend?"

Huh? The Aomine Daiki was asking him to play again? Kagami's heart pounded at the sudden question.

"Thought you didn't like playing with me."

Aomine's eyes widened at the comment. "Hah? What makes you say that?!

Kagami snorted. "Well, I'm always the one asking you to play games with me," He crossed his arms over his chest. "And you always look like something's stuck up your ass."

"What the hell?" Aomine scowled, "Never mind, I revoke my question." He started to turn on his heel when Kagami grabbed his arm quickly.

"Wait! Look, sorry. Ok?" Kagami blurted. "I was just surprised that you asked."

Aomine's face noticeably relaxes. "So, you want to?"

"I can't," Kagami says, he pouts a bit. "I leave next Tuesday."

"Leave?" Aomine asks, his face hardens again. "Leave where?"

"America."

"America?"

Kagami nods. He notices that he's still latched onto Aomine's arm and he lets go. His hands go up to fiddle with his shirt instead, feeling the need to keep himself busy with something.

"For what?" Aomine asks, eyeing Kagami's hands.

"To visit my dad," Kagami replies.

"When will you be back?"

"In a month," he says. "I'll be back a couple days before school starts."

He hears Aomine mutter an 'oh.' He assumes the conversation has died so he readies his goodbyes when he suddenly sees Aomine lean down into his bag, pulling out his cell phone. He notices it has a little basketball charm on it.

"Want to exchange numbers?" Aomine asks, his phone held out to Kagami. Kagami just stares wide-eyed at it, his hands clasping and unclasping, trying to grasp the situation. Aomine was asking him for his number?

"Don't get the wrong idea, it's a pain having to go through Tetsu all the time." Aomine says. "And we can-uh.....talk...while you're in America."
"Talk," Kagami repeats, plainly.

Aomine nods wordlessly, his cell phone still outreached toward Kagami. He began lowering it a bit, when Kagami gently grabs it out of his hand. He points at the basketball charm and gives him a cheeky smile.

"Shut up, Satsuki wouldn't leave me alone until I put the damn thing on."

"Sure, sure," Kagami says chuckling lightly. He quickly inputs his number and hands the phone back to Aomine. "I sent a text to myself."

"Cool," Aomine says, pocketing his cell phone. "Guess I'll see you later then Bakagami."

Kagami smiles. "See you Ahomine."

Aomine laid sprawled out in bed, busy reminiscing his one-on-one with Kagami. The picture of Kagami resting against the bench remained burned in his memory. The way his short fiery red hair stuck to his forehead, the way his eyes closed and his face relaxed, his long dark lashes fanning out beautifully, sweat running down his neck and face, full pink lips that glistened from a mixture of perspiration and water. At that moment, he recalled thinking that Kagami was beautiful. And he was so f*cked.

It wasn't long after the one-on-one when he confided in Tetsu about his feelings for the redhead. He had called Tetsu out the day after to speak with him about it. He struggled with it for awhile, a bit confused on what to call this emotion fluttering around in his chest. He had asked him for advice on how to go about it. Aomine liked the relationship he had with Kagami, but he didn't want to risk losing it. After all, Kagami was the one who brought his love back for basketball. He couldn't imagine not playing with him anymore. And anyways, he wasn't even sure if the other male swung that way.

Tetsu had agreed to help him by figuring out Kagami's own feeling. Until then, he had instructed Aomine to try and get closer to the redhead. Something he knew he would struggle at doing.

Snapping back to the present, he brought his phone up to check the date and time.

**10:13am. July 24th. Wednesday.**

*Kagami probably landed already, I wanna text him*, he thought, rolling over to wrap himself in his blanket. He scrunched up his eyebrows, trying to figure out the time difference when he heard a high-pitched voice outside his door.

"Daiiii-chhaannn," she called.

He groaned and turned around to see Satsuki waltzing through his door. Her pink hair tied up in a high ponytail, bouncing with her every movement.

"Dai-chan! What are you still doing in bed?" She huffed.

He brought the covers up over his face. "Sleeping. Leave me alone."
"It's 10 already!" She exclaimed, pulling on the covers. "Remember we all made plans to go to the beach for a few days!"

Aomine frowned. He made no such plans.

"Dai-chan! Did you even pack?!"

He ignored her.

Then the sound of torn paper filled the room.

"Ahh~ Such a shame," Satsuki pouted."Mai-chan looked really cute in this photo too.."

"Satsuki! What the hell are you doing?!" Aomine shouted, desperately trying to grab his precious magazine. Satsuki jumped backwards and laughed. She grabbed another page and started tearing at it slowly. Aomine winced at the sound.

"Alright, alright!" He threw his hands up in surrender and quickly grabbed his duffel bag, blindly packing whatever was on the floor.

When he finally finished packing, he walked to Touou Academy with Satsuki, his mind kept flickering toward the redhead. He gripped his phone tighter in his pocket. When he arrived there most of his teammates were already on the bus.

"I'll be sitting up front," Satsuki said, patting his back.

He groaned when he opened the door. He'd hope he would get a seat next to Ryo but a first year was sitting with him. He clicked his tongue when he saw Wakamatsu staring daggers into him.

"Aomine you bastard! You kept us all waiting!"

"Shut up. How can you be so goddamn annoying so early in the morning?"

"What'd you say?!" Wakamatsu growled, "You're the one to get their lazy ass on the bus after everyone else and you-....Hey! Don't ignore me!!"

Aomine jammed his ear buds into his ear, hoping to tune him out. But damn was his voice so obnoxiously loud. He'd rather be hearing his voice right now.

He didn't know when he did, but he fell asleep. Somehow falling asleep for the whole ride. He was stirred awake by bus floor rumbling with footsteps of his teammates waiting to get off the bus. He yawned widely and stretched, rubbing his aching neck and back.

Need a drink. He grabbed his things and followed the rest of his team into the lodge, dropped his things in his room and shuffled out when he met pink hair.

"Ah! Dai-chan! Where are you going?" Satsuki asked.

"Getting a drink," he muttered.

She frowned, "Don't wander too far!"

"Yeah yeah," Aomine held up a hand and continued walking. He couldn't believe he allowed her to push him to go on this trip. Honestly, that Satsuki was terrifying sometimes. The way she could make him do things he really didn't want to do. The touou ace turned some corners until he found a vending machine, his hands fiddling in his pocket, fishing for change. It's not like I have anything
"Aomine-kun?"

At the sound of the familiar voice he turned around, meeting his former shadow's blank eyes. He blinked a few times. He was holding Nigou in one arm and a bottle in another. Well, this wasn't the first time they ran into each other.

"Tetsu?"

"What a surprise, running into you here." Tetsu said, smiling slightly. He crouched down to let Nigou on the floor. Nigou barked in agreement, his tail wagging happily and Aomine kneeled down to give him a scratch behind the ears.

"Yeah," Aomine replies. Standing up tall again, he walks over to the machine and inserts his money before pressing a random button. He wondered how the topic of Seirin's training camp passed them by when they last met. Then again, his heart and head were full of a certain redhead at the time.

"How have you been?" Tetsu asks.

"Fine," he says with a shrug, bending down to pick up his drink.

"Have you been texting him?"

"Who?"

Tetsu rolled his eyes. "Kagami-kun of course."

"Uh.."

"You haven't?" Tetsu asks, he's frowning slightly. A disappointed Tetsu. That's not good.

"I'm waiting for him to text me first," Aomine says.

"What's the point of asking him for his number if you're not willing to initiate the conversation with him?" Tetsu points out.

"It's just...fuck.. I don't know what to talk to him about," he says dejectedly. "And I'm not sure if you've noticed, but we fight...a lot."

"Gee, I had no idea," Tetsu says, sarcasm dripping in his voice.

Aomine slumps down on the floor, he pulls at his hair out of frustration. He'd just recently realize his feelings toward Kagami. He didn't want to fuck it up. "It's not easy you know."

"What's not?"

"Being nice," Aomine sighs."Every time I try and say something to the guy, it just comes out mean."

Tetsu walks over and crouches down next to him. He hums in understanding and rocks back and forth on his legs.

"Aomine-kun, you shouldn't underestimate him," Testu says, picking Nigou up. "Just be yourself. Kagami-kun is a strong individual. If there's anyone that can put up with you, it's him."
"Is that supposed to be a compliment?"

"No comment."

"Well...thanks. I guess.." Aomine says, finally. "I'll try sending a text later."

Tetsu nods and gives him a pat on the shoulder. "Good luck Aomine-kun."

"Thanks."

"Oh, before I forget," Tetsu adds, standing up. "Kagami-kun's birthday is on the second of August. You could text him then too if you'd like."

"Second of August," Aomine repeats, quietly. He nods and pulls himself up. "Yeah, I'll do that. Thanks for letting me know."

Aomine says goodbye and shuffles back to his room, drink in one hand and cell phone in the other. He settles down in his bed feeling refreshingly confident. Then opens up his phone to a blank message screen and types in a quick message before his confidence has any time to dissipate.

To: Kagami

Hey.

He sucks in a breath and exhales slowly. He was already regretting it. But not a minute later, his phone vibrates.

From: Kagami

Hey, what's up?

Smiling, he punched in a reply.

To: Kagami

Nothing much. How was your flight?

From: Kagami

It was gud. Slept the whole time lol. What r u doing?

Aomine chuckled. How was it possible to sleep the whole way there? He really was an idiot.

To: Kagami

You must be a real idiot if you slept the whole way lmao. Did ur brain melt up there or sumthin? & I am @ training camp. Tetsu is here too.

This time, Kagami didn't respond right away which left him feeling anxious. Did he go too far again? They usually bicker like this all the time. This was nothing. But then again, he couldn't be sure. Anything can be misinterpreted through text. He contemplated responding with an apology when Kagami responded.

From: Kagami
Shut up!! I was tired ok. Kuroko is? Tell him I say hi.

Aomine let out a sigh of relief. Then his phone vibrated again.

From: Kagami

Hey, I g2g. Talk to u later Ahomine. It's night over there so gn.

Aomine quickly typed back.

To: Kagami

K, l8ter Bakagami.

So it was a very brief conversation, but it was enough to make Aomine feel giddy. Kagami had told him they would talk later. So that definitely meant they would be continuing the conversation later again right?

Wrong. He doesn’t hear from Kagami for the rest of the week (which may partly be his fault because he refused to initiate another conversation but don’t tell Tetsu.). Touou left a few days after arriving at the beach. They played some practice games against Seirin, but none that Aomine participated in. He didn’t see the point in playing if their ace wasn’t there. ‘A waste of time’ he had called it.

Before parting with Tetsu, they agreed to keep in touch. The shorter male telling him that he would give him any updates on Kagami that was worth noting, but he encouraged Aomine to keep texting him in the meantime.

So here he was, wrapped up in his blankets again. If he was honest with himself he felt rather anxious. Kagami has been in America a little over a week now. That guy was probably having the time of his life over there. Did he even like girls with big boobs? He’s seen a lot of females with big boobs in American ads, he wouldn’t be surprised if the redhead managed to score with someone there.

Groaning, he stuffed his head underneath his pillow. It wasn’t like Kagami’s return would spark anything new in him. He had no plans to confess, or date, or touch him (though he really wanted to). He just wanted to see him, wanted to know more about him, he wanted to see him smile. Not to mention, the redhead made the funniest expressions when he was worked up. Kagami made him curious, something he wasn’t really used to being. It felt unnatural to him. But he liked it. It was a different high he would get off the basketball court. Kagami’s existence in itself was exhilarating. He really is a miracle.

Aomine had a very leisurely morning. Mostly rolled around in his bed trying to ward off thoughts of Kagami when he suddenly remembered to check the date. He sat up suddenly, flailing around his bed in search of his cell phone.

Shit, shit, shit.

Once he found it, he sighed in relief. It was the second of August. He wasn’t late at all. Aomine scrunched up his brows, trying to figure out the time difference. So if it’s morning here, it must be
late over there...It’s 11:20am right now. Is it 11:20pm over there? Is he even still awake? Wait, they’re a day behind so does that mean it’s not his birthday? Whatever, he’s Japanese, I’ll go by Japan’s time.

The tanned male stared at his screen a bit. Was it too much if he wrote, “Happy Birthday!”? Or was it better if he went for something more casual, maybe a “hppy bday.” He rubbed his temples, his brows knitted together tightly. Why was it so hard for him to be himself? He wasn’t sure how long he spent mulling over it when his phone rang sharply, shocking him out of his state of intense concentration. He might as well have went into the zone for that. Aomine grumbled curses as he checked the caller. His eyes widening at the name on his screen.

*Kagami. Kagami is calling me. He called me first.* Aomine waited a couple seconds before picking up.

“Happy birthday!” He blurted out, not thinking. His hand promptly goes up to smack his forehead, groaning and cursing at himself mentally.

“What?”

“I- Uh, it’s your birthday right?” Aomine says, quickly. “August 2nd?”

“O-oh. Yeah, it is. Thanks,” Kagami chuckles a bit and he feels his heart squeeze. “But it’s not the 2nd yet over here.”

“Well it is over here.”

“Guess that’s true.”

Aomine chews on his lower lip. There’s a lot of things he wants to ask him. Like why he hasn’t reached out to him in over a week, what he’s wearing, if he’s been playing basketball, but he hears Kagami shifting around. He can make out the sound of rustling blankets. He guesses the redhead’s in bed.

“Isn’t it kinda late over there?”

Kagami just grunts in response.

“And you’re awake because?”

“Can’t sleep,” Kagami says plainly. “Thought I’d find someone to annoy.”

“The hell? Go annoy someone else. Call Tetsu or something.”

“I did,” Kagami says. “He hung up on me.”

*So I was the second choice,* Aomine thinks. He’s not sure whether or not he’s happy about that. But he’ll take what he can get.

“What do you expect me to do about it?” Aomine asks, referring to Kagami’s insomnia.

“I dunno, you were the one that said we could talk.”

“I did say that, didn’t I.” he mumbles. He ponders a bit. Trying to find a topic of interest. The only subject they talk about is basketball, but he doesn’t want to talk basketball right now. He really just wants to hear Kagami’s voice.
“Are you thinking?” Kagami asks.

“Huh?”

“I can hear the gears turning in your head.”

“Shut the fuck up!” Aomine nearly shouts. And Kagami laughs. It was a hearty laugh, the kind that made Aomine feel like he was floating in air, it was melodic. He wanted to hear him laugh again.

“Sorry, couldn’t resist,” Kagami says, a smile in his voice. He hears him shifting in bed again.

“Well what did you want to talk about?”

“Hmmm,” the redhead hums. “Sing me a lullaby?”

“A lullaby? What are you, five?”

“Yup. Just turned five today.”

“You just said it wasn’t your birthday over there,” Aomine snorts.

“I turned five in Japan.”

Aomine rolls his eyes. “I’m not singing, Bakagami.”

“Not even for my birthday?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“Ugh, I’ll sing you happy birthday if that’s what you want,” the taller male sighs. He hears Kagami grunt affirmatively. He clears his throat loudly and mentally prepares himself. Then he sings. It’s really awkward at first, he was off at the start of the song, his voice wavering but he finds a steady key. He sang softly for fear of his parents hearing somewhere else in his home. When Aomine finishes, he holds his breath and waits for Kagami to mock him. But he doesn’t.

“Oi, Bakagami. Did I kill you with my voice?”

“A little, yeah.”

“That bad?”

“Not at all,” Kagami yawns. “But it made me a little sleepy.”

“I’ll let you sleep then.”

“No, wait,” Kagami says, briskly. “Keep talking.”

“Talk?” Aomine asks. “About what?”

“Anything. Your day, what you did at camp, I don’t know.”

“Shouldn’t you be sleeping?”

“I won’t sleep unless you do,” Kagami adds sternly.
Aomine clicks his tongue. “Fine.” He decides to talk about training camp, going into excruciatingly detailed explanations hoping to irritate the other male, but it doesn’t work. He hears Kagami make sounds of approval, urging him to continue. Occasionally Kagami will interject to say something witty and unnecessary. He apparently had a problem with Aomine skipping out on the practice games with Seirin, saying something like ‘Don’t underestimate my teammates,’ but his assertion weighed heavily with sleep so Aomine told him to shut up. He realized that the longer he talks, the less frequent the redhead speaks. So after awhile of not hearing anything back, Aomine stops talking, and he listens.

He doesn’t hear anything at first, thinking that Kagami must’ve hung up on him. But then he catches the sound of Kagami’s breathing. It’s steady and relaxed, and Aomine wants nothing more than to be there with him. To stroke his hair while he sleeps, bask in his scent, and maybe sing him some more lullabies. Aomine calls his name, making sure he’s really asleep. And when he doesn’t, he lets himself relax.

“Come back soon,” he whispers. And he hangs up.

Aomine sends Kagami a couple text messages after that, even called him once. But he never gets a response back from him. Aomine assumes it’s because Kagami’s too busy when he hears from Tetsu that he and Seirin haven’t heard back from him as well. Tetsu seems worried. He says it’s out of character for Kagami to just not respond. But Aomine doesn’t worry too much. He tells Tetsu that Kagami will respond eventually. He’s probably out partying or clubbing, or doing whatever they do in America; Kagami will be back in a week anyways.

The day he starts to worry is a few days after school is back in session. Tetsu calls Aomine, his voice shaking slightly. It’s been 3 weeks since he’s heard from Kagami and he was supposed to return to Japan days ago. He thought maybe Kagami returned home but hadn’t said anything. So he visited his apartment but he wasn’t there. Aomine decides to call Kagami again. He doesn’t pick up.

So he just waits. Anxiously waits for days until days turned to another week and Kagami still doesn’t return.

Chapter End Notes

I’d like to think that when Aomine falls, he falls hard. He'll be in his head a lot haha. It might seem ooc for some people, so sorry about that! Maybe some more GoM appearance next chapter! We’ll see! I have the general idea for this fic but I'm kinda letting it write itself //sweats

Chapter length will be all over the place so sorry in advance!

Thanks for reading & see you in the next chapter!
It was one of the cooler days of summer, the start of Fall fast approaching. The concurrent chatter of high schoolers fills the air around him as he leans not-so-casually at the entrance of Seirin. They eye him suspiciously but he avoids their gaze, his hands stuffed into his pockets, hiding his clenched fists. Navy blue eyes scan the array of different faces, hoping to catch a glimpse of his former shadow, and hoping even more that he’ll spot the fiery redhead somewhere in the mix. He straightens up when he sees the blank expression he’s looking for.

“Aomine-kun.”

“Tetsu.” he greets.

“What are you doing here?” Tetsu says, curiously.

“Was at a nearby court,” he shrugs. “Decided to stop by.”

The shorter male frowns. “Does that mean you skipped school today?”

“Don’t see how it’s any of your business even if I did,” he retorts. “Anyways, have you heard back from that Alex person? Did she find him?”

“Eh?”

“I said, did she find him yet?”

“Find who?”

“Whaddaya mean who?” he growls. “Kagami! Did she find Kagami?”

Tetsu tilts his head lightly, a look of puzzlement written on his face. “Kagami?”

Aomine frowns at his response. “Yes, Kagami. Are you fucking with me Tetsu?”

“Aomine-kun,” Tetsu says warily. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“What part don’t you get?” Aomine hisses, his voice gradually getting louder. The students around them start to murmur, and he can feel their stares boring into his head.

“Kagami. You keep saying his name and I don’t know who that is.” Tetsu says. “And quiet down, you’re causing a scene.”

Aomine’s breath catches in his throat, eyes widen at the sudden claim and he looks for any signs that Tetsu could be joking with him. But the other male just stares at him blankly.

“Y-you’re kidding right?” Aomine laughs awkwardly. “Tetsu if this is your idea of a joke, it’s fucked up on so many leve-”

“Aomine-kun, I really don’t know who this Kagami person is,” he says, his voice filled with concern. “Are you feeling alright?”
“Yes, you do!” He bellows. “He’s your light, we played games together, took down Jabberwock, you even- wait.. I’ll fucking show you.” He fishes around in his pocket for his phone, frantically pulling it out, and flipping it on. His eyes scan for Kagami’s name anywhere in his contacts, in past text messages or phone calls. He sees Satsuki’s name on the log frequently, even Imayoshi and Tetsu. But Kagami’s name never appears.

“Nononono..” Aomine chants, his hand goes up to tug at the blue strands over his eyes and he searches again. His pupils bouncing madly around the lit screen and he can see Tetsu in his periphery, his eyes darting quickly between the phone and his face.

The former shadow reaches out to him, his eyes filled with so much worry for the taller male, he’s looking at him like he’s gone mad. “Aomine-kun, calm do-”

“Don’t fucking touch me!” he slaps Tetsu’s hands away and stumbles backwards.

“Aomi-”

“Is your coach still here?” Aomine says, quickly.

“Yes, but.”

He doesn’t allow Tetsu to finish, he bolts past him toward the gym, ignoring Tetsu’s call for him to wait; Aomine pushes past the string of people, blindly running toward the gyms, not caring for the people he’s knocked over in his rampage. Once he gets close, he bursts through the door, startling the members that were in the middle of cleaning up. He doesn’t have to spend much time interrogating the other members for the coach’s whereabouts, because she immediately jogs toward him.

“Aomine? What’re you doing here?” Riko says, she clutches the clipboard she’s holding close to her chest.

“Kagami Taiga.” Aomine says.

Riko seems surprised at the sudden response. “Excuse me?”

“Is there any guy on your team named Kagami Taiga?” Aomine seethes.

She frowns and Aomine can tell by her reaction that she doesn’t seem to recognize the name.

“.No,” she says slowly. “Thought you would know that. Our teams have gone head-to-head countless times.”

“Fuck fuck fuck,” Aomine mutters.

“What’s the matter?” The tanned male snaps his head to face the captain of the team, his head is held high in an attempt to look intimidating.

Aomine clicks his tongue. They’re all staring at him with the same expression Tetsu gave him earlier and he’s sure that the rest are just as clueless. So he quickly turns on his heel and runs out. If Seirin and Tetsu didn’t know who Kagami was? Who else would?

Before he’s able to get any farther past the gates, he catches sight of Tetsu, where he’d last left him. He desperately tries to run past but Tetsu grabs hold of him tightly.

“Aomine-kun, wait!”
“Tetsu, get your hands off me! I need to talk to someone else- I need-!”

“Aomine-kun! I already called the others!” Tetsu shouts, his eyes wary yet stern. “No one else recognizes the name. I think you-”

“Fuck OFF!” Aomine cries, yanking his arm out of Tetsu’s grasp. He can feel the warmth and wetness seeping through his eyes. Gritting his teeth, he fights back the tears. There's no way in hell Kagami wasn't real; that smile had existed, that laugh that sent chills down his spine every time he heard it had existed, that picture perfect moment of Kagami resting beneath the summer sun had existed.

Satsuki, I need to speak with her.

Aomine runs away again, this time Tetsu doesn't try to stop him. By now, the sky was painted in rich hues of orange and purple, the street lights dimly lit, but something catches his eye in the distance. Even with the light of day fading away, he can clearly make out the intense red hair standing in the middle of the road. Aomine’s heart pounds wildly in his chest and he sucks in a breath. He's fucking real. So Aomine runs faster, his feet pounding loudly against the pavement before he stops abruptly in front of the redhead, pulling the male into a crushing embrace.

“Thank God, you're okay,” Aomine says, breathless. “Where the hell have you been?”

But the other male doesn't answer. Much to Aomine’s dismay, he doesn't even react to the hug. His body is eerily still, arms limp at his side, and his gaze is casted downward.

“...Kagami?”

Nothing.

Aomine pulls away, still keeping a firm hold on Kagami's slumped shoulders. He tries to meet his eyes, but Kagami’s head is hung too low.

“Kagami? Answer me, hey.”

Then he sees Kagami’s lips moving slowly, it's very slight; as if he's struggling to speak. But Aomine can't make out what he's saying. He attempts to lean closer when he suddenly sees tears rolling down the redhead’s cheeks. It startles him. If there's anything Aomine would expect Kagami not to do; it's shed tears. The sight of it made his heart drop and it literally pained him to see Kagami like this.

“O-oi, Kagami what's wrong?” Aomine says, wiping at the wetness around his eyes. “Are you hurt?”

“....ki..”

“What?” Aomine asks, he takes a step closer to him.

“Da..i..”

“.ai-chan....Dai-chan!!”

And he jolts awake. His heart is pounding in his chest and he can feel his clothes clinging to him from sweat. While he tries to get his bearings, he sees the familiar figure hovering over him. She's
shaking him viciously and he makes a feeble attempt to swat at her hands.

“Go away,” he grumbles, curling up into a ball.

“Dai-chan! What's wrong?! You look horrible!”

“I said go away,” he growls.

“Did you have a nightmare?”

“Leave. Me. Alone.”

She ignores his protest and Aomine suddenly feels the bed dip and movement behind him. Warm, dainty hands rub at his arm gingerly.

“Dai-chan,” she says, her voice soft and gentle. There's a hint of worry in there. He hates when she does this. It's like a switch goes off and he has the urge to disclose all the emotions he's feeling. But he's a stubborn ass so he inches away from her. There was no way in hell that he would tell Satsuki about Kagami.


“Nothing, just drop it already.”


“M'not lying,” Aomine mumbles, he curls himself into a tighter ball.

“Dai-chan, you're being a big baby.”

“I thought I told you to go away,” Aomine hisses.

Satsuki doesn't say anything. Instead, her hands move from his arm to card through his hair. She gives him a soft ruffle and then sighs heavily.

“Is it Kagamin?”

“What?”

“Don't play dumb with me,” she says sternly. “Tetsu-kun told me what happened.”

“What exactly did he tell you?” Aomine asks, he sits up and narrows his eyes at her.

She quiets again. The aura around them noticeably getting heavier. “That he's been missing.”

Aomine flinches at that word-- “Missing.” Like Kagami went off and gotten himself kidnapped or something. It's been almost two months since Aomine’s last seen and heard from the male. Nothing was confirmed yet. Fortunately, Tetsu was able to get in contact with that Himuro guy through Murasakibara, who then got in contact with Alex, the redhead’s busty master. Apparently she was on a vacation somewhere else and hadn't realized that Kagami never returned to Japan. Once Tetsu explained the situation, she told him that she would look for him. That was where they were now.

“He's not missing,” Aomine says, “For all we know, that idiot probably likes it in America.”

“And what makes you say that?”
“I don't know. NBA? Girls with big tits?”

“Dai-chan, there's no way Kagamin would leave everyone behind without saying anything first and you know that” Satsuki says softly. “I know you're worried Dai-chan..everyone is...but stay positive.”

“Positive? Like how?”

“Maybe Kagamin just broke his phone.”

“Satsuki,” Aomine says, he runs his hands down his face and let's out a frustrated sigh. “If that were the case, he could've easily emailed or borrowed someone’s phone to get in contact with Tetsu or the others.”

“That's true but-”

“I'm done with this conversation.”

Satsuki sighs and pulls herself up. She can understand his aggravation. After all, Kagami was the one that brought Aomine back to his former self. She relied on him too. Even she was able to notice how much happier he seemed with the redhead around.

She turns to glance at Aomine. His eyes are cast downward and his brows are scrunched up in worry, his mouth drawn in a thin line. She leans down until she meets his eyes and she lays a gentle hand on his shoulder.

“Kagamin will be okay,” she says, voice confident and stern. “He’ll come back. I promise.”

Days later, Aomine’s sitting with Tetsu at Maji burger for a late lunch, both anxiously looking at their phones for any news on the redhead.

Tetsu had gone through a couple vanilla milkshakes. Aomine hasn't touched his burger.

“Himuro-san says if he doesn't hear from Alex soon, he'll go back to America to help look for him.”

“That so?” Aomine says, blankly. He wishes more than anything to be in America right now. But he knew he would be useless. For one, he couldn't speak the language. And two, his parents would never allow him to spend that amount of money on a plane ticket.

“Any news from Alex?” Aomine asks.

Tetsu shakes his head. “Last I've spoken to her, she says she went to visit Kagami-kun’s father’s house but apparently he moved. So she's currently trying to track down his whereabouts.”

“Can’t she just go to his workplace and ask?”

Tetsu shakes his head again. “She doesn't know where he works.”
“What the hell? That idiot never told her?!”

“Kagami-kun doesn't speak of his family much,” Tetsu says. “I assumed Alex-san would know more than I do but I guess that isn't the case.”

Aomine could tell by the way Tetsu’s voice trailed off that he was disappointed. Kagami and him were supposed to be best friends, they were partners that worked in perfect synchronization on the court, yet here they were, both struck by the realization that they really didn't know much about the redhead’s personal life at all.

They're in the process of cleaning up their mess—Tetsu throwing away his empty milkshake cups, and Aomine stuffing his burger into a to-go bag—when Tetsu’s phone rings. As always, he hopes to see Kagami’s name on the screen, but the name that appears is second best.

“Put it on speaker!” Aomine says.

Tetsu nods, and picks up. He leans across the table to allow Aomine to hear better.

“Alex-san.” Tetsu says. “It's rather late over there. Is everything alright?”

“I found him,” she answers, bluntly. There’s a ticking noise in the back and a sound of a car engine roaring.

“You did?! Where?!” Aomine shouts. Tetsu immediately gives him a disapproving look.

“What? Who was that?” Alex asks.

“It's nobody,” Tetsu says. Aomine scowled at that. “Where did you find him?”

“I found him wandering around about half an hour ago,” Alex says. “Taking him back to my place now.”

“Is he alright?” Tetsu asks. “May we speak with him?”

“He's fine, he looks pretty worn out though,” and Aomine notices her tone getting lower. “He's passed out in the back so I don't think he's up for talking right now.”

“I’m glad he's okay.” Tetsu says, his expression softens a bit. Aomine lets out a sigh of relief, allowing weeks of pent up anxiety and worry to dissipate at the fact that Kagami hasn't gotten himself into any major trouble—He was uninjured and healthy. That was most important.

“I don't know,” Alex says, after a moment of silence. Her voice is almost at a whisper, possibly for fearing of waking Kagami up, or have him overhear her.

“What do you mean?” Aomine asks.

“He just seems a bit off. Like he got spooked or something.”

“By what?”

“Don't know. He wouldn't say,” Alex says. “I'm getting him on the earliest flight back to Japan tomorrow but I can't go with him. I still have things to finish up here. Can I count on you to come get him?”

“Of course, Alex-san” Tetsu says, he looks at Aomine and gives him a nod. “We’ll be there.”
“Good, keep an eye on him for me.” She sighs heavily into the phone. “Something just isn’t sitting right with me.”

“Oi, Tetsu,” Aomine says. “What’s taking him so long?”

It’s late afternoon when the two arrive at the airport. Kagami’s flight had landed moments ago, and amongst all the bustling activity in the airport, Aomine felt like time was going agonizingly slow.

“Aomine-kun, his flight just landed,” Tetsu says. “He’ll be coming out soon.”

Subsequently, as if by command, a sea of faces move concurrently toward them. Aomine, unconsciously, takes a few steps forward to try and get a better look, focusing his attention on spotting the redhead. Luckily, it wasn’t hard to catch him, he was the very last passenger trailing behind the others, and he easily towered over them being the 6-foot something height he was. Without realizing, he had waved over to Kagami, who seemed preoccupied looking for someone, probably Kuroko, but once he caught sight of Aomine he waved back.

He fought the fuzzy warmth that he felt spread over his chest at the sight of him, simply because he convinced himself that punching the redhead for worrying him and the others was more important than ugh-feelings. Of course Aomine missed the redhead, but he prioritized their friendship more than anything else. If there were any plans to make a move on him- it wouldn’t be now.

As Kagami approached closer and the crowd in front of him seemingly dispersed, Aomine felt his mouth go dry at the other’s appearance. Obviously, he didn’t expect the other to look good after a 12 hour flight, but he definitely wasn’t expecting the redhead to look like this. Tetsu, apparently on the same train of thought, looked at Aomine with an unreadable expression.

What scares him the most is how similar he looked to the Kagami in his nightmare. The first thing Aomine notices are his eyes. They were considerably dull, a deep red that almost looked black and a grayish hue surrounding the rim of his eyes. His bright ruby eyes that were usually burned with so much intensity and purpose were reduced to a mere flicker of a dying flame. His golden skin looked paler, which was strange, the taller male expected him to be tanner coming from a place like Los Angeles. His shoulders looked smaller, not enough to cause much of a concern, however he was pretty built, a bit wider than Aomine, but he could tell that the other male’s body was now similar in size to his now.

“Aomine?” Kagami asks, and Aomine feels chills running down his spine. His voice is softer, almost tame, it lacks the gruff quality Aomine remembers. “You came too? I thought Kuroko was meeting me.”

Aomine’s first instinct was to pull him close followed by a bombardment of “whys”. Why did you have to go, why did you stop responding, why didn’t you come back, why come back like this; and he almost does, until he catches himself and thwacks Kagami upside the head in a state of panic.

“Ow-! What the hell asshole?!?”

Ah, there it is.
“You deserved it you bastard,” Aomine growls.

“Oh…” Kagami rubs at the back of his head, he bites his bottom lip and looks away. “About that...well...sorry...”

“Seriously? What kind of half-assed apology is that?”


“Ah, Kuroko!” Kagami ignores the hard stare Aomine gives, facing away from him to greet his shadow. “Thanks for coming to get me.”


Moments later, they’re on the bus, heading back to Kagami’s apartment. Tetsu, being the best wingman ever, volunteered to sit in a different seat, allowing Aomine to snag a seat beside Kagami. The redhead looked a bit puzzled at first, most likely expecting Tetsu to sit beside him, but he doesn’t complain, he just inches closer to the window allowing more room for the tanned male to fit in.

Surprisingly, the ride wasn’t awkward. He was expecting the redhead to doze off considering how fatigued he appeared, but he doesn’t. The other male seemed entranced at the scenery that whirled by, almost as if he was trying to soak in every detail of his surroundings, like he’s never seen the familiar landscape before. For a pretty big guy, he looked kind of small, hunched over hugging his sports bag, identical to a child holding a teddy bear.

Aomine tries to think of ways to start up a conversation with the other. Thinking back on his actions from before, he starts to regret slapping him. Sure, Kagami deserved it, but based on his disheveled appearance it wasn’t like he had the time of his life either. He opens his mouth to say something when Kagami shifts away from the window, aligning himself along Aomine’s side, and he can’t help but think, ‘He fits there perfectly.’

The redhead then leans his head back against the chair and looks at Aomine for a few seconds before he speaks.

“Oh yeah,” Kagami starts, he unzips the bag and rummages around in it. “I got you a souvenir.”

He pulls out a cell phone strap, reminiscent to the basketball charm Aomine had on his own cell phone, except the charm was of a little black cat. He places it on Aomine’s lap and zips his bag closed. The tanned male scoffs and picks it up.

“The fuck is this?”

“Obviously, it’s a cell phone strap,” Kagami says. “I thought you’d be needing a new one by now.”

“The hell? What makes you think I’m into this crap?”

“You had a basketball charm on your phone.”

“I told you, Satsuki wouldn’t leave me alone until I put it on!” Aomine exclaims, silently praying the other male doesn’t notice the flush of pink on his cheeks.

“Well if you don’t want it, I’ll give it someone else.”

“Wait a minute, I never said I didn’t want it,” Aomine says, quickly. He looks at Kagami and gives him a slight smile. “Thanks, I guess.”
Kagami gives a curt nod and slumps back into his seat. Aomine pockets Kagami’s gift, making a mental note to put it on later. Lost in the warmth of the other’s side along his, he starts speaking before he even realizes it. “So how was it?”

“Hm?” Kagami hums. “Be more specific.”

“America.”

“S’fine,” Kagami replies, not bothering to elaborate.

Aomine rolls his eyes, “Be more specific.”

Silence is his answer. He only hears the thrum of the road beneath his feet and the hum of the bus’ engine. He looks at Kagami to see him tugging slightly at the bag’s zipper, and he gently nudges the other’s shoulder hoping to coax him into answering.

“It was busy,” Kagami says, finally.

Aomine raises an eyebrow. “Is that why you went MIA for a couple months?” He curses at himself for sounding so pathetically passive aggressive.

“Don’t see how that’s any of your business,” Kagami mutters in response.

“Hah? It is my business!” Aomine almost shouts. “Do you have any idea how worried everyone was?!”

Tetsu, who was sitting a couple seats ahead of them, snapped his head around and gave him another grim look. Aomine grimaces and instantly slouches down in his seat, making an effort to hide himself behind the passenger sitting in front of him. Tch, can’t talk about it here. Suddenly the warmth at his side leaves, and he turns his head to see the redhead leaned against the windowside again, his eyes glossed over in thought, and Aomine finds it irritating that he never received a response from him. I’ll try again later, Aomine thinks. He stubbornly scoots himself closer to Kagami, desperate to feel his warmth again, practically squishing the other against the window. So much for not making a move, he thinks, but he doesn’t care. There was no way he was letting Kagami go again.

Or so he thought. They arrived at Kagami’s apartment shortly after. Tetsu suggested they go out for Maji but Kagami declined the offer saying that he was too tired from the trip and would rather sleep. Aomine and Tetsu were walking out of the apartment complex when Aomine stopped.

“Tetsu,” Aomine called, his hands gripping the kitty charm inside his pocket. “Is it really okay to leave him alone?”

“Aomine-kun, if I let you back in there you’re just going to harass him with questions again,” Tetsu says, sighing. “As much as I’d like to know what happened, we both know now isn’t the time to ask.”

“But didn’t you see him?” He huffs. “Dude looks like he got the life sucked out of him.”

“He just got back, let him rest first and then we can try talking to him.”

“Tets-”

“Aomine-kun.”
Aomine drops it, clicking his tongue in annoyance and Tetsu walks ahead of him. They trudge along in silence, almost making it to Maji when Aomine grabs Tetsu’s shoulder.

“Sorry Tetsu, I’m gonna head back after all,” Aomine says, adamantly. Tetsu turns around and eyes him carefully and Aomine tenses. He had always respected the things Tetsu had to say, but this time was different. The warmth that lingered on his side was a reminder that he wouldn’t let anything get between him and Kagami. Whether or not the redhead wanted to open up wasn’t for him to decide, he knew that, but he craved Kagami’s smile, and he was determined to see it again.

“I know that idiot won’t say anything to me,” he starts, “And I know all I do is irritate him.” Shoot, he’s getting corny. “But I want to be beside him right now. If that’s all I can do, then so be it.”

Tetsu sighs and runs his hands through his hair. “Alright Aomine-kun, but please don’t push Kagami too much. I’ll buy some burgers for you both so wait until then.”

Aomine gives him a wide smile, “Thanks Tetsu.”

Chapter End Notes

Aomine's protectiveness is coming out~ Anyways, welcome back Kagami!

I think last chapter I said we would see more GoM but I lied :oD Next chapter maybe?

More Aokaga next chapter, and maybe(?) we'll see what Kagami's first week in America is like, though not sure if I wanna go into that just yet! I'll see where the story takes me!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Kagami’s POV to start!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day One, Week One

Dark and drafty- and a bit bumpy. He’s almost fallen under again when a rough shake stirs him awake. He blearily opens his eyes to a middle-aged caucasian man staring down at him. Despite his young(ish) appearance, he resembled Santa Claus.

“Hey,” Santa says. “They just made the announcement, we’re preparing to land.”

“Thanks,” Kagami says, with a sheepish smile.

Kagami rubs his eyes lazily and attempts to stretch out his legs. He was unfortunate enough to be assigned the middle seat for the plane ride, which ultimately meant there was nowhere for his long legs to go. On his right side, Santa occupied the window seat, and on his left was a woman who strangely reminded Kagami of a bowling pin on the top, and a bowling ball on the bottom. She was kind of drooped over, half her body in the middle of the aisle with her mouth hung wide open and Kagami briefly wonders if he should wake her up.

He peers outside the window, taking in the familiar Los Angeles scenery as the plane continued to make its way toward the ground. He could feel the butterflies accumulating in his stomach, anticipating meeting his father, and more importantly, his girlfriend.

“Beautiful, huh?” Santa breaths, and Kagami just nods. The burly male turned to look at him and quirks an eyebrow. “First time here?”

“No,” Kagami answers. “I’m visiting family.”

“I see.”

They don’t say anymore, simply taking in the view of the Los Angeles airport as they approach. The captain’s voice soon resonates through the intercom.

"Ladies and gentleman, we've been cleared to land, flight attendants please be seated for arrival."

Kagami braces himself for landing, feeling the familiar jolt of the ground beneath him, he lets out a sigh of relief when he feels the rumble of the earth below his feet again.

As they depart the plane, Kagami waves goodbye to Santa and goes to pick up his luggage. His cell vibrates in his pocket and he takes it out, revealing a new text message from his dad, and several notifications from his friends.

Hi Son,
We’re waiting in front of the gate.
See you shortly.
Kagami exhales, trying to calm the overwhelming amount of nerves he feels. It’s odd, really— he’s never thought he’d feel this nervous reuniting with his father before and he knew for a fact that those emotions were amplified tenfold at the idea of meeting his new woman.

With the gate in sight, he straightens up, trying to bury down any last minute concerns he has. When he exits, he sees the familiar red head of hair he’s grown up with. He’s gotten older, that’s a given; but he aged elegantly. His hair is a bit paler compared to Kagami’s deep shade of red. Wrinkles adorn his face, but his facial features are still sharp and stern. Although Kagami was taller than him, he felt oddly small next to him.

Alongside him stood a woman of equal height, well almost, he eyed the neon red heels she seemed to be wearing. Upon closer inspection, she looked to be of asian descent. She was wearing a flowery red blouse, glittering expensive-looking jewelry hung from her neck and wrists. Her lips matched her shoes, but other than the huge pop in color, her eye make-up seemed to accentuate more of her natural beauty. Her mini-skirt wrapped tightly around her thighs and she had long black hair pulled up high in a ponytail. If Kagami had to describe her in one word, it’d be: Intimidating. No, wait-- it’d be red.

“Taiga,” his father greets, pulling his son into a tight hug. “It’s been awhile, hasn’t it?”

“Hey dad,” Kagami breathes in his father’s scent. It reminded him a lot of his childhood, he’d remember being carried on his smaller back when he was younger. When Kagami cried constantly because the local school kids made fun of his eyebrows, or when he’d gotten into a scuffle that one time with the older kids because he threw a basketball at their heads. The very same back that carried him home that day from the hospital.

His father pulls away, his lips upturned into a gummy smile and he turns to face the red lady beside him. “Taiga, I’d like you to meet Chai.”

Chai turns to face Kagami and she sticks out her hand. “Sasaki Chai, but you can call me Chai.” Her tone arrogant and demanding. “I’ve heard a lot about you Taiga.”

Kagami takes her hand and shakes it awkwardly, nodding his head. “It’s nice to meet you.”

She nods sharply and lets go, and he notices barely, just barely, that she wipes her hand on her sleeve.

*Are my hands sweaty?* He wonders, rubbing his fingers together, he finds that they’re the opposite. Dry and a bit cold from the plane ride. He gapes at her. *Did she just-

She catches Kagami’s gaze and blinks innocently, arms wrapping around his father’s waist.

“Honey~” she purrs, “I’m hungry. Let’s all get some dinner? I’m sure little Taiga here is famished!”

*Little?*

“You’re right, dear,” his father walks toward him and grabs one of his suitcases. “Let me help you out.”

His father walks ahead of him, guiding them toward the airport exit, his girlfriend clinging to his arm obsessively--no, obnoxiously and Kagami couldn’t help but cringe. He had a bad feeling about whoever this woman was and had planned to tell his father he didn’t exactly approve, but seeing
his father’s expression brighten tremendously when she cooed over him was something he hadn’t seen since his mother left. He would feel extremely guilty for taking that away from him.

However, he never would have imagined his father getting himself a girlfriend like her; or a girlfriend in general. Everything from her demeanor to her appearance had just screamed insincerity. Sure, he wasn’t the most clever person when it came to picking up social cues, but Kagami knew for a fact that Chai had took a slight jab at him.

As he continued to question his father’s choices in women, he glanced up slightly to see that Chai was watching him, and when they lock eyes, she sneers.

They’re at a extravagant restaurant an hour later. Kagami fidgets in his seat, somehow feeling incredibly uncomfortable and astonished at the fact his father even considered bringing him to a restaurant so lavish after being on a plane for 12 hours. Other patrons were clothed in formal wear and Kagami felt severely underdressed in a t-shirt and shorts; he was pretty sure he was in dire need of a shower as well.

“Dad, is this really okay?” Kagami asks, tone uneasy as he scans over the menu. “These meals are crazy expensive.”

His father chuckles a bit. “Yes, order whatever you like Taiga.”

Easier said than done- Kagami didn’t even know what half of these menu items were.

“Do they sell cheeseburgers?” he asks, flipping through the contents.”I can’t find it.”

“Tai-”

“Cheeseburger?” Chai gasps, morphing her face into something of disgust. “Is that what you eat all the time? No wonder you look like... that.”

“Now now” -His father laughs. _Laughs-_ “I’m sure Taiga was just joking.”

“I’m not joking,” Kagami mutters.

“See, honey?” Chai leans over the table, resting her chin on her fist giving Kagami a teasing look. “He looks like the type to eat cheeseburgers. It’s poor people food.”

Now what was that supposed to mean?

Their waiter strolls by shortly after, eyeing the redhead and wrinkling his nose. He whips out his notepad in a swift motion. “What may I get for you, sir?”

“Do you guys sell burgers?”

“Excuse m-”

“He’ll have the prime rib,” his father interjects, laughing nervously. “Medium. And my girlfriend and I will be sharing the lamb chops. Medium rare please.”

The waiter scribbles down the order quickly and bows. “It’ll be right out,” he says, he quickly turns on his heel and walks away.

“I play basketball,” Kagami says, smiling. He always liked talking about basketball, he was proud to talk about it. His teammates, his opponents, the games, the Generation of Miracles; he liked sharing those moments. It had his blood pumping at the mention of it. He was itching to go to the nearest court later on.

“Basketball, huh?” Chai said, her tone almost condescending. “Seems like something a guy with your intellect can do.”

Kagami quirks an eyebrow at that, his smile fading as quickly as it came. “Care to explain?”

Chai just shrugs at that, ignoring the heat behind his words. “I’m just saying, it doesn’t take a huge amount of intelligence to throw a ball into a hula hoop.”

He turns to his father, hoping he would say something to back him up, but he doesn’t. His father remains silent, and he’s staring down at the empty plate in front of him.

“Dad?”

“Taiga, I don’t want to get into this now,” his father sighs. “Let’s just enjoy dinner, alright?”

“You’re just gonna let her talk to me like that?!” he growls.

“Taiga,” his father says sternly. Chai grins beside him. “I said we’ll talk about this later.”

Kagami slumps in his seat, pouting. He wasn’t exactly sure what had prompted the red lady to dislike him so much, they barely knew much about the other, yet she had constantly made rude remarks at him since they’ve met.

His father scoots his chair back, standing up. “I’m going to run to the bathroom real quick. Taiga, try not to cause a ruckus while I’m gone.”

“Should you really be telling me that?” Kagami mutters, watching his father walk off toward the restrooms.

Chai chuckles, “Relax, Taiga,” she leans across the table again, looking Taiga straight in the eyes. Her glare cold and menacing. “I’m not that bad of a person.”

“That’s debateable.”

“Not compared to the things you’ve done at least.”

He frowns. “What the hell are you talking about?”

The female laughs and shrugs. “Who knows?”

“You know nothing about me,” Kagami grumbles.

“Oh believe me Taiga,” She hums. “I know a lot more about you than you think.”

“What could you possib-”

“Ahh, honey~!” she squealed, her cold gaze instantly melted upon seeing her lover return. “Welcome back! Taiga and I were just talking about some things!”
“Oh really?” his father chuckled, smiling brightly. “I’m gone for that short a time and you both get along? I should leave more often.”

“Sweetie, you know I can’t live without you!” she leans over giving him a quick peck on the cheeks, and Kagami can feel his appetite depleting.

A little while later their meal is served, and everyone eats in silence (except for the occasional, ‘Say ahhhh’). For the first time in awhile Kagami doesn’t clear his plate. He blames it on jet lag when his father asks, not wanting to admit his lack of appetite was due to his earlier conversation with Chai. He wanted to ask him about it. What in the world had Chai known about him? What had he not known about himself? But his father was smiling too brightly, oblivious to the atmosphere around him. He couldn’t bring himself to tear it all down, and on his first day back to America nonetheless.

“So what did you and Chai talk about?” his father asks. They both were waiting outside the restaurant for her while she ran to the restroom.

‘Now’s your chance, just tell him,’ he thinks. “Well, she…”

“You know,” his father starts. “I’m really happy you came back to visit. I know you really didn’t have a choice in the matter, but I’m glad we can spend some time together.”

And Kagami nods, swallowing dryly.

“With Chai here now, it’ll be like a full family again,” his father beams, and he pats Kagami on the shoulder. “So what were you saying?”

The redhead shakes his head. “We just talked about Japan mostly.”

“I see,” his father says. “I know she’s probably not what you were expecting, but her heart is in the right place, Taiga. I hope you can see that.”

“I know.”

They drive back to his father’s house to rest for the night. Kagami sat anxiously in his childhood room, trying to ease away the sense of foreboding. He wasn’t sure if he had made the right choice not telling his father about his conversation with Chai, but it was too late. He came to the decision that he would just do his best to ignore it, finding that in these situations, his father’s happiness trumped his own. ‘I’ll just deal with this for a few weeks and then I can go home.’ He rolls over and wills himself to go to sleep.

Aomine was running back to Kagami’s apartment, being extra careful with the bag that contained his burgers. Tetsu decided to buy him five burgers, claiming, ‘That’s usually how much he eats when he’s not feeling well.’ No matter how long he knew the redhead, he would never get used to the amount of food he ate.

As he stopped in front of his door, he knocks a couple times and takes a step back. Soon enough, Kagami opens the door just a crack, peering through the opening with a slight frown. There’s a slight sheen on his face, creating a stark contrast with the dimly lit room behind him, which made him appear a little too ghostly for Aomine’s liking.
“Aomine?” Kagami opens the door wider, and Aomine notices that the only source of light is emitting from his tv which, frighteningly, is stuck on some static channel.

“You..uh...okay?” Aomine asks, swallowing hard.

Kagami frowns at that. “You came all the way back just to ask me that?”

“No- I mean, you look like you’re in the middle of a summoning,” Aomine points out, gesturing inside Kagami’s apartment.

“Ah, that,” Kagami says, turning to look at his tv. “I turned it on and it was like that. I’m trying to get it fixed.”

He turns back around and eyes the bag Aomine’s clutching a little too tightly around his middle. “What’s that?”

“Shit!” Aomine relaxes his tight grip on the burgers. He peeks inside and sees that a few of them are smushed. “I got you- I mean Tetsu bought you some cheeseburgers.”

The other male let out an exasperated sigh. It was atypical to see the redhead react in such a way, especially with burgers. Normally he would jump at the chance of food, especially free food. Aomine holds his tongue, heeding Tetsu’s advice, he would much rather prefer not to get kicked out of Kagami’s apartment before even stepping foot in it.

“Well, thanks for dropping it off,” Kagami says, he grabs the bag and starts to shut the door when Aomine quickly stops him.

“Wait a minute,” Aomine says. The other male raises a single eyebrow. “Let me stay over.”

“What?” Kagami’s eyebrows scrunch together in another frown. “Aomine, I’m about to go to bed. I can’t entertain-”

“Why’s your tv on if you’re going to bed?”

“I--” Kagami starts to say, but then he closes it. His lips pursed in defeat. “Whatever. You can’t stay over. I don’t have the energy to deal with you.”

“So you’re not sleeping,” Aomine says, plainly. “Great, I’m coming in.”

“O-oi!”

He pushes in past Kagami and kicks off his shoes. Shrugging off his jacket, he settles himself on Kagami’s sofa, the loud stampering of Kagami running after him following shortly after.

“You bastard! You can’t just waltz right in here!”

Aomine hums in amusement. The tanned male makes a show of sinking himself deeper into the couch, kicking his legs up and crossing it over the glass coffee table in front of him, before eyeing Kagami and giving him one of his teasing smirks.

“Just pretend I’m not here.”

“Like hell I can!”

“Just do whatever it is you were gonna do,” Aomine says, scratching the inside of his ear with his pinky, nonchalant. “I won’t bother you.”
“Tch, you’re already bothering me asshole.”

“Then I’ll be quiet.”

And so he does. Kagami glares at him for a bit, before he walks toward the kitchen to place the burgers on the counter, all the while glancing over at the other male giving him menacing looks. Aomine wants to ask him why he’s not eating, but he’d already locked his lips and thrown away the key.

The redhead walks back over to him holding a glass of water that he places -angrily- next to Aomine’s feet. He then grabs what Aomine thinks to be some sort of instruction manual before plopping himself in front of the tv. There’s a jumbled mess of wires in front of him, all seemingly different colors, and he watches as Kagami tries to untangle and sort through them, cursing under his breath as he was doing so.

He would help. Eventually. It was really cute to see him tangle himself in wires, like a kitten with some yarn.

After observing Kagami struggle in silence for about ten minutes, he drags himself off the couch and crawls over to him, giving the redhead a light pat on his shoulder before sitting down. He holds out a hand, motioning Kagami to hand him the manual. The other male gives him a hard look, but eventually hands it over.

‘What an idiot, he's got it all wrong,’ he smiles thoughtfully, reading over the manual and admiring Kagami’s disastrous handiwork.

While he works quickly on untangling the last bits of wire, he sees Kagami shuffle on his knees to a plastic bag next to the tv, before waddling back clutching a dvd in his hands. Aomine looks at him questionably.

“When you’re done with that, I want to watch this,” he mutters, holding out the dvd for Aomine to take.

Taking a look at the dvd, Aomine is glad, for once, that he isn’t able to speak. Just looking at the title of the film confirms that his crush is an actual child, and he bites his lips to prevent the snarky comments from escaping.

“It’s my favorite movie,” Kagami adds.

*You’re making this way too difficult, Bakagami.*

But Aomine decides, anyways, that if Kagami wants to watch Toy Story- then god damnit, he will. With his purpose newly revitalized, he finishes setting up the tv, and the static channel quickly switches to one of color.

“Oh, you actually did it,” Kagami says, and Aomine doesn’t appreciate the hint of surprise in his voice.

Aomine opens his mouth to say something, but closes it again, remembering he had to be on his best behavior. So he just settles for a nod.

“You can speak you know,” Kagami hands Aomine to insert into the dvd player and he takes it, lightly bumping him over the head with it.

“It’s thank you, you idiot,” Aomine says.
“Thank you,” Kagami mutters, he stands up quickly and Aomine notices he sways a little. “Did you eat yet?”

“No, not yet,” Aomine shrugs, staring intently at the dvd player.

“You want some cheeseburgers?”

“Tetsu bought those for you.”

“We can share them,” Kagami says rolling his eyes. He makes his way to the kitchen grabbing the bag of burgers, then sits himself in front of the coffee table. “Anyways, I don’t have anything else for you to eat. Since Kuroko paid for these, I’m guessing you’re too broke to buy your own food.”

“Tch, whatever,” Aomine presses ‘play’ on the remote, then walks back over to the couch and plops down. He reaches over Kagami to grab a single burger.

“Wait a minute Ahomine, don’t eat on the couch!”

“Relax,” Aomine says, “I’m not a slob like you.”

“But-!”

“Shhh, the movie’s starting.”

Once the movie begins, Kagami quiets, nibbling on the burger he’s holding, and he watches the screen intently. Aomine, on the other hand, doesn’t focus on the movie. He’s seen this particular film before- albeit with his younger cousin, so he fixes his gaze on the back of Kagami’s head, eyeing the redhead’s locks which had grown longer. It still held its signature spiked appearance, but he suddenly had the urge to run his fingers through them. He blankly finishes his burger, almost as if he were on auto-pilot, before leaning over Kagami’s shoulder again to discard the wrapper on the coffee table.

As he retreats back on the couch, he gives into his innocent desires, allowing his fingers to delicately graze the tips of Kagami’s strands. It was soft, surprisingly soft. The touch, feathered and silky had Aomine wondering what in the world made it look so rough and ragged on the outside. He indulges himself a little more, scooting himself to the edge of the couch he gently cards his hand through Kagami’s hair, finding the action strangely therapeutic. Underneath his touch, he feels Kagami flinch slightly, aware that Aomine was touching him. But he doesn’t say anything, doesn’t turn around; just allows Aomine to relax him.

Oddly enough, Aomine feels himself getting sleepier. Leaning on his side, he lays down on the couch, his free hand still stretched over combing through Kagami’s hair. The combination of his touch, the buzz of the movie, and the softness of the cushion beneath him had him lulling to sleep. His eyelids getting heavier with each blink and he slowly eases his arm away, letting it fall off the couch. When he does so, Kagami turns around to face him.

“Sleepin’ soon?” Aomine mumbles, his words coming out sounding more like grunts than anything.

“Mm,” Kagami hums.

Aomine says something, something he doesn't really remember, his voice drawled out and unintelligible from sleep. He's not sure what expression Kagami makes at his slur. Aomine squints his eyes to try get a better look at him, but his vision is blurred and the light reflecting off the tv casts a shadow over Kagami’s front. Not that it matters anyways, because the other male walks off.
From the living room, he hears Kagami open a door and close it, before he returns carrying a comforter.

The redhead gently drapes it over him, who’s already half asleep, tucking it under his legs. Aomine feels a cold hand on his forehead and the other male’s soft breath so close to his face-

“Da..i..”
“I’m ______”

It says, voice soft and breaking, and it's the last thing he hears before his consciousness slips away.

Chapter End Notes

//tries to add in a bit of fluff before the angst begins

Consider this chapter like an intro before all the angst starts. From here on out, it just goes downhill. Waaayyy downhill.

That being said, this fic will still mainly be in Aomine's POV. Kagami's POV will only be during his time in America and I can't write about all of it otherwise this fic would never end. Although, maybe, just maybe, I'll write Kagami's POV while he's in Japan, just so we can know his inner thoughts. As for now, it'll only be in America and It'll only be key moments, the rest can be up to your interpretation. But if you ever need me to clarify certain things, then I surely will :o)
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thanks a ton to my beta. She's AMAZING

Enjoy the chapter~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day Nine, Week Two

“Taiga, where do you think you’re going?”

His father stood at the kitchen, arms crossed and his foot tapped impatiently at the sight of his son lacing up his sneakers.

It was nearing the afternoon on his second day there, the weather was hot and sweltering, what you’d expect for Los Angeles weather, when he grabbed the basketball he’d packed and prepared to hit the streets for some much-needed b-ball. His father had stopped him, told him that he was here for family, not sports. Since then, it’s become somewhat of a ritual for them for the past week.

Kagami had decided to sneak out a bit earlier today. The sun hadn’t risen yet and he had made every attempt to sneak about quietly. Unfortunately, he couldn’t account for his father’s supernatural hearing ability. Add Takao’s Hawk-eye to the equation and he definitely would’ve been a top-tier basketball player.

What a waste of talent.

“I-uh, couldn’t sleep,” Kagami says, biting his lip. “So I’m going for a quick walk.”

“Oh huh,” his father quirks an eyebrow. “At 5am?”

“I said it’ll be quick.”

“With a basketball?”

Kagami rises on his feet and looks at his father pleadingly, “C’mon dad, I’ll only be out for an hour. There’s probably no one at the court right now.”

“Taiga, I told you. You’re here for family time,” his father walks over to him and snatches the ball from his hands unceremoniously. “You play basketball all the time anyway, just deal with it for a couple more weeks.”

“Dad, it’s 5am! A little basketball isn’t gonna hurt your precious family time,” Kagami bellows. “I’ll be back before Chai’s even awake.”

“Taiga,” his father’s tone stern and unwavering. “I’m your father. When you’re living under my roof, you’ll abide by my rules. So when I say no basketball, it means no basketball. Got it?”
“That’s bullshit.”

“Taiga!”

“This isn’t about family, you just don’t like the idea of me playing basketball.”

His father’s eyes widen at that. “What makes you say that?”

“You never seem interested when I talk about basketball, in fact, most times you don’t even want to hear it,” Kagami growls. “And you never showed up to any of my games.”

“Taiga, I live in America,” his father says tiredly.

“Which brings me to my next point,” Kagami walks up to his father, stopping a couple feet away from him. “You left me in a country all by myself. Why should I listen to you?”

“I thought I made it very clear that I have work here,” he says.

As rational as that sounded, Kagami couldn’t help but still feel resentment for that. Because it was too rational. He and his father had become distant the day his mother left. His father had thrown himself into work, leaving Kagami in the hands of a nanny- most days he wouldn’t even see him.

Because of that, Kagami had considered himself lucky enough to run into Tatsuya and Alex. They both kept him occupied throughout the loneliest of days, taking care of him, talking and playing with him, he had considered them more of a family than his father.

So when the opportunity of moving back to Japan arose, Kagami had thought this time his father would finally play more of an active role in his life. He never once thought to blame his father for leaving him there, he was old enough to understand the weight of responsibility hanging over his father’s shoulder. Besides, it was a natural occurrence growing up- however in this moment, he felt the situation had a striking resemblance to that day his mother left. The only thought that that ran through his head was, I was never enough for you to stay.

He stood unmoving, pondering. There, of course, were many times Kagami had always wanted to express to his father how he felt all these years, now being one of those times; but he couldn’t do it. He knew the outcome of the argument wouldn’t change a thing. If his father hated basketball then there was no changing that. If his father had been too busy with work, there was no changing that either.

“I’m going to my room,” he mumbles, grabbing the basketball out of his father’s hands he pushes past him rudely.

He slammed the door loudly, not caring whether or not he woke Chai up- though under the surface, he secretly wished he did- He tossed his basketball in his open suitcase and kicked off his sneakers, eyeing the simple red and black design on them. He laid down and wrapped himself in his covers. Grabbing his cell from his nightstand, he reads through previous messages.

Alex had sent him tons of (topless) selfies of herself in Hawai‘i, Kuroko kept him updated on their training regime and annoyingly sent him pictures and videos of Nigou, and Aomine… What was he up to? Kagami opens their chat and rereads the brief exchanges between the two and smacks himself mentally. ‘Shit I forgot to text him back. I should text him later.’

He places his phone back on his nightstand and rubs his head on his pillow, getting comfortable. While his mind drifts, he slowly falls back asleep, letting breathtakingly blue hair and eyes and tan skin fill the contents of his dream.
A couple hours later he’s jarred lightly. He feels the bed dip beside him, indicating that someone was there, and slowly, the faintest smell of pancakes meets him.

“Taiga,” the voice says, and he’s shaken again. “Son, wake up.”

The redhead mumbles confused and rolls over rubbing his eyes, blinking rapidly to clear his vision before looking up at the man sitting next to him.

His father is there, smiling slightly. In his hands, a plate of messy chocolate chip pancakes with sliced strawberries and whipped cream. “Hey Taiga, thought you’d be kind of hungry.”

“Who made it?” Kagami says, voice rough from sleep. “Did she make it?”

“Why?”

“I don’t want her to poison me,” he grumbles, and he’s not pleased to hear his father chuckle.

“Yeah, she’s not such a great cook is she?”

‘That’s not what I meant,’ he thinks, irritated. He glares at his father and his father stares back, clueless.

“I made it,” his father says, finally. “But I made it out of a box. So sorry if it’s not quite up to your standards.”

Kagami sits up and grabs the plate from him. He takes a reluctant bite. It’s not bad. So he heartily gobbles the rest.

“How is it?”

“It’s alright,” Kagami shrugs. It was clear that he obviously didn’t get his cooking ability from his father.

He notices that his father sits there the rest of the time wordlessly, not leaving. He’s staring at Kagami in concentration, like he’s thinking of something.

“What?” Kagami says, impatiently. His father blinks and clears his throat.

“Just wanted to..uh, apologize,” his father says nervously, “for earlier.”

He stares at his father a bit, comprehending what he just said, then looks down at his plate to play with a strawberry slice with his fork.

“What for,” he grumbles, almost feeling guilt. He’s not sure why he does.

“Well I haven’t exactly been the best parent,” he starts. “But that’s why I wanted you to come back. So maybe we can make up for all the lost time…” his father trails off.

“I thought you wanted me to come back so you could gloat,” Kagami says.

“Gloat? About what?”

Kagami rolls his eyes. “Your new girlfriend.”

“A little bit of that too,” he says, smiling. But Kagami doesn’t smile back, and he clears his throat nervously.
“Why Chai?” Kagami spits out.

“Excuse me?”

“I mean, why her?” Kagami says. “She’s not exactly the type of person I’d imagine you’d be with.”

“Ahhh, that,” his father gestures Kagami to scoot over, and he climbs on the bed to sit next to him. “I can tell you a bit about that, if you want.”

“Well I asked, didn’t I?”

“Watch your tone,” his father says bluntly. “Anyways, I won’t get too in depth. It’s embarrassing.”

“That’s fine with me,” Kagami says, placing his empty plate on his nightstand. He looks at his father, signaling him to start.

“I met her at work,” he says. “She’s my coworker. She’s very good at what she does, very hardworking, I admired her for that. But as you can tell, her attitude is very...off-putting.” He laughs a bit, and Kagami notices that he’s beaming.

“We had a very rocky start. At the time, I always hated having to work alongside her. I thought she was difficult,” and Kagami nods. “But y’know, that attitude of hers saved me.”

Kagami frowns, “What do you mean by that?” He asks, surprised by the fact that Chai’s trash attitude saved somebody. It was weird to hear.

“I didn’t want to get into this—” he shifts uncomfortably, “Ever since your mom....left. I immersed myself into more work, hoping it’d distract me, but it didn’t. Everything seemed like a chore to me. I really was just living everyday as if I were on auto-pilot. I only did the bare minimum to get you and me by.”

His father’s smile returns as he’s reminiscing on older days. There’s a twinkle in his eye. “But Chai,” he says. “She pushed me, challenged me, made me work harder. She saved me, Taiga. Before I knew it, I had fallen in love again.”

“Frankly, I didn’t think that would happen,” he says laughing. “I’m not sure you understand exactly how I feel but, you’ll understand once you find someone you like.”

Kagami sat quietly, letting the information soak in a bit. What’s scary was that he did understand—though, not quite. He’d been on the other side of the whole ordeal, in a different situation, with a different person, with a different gender, and he, alarmingly, held the same feelings for this person. Thankfully, neither of them, had the same level of assholery as Chai. After awhile, Kagami nods slightly in understanding.

“I guess I kinda know what it feels like,” Kagami mumbles. “Though, that doesn’t explain why she hates me so much.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, she doesn’t hate you,” his father says. “She only—”

He abruptly stops himself and chews on his lower lip nervously. Kagami frowns at the sudden action, he narrows his eyes at him.

“She only...what?” he asks, slowly.
His father continues to bite his lip, restraining himself. His eyebrows are knitted tightly together and in the current light of the room, makes him appear ten years older. “Taiga..” he starts off hesitantly. “There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you for awhile now.”

“What is it?”

“Your mom,” he says hesitantly. “How do you feel about her?”

Kagami’s heart flips at the question. It was very unlikely for his father to willingly speak or ask about his mother. Especially now of all times. “I hate her,” Kagami says softly, looking down and fiddling with his blanket, “Because she left us.”

His father sighs loudly and rubs his face, then leaves his face buried in his hands. “I was afraid of this.” he mutters.

Kagami frowns, “What-”

“Hooonnnneeeeyyyyyyyy~” Chai calls obnoxiously from the hallway. It doesn’t take long before she barges into Kagami’s room, flinging the door wide open. “There you ar- You’re not even dressed yet! Both of you!”

“Ahh, sorry sweetie,” his father quickly rises from his bed.

“Honestly, I can understand Taiga dressing like a peasant, but you!”

Kagami rolled his eyes. After a week of her constant attempts at provoking him, he’s learned to tune her out- mostly.

“Alright, alright. I’m getting dressed now,” his father says, his hands held up in surrender.

“Wait! Dad!” Kagami cried out, scrambling out of bed. “What about-”

“We’ll talk later,” his father said, quickly moving past Chai.

Kagami plops down on his bed again, tugging at his red locks. Why the hell did he bring up mom? He glances up to see Chai still there, leaning casually at his doorway smirking at him.

“Have a nice talk?”

“No,” he grumbled. “Cause you interrupted.”

She rolls her eyes. “Oh, boo hoo. I’m surprised he wanted to talk to you after all these years.”

“He says he wants to make up for lost time,” Kagami says.

Chai seemed surprised at this, she straightens up and crosses her arms, a look of pure pleasure on her face. “Really?”

“What the hell do you look so surprised for?” he snarled.

She shrugged, “Didn’t think he’d be too quick to forgive.”

_Forgive? But he was apologizing to me?_ He quirks an eyebrow. “Forgive? For what?”

“Well! I’ll just leave it that today,” she says, turning on her heels and walking out.
He groaned loudly. Why the hell was everyone so vague?

Kagami’s couch was surprisingly comfy and warm. His scent lingered everywhere. It smelled a little like citrus vanilla, with a hint of muskiness. Odd- but strangely relaxing. He smelled good. The quiet atmosphere was broken by a buzzing sound. He’d forgotten his phone was in his pocket. He fumbled around sleepily for it, pulling it out and roughly tossing it on Kagami’s coffee table, ignoring its cries. Eventually it silences- though, not for long as it starts buzzing again a few minutes later. Clicking his tongue in annoyance the male finally rises, his navy eyes blinded by the light that streamed through the living room curtains, and he rubbed them lazily blinking hard a few times to clear his vision. He grabs his cell without bothering to look at the caller ID. Only one person is capable of calling him repeatedly.

“Dai-chan!” Satsuki pouts. “I've been calling you! Did you put your phone on silent?!”

“No,” Aomine mutters, his voice heavy with sleep.

“Did you just wake up?!”

“Yes.”

“Dai-chan!” She screeches. “It's almost 12 now! Aren't you staying over at Kagamin’s”

“Yeah, I am.”

Speaking of which, the apartment was eerily quiet. The trash on the coffee table from the previous night was tidied up and the tv shut off, but other than, everything was left untouched. He stands up, stretching his arms and legs and walks toward the hall.

“Oi! Kagami!” He calls out.

When he doesn't hear a response, he calls again. “Kagamiii, you in your room? Where are you?”

“He’s not with you?!” Satsuki says alarmingly. “Dai-chan! I thought you stayed over there to watch him!”

“I came here to be with him, not watch him. I'm not his god damn babysitter,” Aomine huffs. “And he's probably in his room sleeping. Don't forget he just came back yesterday.”

“Wait, Dai-chan, you said you stayed there to be with Kagamin?”

_Oh shit._

“Dai-chan,” she says evenly, almost as if she were restraining herself from squealing. “Do you like-”

“Satsuki, I gotta hang up!” Aomine says quickly, pocketing his phone.

Sighing loudly, he runs his hands through his hair. He's sure the topic will come up again sooner or later. There was no way Satsuki would leave it alone.

Shuffling through the hallway, he slowly opens the doors. Peeking in, he finds an empty bedroom.
It’s surprisingly simplistic, it’s only furnished with a single bed, and he guesses it’s a guest bedroom. Why the fuck didn't I sleep in here last night? He wonders. He moves on to open another door, finding a shower and toilet, scoffing a bit at the thought of Kagami being so Americanized he decided to install a shower here.

He stops in front of the last bedroom, presumably Kagami’s and he knocks a couple times. “Kagami?”

He’s met by silence again, so he opens the door a crack and sticks his head inside.

The floor was littered with clothes and items. Textbooks, dumbbells, papers, sports gear were all spread out messily on the floor. In the center of it all, was Kagami, curled up into a ball on the ground, his arms wrapped tightly around his center, and his face was contorted in pain.

“Kagami!” he exclaimed, he rushed in and knelt down beside him, his hands hovering over his trembling body, unsure if Kagami was injured, if it was okay to touch him. Panicked thoughts flood his mind. Navy blue eyes scanned the redhead’s body wildly, trying to figure out the cause of the pain. The other male opens his eyes to look at him, his eyes glossed over slightly, and he’s sweating profusely.

“Aomine...?” he whispers, and Aomine nods reassuringly.

“I’m here,” he says, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder, briefly noticing how small and boney it’s gotten. “What’s wrong? Are you hurt?”

“Stomach…’urts” Kagami moaned in pain. “Need to puke.”

Aomine nods. Without wasting any time, He grabs Kagami’s arm gently, wrapping it behind his neck and shoulders, hoisting him up slowly, being careful not to jar him too much. “We’re gonna walk to the bathroom now.”

Kagami nods and they stagger to the bathroom. Easing him in front of the toilet, Aomine sits behind him, rubbing soothing circles into the redhead’s back, chanting soothing words as he heaves and coughs up the contents of his stomach.

They stay like that for about a half hour- Aomine doesn’t leave his side throughout the whole session. Once Kagami’s stomach settles down, he allows himself to get up to grab a washcloth, wiping delicately at Kagami’s face, before wiping down his neck and arms.

“Feel better?” Aomine asks. Kagami rests his head on the toilet seat and nods tiredly, closing his eyes.

“Hey, that’s unsanitary,” Aomine runs over and pulls Kagami up, looping his arm around Kagami’s waist to keep him sturdy, guiding him back to his room. “Sleep in your bed.”

He kicks the mess on the floor, clearing a path for Kagami to walk and places him in bed, draping his blanket on top and sits down on the floor so he’s able to match his gaze.

“Still hurts,” Kagami mumbles, wrapping the blanket tighter around him.

“Cause you just puked everything up, idiot.” Aomine brings his hand up to ruffle affectionately at the other’s hair, it’s texture a bit damp from sweat. “I’ll get you some water, you can’t go to sleep dehydrated.”

He quickly runs to the kitchen, grabbing a glass cup and fills it with water, before briskly walking
back to Kagami who sits upright when he returns. He kneels down and brings the cup to his lips and orders, “Drink.”

Kagami takes a small sip, then gulps the rest down greedily, before rustling back under the covers again.

“I’ll find something for you to eat,” Aomine says. “Sleep until then.”

Aomine waits until Kagami’s asleep before he moves. When he hears Kagami’s ragged breathing slow down into even, steady breaths. He gets up and dusts himself off, leaving the door open a crack.

The tanned male stood awkwardly in the kitchen, not knowing exactly what he could feed the redhead. He knew an upset stomach called for light, bland foods, so buying was off the list. Now the choices were either- instant foods or a home cooked meal. Looking through the redhead’s fridge and sighing when he sees the emptiness, besides some onions. Opening the cupboards, he spots chicken stock and a bag of rice grains. He smiles slightly. I can make something with this.

He recalls the times his mother made him porridge whenever he was sick. He’s never exactly liked it as a meal, but it was comforting. It was heavy enough to keep him full, and light enough not to cause any stomach issues. Perfect, he’d make Kagami some porridge.

In terms of cooking ability, he was nowhere as good as his mother or Kagami, but he definitely had the skill to take it on when the situation called for it. His mother cooked meals at home frequently, so he never really had to step foot in the kitchen. And even if he had to, he would rather pester someone else to make him meals. Now however, he really really had to.

Grabbing Kagami’s apron off the hook, he starts washing the rice, deciding that cooking it on the stove would be much faster than waiting an hour for the rice cooker. When the rice starts to cook, he chops up some onions and throws it in a hot pot, waiting for them to turn translucent before he adds the chicken stock. Once the rice is done, he adds that into the pot and covers the top, allowing it to simmer before it’s ready. While he’s waiting, he peeks in on Kagami’s bedroom, checking on him. When he sees that the redhead is still sleeping, he runs back to the kitchen to check on the porridge.

It’s about another forty or so minutes before the porridge is done. Spooning it in a small bowl, he heads toward Kagami’s room. When he enters, he places the bowl on his nightstand and makes his way over to the sleeping figure. Upon closer inspecting, Kagami’s peaceful face has morphed into that of concern, he was whimpering, muttering words Aomine couldn’t quite decipher. He was breathing heavily, his face was crumpled up, brows knitted tightly together, and beads of sweat dripped down his damp forehead. In a state of alarm, Aomine shakes him gently, calling his name. Kagami suddenly jolts awake, wide dark ruby eyes meets navy in a flash of terror, and he’s grasping Aomine’s wrist tightly. The taller male rubs at his arm, reassuringly, whispering- It’s just a dream Kagami. I’m here now, just relax- and he knocks their foreheads together at an attempt to let the other male know that he really was there. After a few minutes, Kagami calms down, his grip loosening around Aomine’s wrist and he lets his head fall back on the pillow again, and he sighs.

“Sorry ‘bout that,” he mutters, draping an arm over his eyes.

At that point, Aomine makes the decision to disregard everything Tetsu has said. There was no way he could pretend that Kagami was okay, no way he could keep himself quiet when the person he cared for was so broken in front of him. Given Kagami’s current condition, he knew there had to be something severely wrong with him. Whatever he had was eating away at him. Illness? Did he
get sick in America? Out of all the possibilities, that one was the most comprehensible. After all, it
would explain the sudden weight loss on the male. But even then, if he were sick, he knew the
redhead was smart enough to get his ass to the doctor’s. So what was wrong?

Reaching toward the nightstand, he grabs the bowl of porridge and hands it to him.

“Eat,” Aomine says, ignoring Kagami’s apology.

Kagami grabs the bowl, and stares at it, hesitant. He glances up at Aomine with a confused look.
“Where did you get this?”

“I made it, dumbass,” Aomine huffs.

“You did?”

“Yes,” Aomine says, rolling his eyes. “Now eat it, before it gets cold.”

Suddenly Kagami pushes the bowl into Aomine’s chest, and he makes a noise out of surprise.

“What the-”

“You want me to puke again?”

“O-oi!” Aomine barks. “I worked hard to make that for you!”

“Did you taste it?” Kagami asks. “And is my kitchen still in one piece?”

“Yes, I tasted it. It’s fucking delicious,” he brags. “And if it weren’t, we’d both be dead by now.”

Kagami looks at Aomine reluctantly, he brings the bowl back close to him to scrutinize it. Then he
holds it up to his nose, and sniffs it.

“Taiga,” Aomine says.

Kagami’s head snaps up, bewildered at the fact of hearing his first name coming out of Aomine’s
mouth.

“Eat the goddamn porridge.”

Obediently, Kagami takes a small bite, swallowing the porridge slowly. He looks up at Aomine in
amazement and the act makes Aomine smile.

“Good, right?”

“It is,” Kagami says, taking another spoonful. “I’m surprised you managed to make this.”

Aomine scoffs. “Well don’t get used it.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t.”

There’s a brief moment of silence. Aomine leans back, resting on his hands, watching Kagami eat.
He doesn’t eat as fast as he used to, is what he notices. Last night with the burgers, and today with
the porridge.

“Oi, Kagami.”

“Hm?”
“What the hell happened to you?” Aomine starts, realizing that that sentence could be taken in numerous ways, he clarifies quickly. “In America.”

“Don’t want to talk about it,” Kagami says, sourly.

“Hah?” Aomine glares at him. “You come back looking like utter shit and you don’t want to tell me why?”

Kagami glares back, but Aomine refuses to back down.

“You gonna answer or not?”

“I told you, that’s none of your business,” Kagami says, narrowing his eyes.

“You made it my business the moment I found you writhing in pain in the middle of your bedroom floor,” Aomine snaps. “Not to mention, the nightmares you were having.”

“I didn’t ask for your help,” Kagami mutters.

“God, you’re so fucking stubborn,” Aomine sighs. “Kagami, I just want to know what happened. Just talk to me.”

“I’m the stubborn one?!” Kagami shouts. “Let’s not forget that you’re the one who barged into my apartment without my permission. This was NEVER your business. Just leave me the fuck alone.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” Aomine shouts back. “I’m just-”

“Just SHUT UP,” Kagami cries, he’s clenching the bowl so tight, his knuckles turn white. “Why can’t you just mind your own goddamn business?! I already told you I DON’T want to talk about it. If you can't get that through your thick skull then just fucking leave.”

Aomine’s patience snaps. Why, why why couldn’t he understand?

“You-” unable to hold back, Aomine grabs his smaller wrists harshly, making Kagami drop the bowl of porridge he’s holding onto the floor, the liquid spilling messily in all directions. “You disappear for two months making me and the rest of your team to worry about whether you’re even alive, you come back out of the blue and expect everyone to pretend that you’re okay when it’s obvious that you’re not-”

Kagami tries to push him away roughly, but Aomine’s hold on him tightens. He’d already decided he wasn’t letting go.

“Just look at you! You’re half the size you were before, you look like a fucking ghost, and you haven’t smiled at all and I-”

He slumps down, the two of them panting, out of breath. He releases his tight grip on Kagami’s wrist to hold his hand instead, facing his palm upwards he traces the outlines in them nervously.

“You what?” Kagami urges.

“I missed you,” he says, breathless, refusing to look at Kagami.

Kagami doesn’t answer. The silence weighs heavily on his shoulders, yet he still couldn’t bring himself to make eye contact. After awhile, the other male speaks, his voice soft and hesitant.

“Aomine, do you like me?”
His breath catches in his throat and he feels his heart hammering so loudly in his chest he's afraid Kagami can hear it. He didn't want his feelings to be known so quickly. At least not while Kagami’s like this. But he can't hold his feelings any longer. So he staunchly nods. “I do.”

As those words leave his lips, he finally looks up. The expression on Kagami’s face being one he didn't expect at all. The boy’s face was filled with pure dread, his eyes wide with fear and his eyebrows are slanted upward in worry and he’s chewing on his lower lip nervously, and in that moment Aomine’s heart dropped.

Chapter End Notes

//Tries to squeeze in some more fluff
//sprinkles a little angst on Aomine's side too

We find out what happens next chapter, though you might have an idea of what already goes down.

A teennnnyyy bit of foreshadowing in this one :oD

See you next chapter!

Also forgot to mention but I hc Aomine being able to cook very basic meals, like rice, porridge, eggs etc etc. He's just very lazy xD
Chapter 6

Day Ten, Week Two

He had fallen asleep to that voice. Soft, deep, husky. Now that he thought about it, he wasn’t sure why he decided to call him in the first place. Most of their phone calls ended in arguments and pointless bickering, yet he somehow felt himself craving for the sound of it. Customarily, his voice would send him a bit over the edge. Every laugh, every biting insult, every low growl sent goosebumps down the redhead’s body, penetrating through his very being, seeping right down to his very bones. He had a love/hate relationship with that tone. Hate; because he couldn’t imagine anyone else swooning so goddamn hard over something so trivial. However, that night Aomine sounded smaller, almost younger; slightly tentative, but it was gentle and comforting. Amidst all the current confusion, Kagami found the sound of his voice healing. If he had to compare it to something- maybe a Siren. The way his voice washed over him like a spell, luring him in. The next morning he couldn’t remember much of what the Touou ace had talked about.

Kagami had gone through his morning routine merrily. Every step was light and airy, the sound of Aomine’s voice stayed lingering in his ears like a song he couldn’t get out of his head. He felt idiotic for feeling like a lovesick-stricken middle school girl, but he couldn’t help it. Aomine had sang him happy birthday that night. The thought of it still had him squealing.

The redhead was busy pulling up his basketball shorts when his door suddenly flung open, jolting him out of his stupor, he flung backwards toward his bed, making an inhuman noise.

“Shit!”

“Oops, sorry son. Didn’t know you were still changing,” his father said and walked in anyways, shutting the door behind him.

“Ever heard of knocking?” he growled, pulling the basketball shorts up. He had packed up the shorts for obvious reasons. Too much, actually. Certain predicaments prevented him from putting them to good use though, so he figured he might as well wear it since it was in his suitcase.

“You could’ve just locked the door,” his father said, rolling his eyes.

“Or you could’ve had the common courtesy to knock before entering,” Kagami said.

His father glanced at him up and down, then frowned. “You’re gonna wear that today?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Didn’t I tell you?” his father asked. “There’s a party later.”

Kagami stood, bemused. For a couple years now he hadn’t received any birthday greetings from his father, labeling it as a natural occurrence. Back in his childhood, he would celebrate his
birthday with Alex and Tatsuya. He never held any negative feelings toward his father for that, assuming that his father was too busy with work or had just forgotten. Kagami never felt the need to clarify. But he stood confused hearing about a party. Had his father suddenly remembered the date?

“What party?” Kagami asked.

“Oh, so I didn’t tell you?” His father smiled widely at him, putting his hands on his hips. “We’re having a little gathering for the special birthday girl.”

“Dad, you didn’t have t- wait,” he starts, then he narrows his eyes. “Birthday girl?”

“Yup, so we’re hosting a birthday party,” his father beams. “And her family and friends are coming, so you’ll get to meet them too.”

Kagami groans mentally. ‘I should’ve known.’ A part of him was disappointed that he believed his father actually remembered his birthday, and the other part was disgusted that he shared a birthday with Chai. Not to mention he held the ultimate honor of meeting others who were just like her.

“Fucking wonderful,” he muttered to himself.

“Now change out of that,” his father said gesturing at his outfit. “You wanna look nice. You could be a part of their family one day.”

“Don’t tell me you’re planning on proposing or some shit,” he said, taking the few steps toward his suitcase, he rummages through for “nice” clothes, praying to god he at least brought a pair of jeans and a button up shirt. He knew his father wouldn’t have sent Kagami back to America to meet someone he wasn’t serious about, but he secretly hoped somehow during the duration of the trip, his father would realize what a bitch Chai was and send her packing.

“Even if I was planning on proposing, I don’t see why I have to notify you,” his father said frowning. “Also, you need to lighten up. No snappy comments. Today’s her special day.”

“I wouldn’t be snappy if she didn’t piss me off so much,” he said, bitter that today was his special day too.

“Taiga,” his father groaned.

“Fine, fine. No snappy comments.”

That seemed to satisfy his father, and he smiled at Kagami in return. “Guests are arriving in about an hour. Look presentable!” He starts to walk toward the door when Kagami suddenly remembered the conversation they had the day before, and quickly grabs a hold of his father’s shoulder before he has a chance to leave.

“Wait!”

His father turns and looks at him, raising an eyebrow in question. “What is it?”

“Yesterday. About mom,” Kagami began, his throat suddenly getting dry. “You said you wanted to tell me something.”

Under his grip, his father tenses up, and clears his throat. “Yes, well. Now’s not the time.”

“It seemed pretty important.”
“It is,” his father said sourly, and was he- was he glaring at him?

“So why did you ask me about mom?”

“Son, I said now’s not the time.”

“Then when is?”

“I don’t know, just not now,” he says, pulling away from him. He watches as his father promptly exits the room and shuts the door, leaving him with unanswered questions again.

An hour and a half later Kagami stood in the living room, holding a plastic cup of raspberry punch (Chai’s favorite.) He’s awkwardly standing in the corner, just watching the guests around him interact. A bunch of them have already congregated into groups, huddling close to each other in small circles. Chai was somewhere in the mix, probably. He didn’t really care as long as she stayed away from him. A headache was already creeping up on him from listening to all these girls babble on and on. His eyes flicker toward his father’s general direction. He’s also conversing with several of her friends. A couple of them look to be Chai’s age and there’s a younger female amongst the group. Probably around his age if not slightly older. His father makes eye contact with him and smiles, he kindly excuses himself from the group and walks toward him.

He sighs and attempts to shrink himself more into the corner. For once in his life, he wishes he had Kuroko’s nonexistent presence. Maybe he’d be able to slip away unnoticed.

“Taiga,” his father said, approaching. “Why aren’t you talking to anyone?”

“Dunno if you can tell, but this isn’t exactly my cup of tea.”

His father frowned. “Don’t you socialize with your friends at school or basketball?”

“Well yeah, but most of my friends are dudes,” Kagami said. He also wanted to add that all the females here looked a bit raunchy, but he bit his tongue on that one.

“Maybe you can make a younger female friend,” his father said, eyeing the younger female across the room giving him a slight smirk.

“No thanks,” he replied flatly, hiding behind his plastic cup.

“Why not? A boy your age should be interested in girls, no?”

“M’not interested.”

“That girl is very sweet. You would like her.”

“Dad, I said I’m not interested. She’s not my type.”

“Oh, c’mon son,” his father said, turning on his heel he walked toward the group of females again. “You don’t know until you talk to her. Lemme go grab her.”

“W-wait!” Kagami shouted, pulling his father back. Feeling his cheeks flush a deep red, he stuttered to get the words out. “I-I already l-like some..body”

“You do?”

After a moment of hesitation, he nods. “Yeah.”
Before his father can say anymore, the doorbell rings, indicating the arrival of more guests. His father gives him another quick glance before he runs off to greet the new guests. Once he leaves, Kagami lets out a sigh, placing a hand over his pounding heart taking deep breaths to calm down.

To be frank, Kagami wasn’t exactly sure of his feelings either. He liked Aomine for sure. That was a given. The man had him weak on his knees (though he’d never show it.) Liking him was easy. Scarily easy. Easy enough that he never had the chance to question his sexuality, which admittedly, was the scary part. He couldn’t imagine what would’ve happened if they weren’t interrupted. Would he have told his father about Aomine? How would he have taken it? Would his father send him back to Japan and disown him?

Moments later he spies his father walking back towards him. Chai is beside him, accompanied by two other guests, who he guesses are the new arrivals. One of them is male, he’s about the same height as him, muscular, his body type was very similar to Aomine’s. If he had to describe him, he looked like the male counterpart of Chai. The other guest beside him was female, she was shorter out of all of them. She had wrinkles, her black hair was grayed and pulled into a tight bun. Her lips were pursed out in a scowl. ‘That must be the mom,’ he thought.

Kagami threw away his empty cup in a nearby trashcan and approached the bunch, stuffing his hands into his pocket.

“Taiga~” Chai sang lightly, and the act almost had him gagging. “I’d like you to meet my family! Don’t worry, they speak japanese.”

The shorter woman looked at him, narrowing her eyes at him and he squirmed a bit under her sharp gaze. It took her some time before she spoke. “Chiyo.”

Kagami offered a slight bow in return. “Taiga. Nice to meet you.”

The male walked forward and stuck out his hand. “Ichiro. I heard a lot about you from my sister.”

“Taiga,” he said with a nod, shaking his hand firmly. The other male gave his hand a squeeze. Hard.

“If you don't mind, I’d like to talk with you,” Ichiro says, his lips upturned in a slight smirk. “I think we can be great friends.”

His father smiled and gave him a pat on the back. “That sounds like a great idea. Go on Taiga. We’ll be opening presents and eating cake soon.”

Before he had a chance to protest, his father held Chai around the waist and led her away. Chiyo gave him a last once over and followed after them, leaving Taiga alone with the other male.

“Uh…” Kagami said, nervously glancing around, unsure of what they should talk about.

“Taiga,” Ichiro says. “Want to sit down somewhere and talk?”

Kagami gestured toward the living room couch.

“No, I mean someplace quieter. There's quite a number of females here, it's kinda hard to hear.”

“We can sit outside, if you want,” Kagami shrugged. He could use a bit of fresh air anyways.

“Fine with me. Lead the way.”
Kagami guided him toward the porch outside. Once he exited he felt lighter, like he was able to breathe. He didn't realize how restrictive the atmosphere was inside until he had left it. He had the sudden urge to just bolt, and run as fast as he could. Maybe to a nearby court.

“So Taiga, how old are you?”

“Thought you said you heard a lot about me from your sister. Shouldn't you know the answer to that?”

“It’s different hearing it from someone else. So just answer the question.”

“I’m seventeen,” Kagami says, opting out the tiny detail that he just turned seventeen today.

“Huh, you're pretty young. I'm twenty-two.”

“Cool,” he adds awkwardly.

“I heard you've been staying in Japan for a couple years now? How's that?”

“It's fine, I like it there.”

“Mmm, what do you do there?”

“I go to school like everybody else,” Kagami said.


“I’m in a club. No, I don't have a job, and what the fuck?”

“Hey that's pretty cool. What club?”

“Basketball.”

“Nice, I could tell you were a sports guy the moment I saw you,” he gave Kagami a playful punch on his arm. “You’re pretty built.”

“Thanks,” Kagami said, smiling slightly. He felt a bit more at ease knowing that one of Chai’s relatives weren’t that bad of a person. Maybe he’d be able to talk more about basketball with the guy. “How about you? Do you play any sports?”

Ichiro shrugged, leaning against the railings. “Nah, but I run and weight lift. I don’t see a point in playing sports unless you’re some prodigy.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m just saying, sports are fun if you’re fucking around in gym class, but it gets you nowhere in life. Most sports players are delusional for thinking they can get drafted into the big leagues. I’d say that’s because they have nothing else to offer. Like brains.”

Kagami turned to face him, crossing his arms over his chest, feeling like an idiot for assuming that Ichiro was capable of having a normal, polite conversation like a decent human being. His mind drifting to what Ichiro had said before -Nice, I could tell you were a sports guy the moment I saw you- Was he implying that he looked stupid?

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”
“Lemme guess,” Ichiro said, twisting his upper body look at him, a smirk on his face. “You tryna aim for the NBA?”

“And so what if I am?”

“And your grades? You at the top of your class?”

Kagami glared in response. Ok so maybe he wasn't the best academically, but he’d rather die than admit it.

“I’ll let the silence speak for itself,” Ichiro teases. “See what I mean? You don’t got anything else to offer besides some muscle.”

“You tryna say I’m dumb?”

Ichiro laughed and waved his hands. “Hey, I'm just saying. Any guy who spends the majority of their time throwing around a ball isn't exactly the brightest.”

Kagami took a deep breath, trying to compose himself. He was not going to lose his temper now. Not with a guy he barely knew, not when he promised his dad he wouldn't cause any trouble. Yet the guy in front of him was sneering so openly at him. If he didn't know any better, he’d say the guy was trying to get a rise out of him.

“You got a problem with me or something?”

In an instant, Ichiro’s face went grim. Eyes darkened and his sneer turned into a scowl. He closed the distance between the two, their noses almost touching and Kagami felt his finger jab into his chest.

“As a matter of fact, I do,” he snarls, his finger continuously jabbing into his middle. “I’ve heard a great deal of things about you from my sister and your dad. Frankly, If it were up to me, you wouldn't be around.”

What the hell? Kagami roughly brushed his hand away. “Are you threatening me?”

“Take it however you like,” he shrugged. “Point is, there's a place for guys like you and it's not here.”

“What the fuck is your problem?! You barely even know me!”

“I don't have to. You’ve already shown yourself to be a pretty simple guy. Ball is life, you don't got any brains, you’re a hothead, you think you're the shit, and you're completely ignorant.”

“You bastard!”

“Ah-ah,” Ichiro wiggled his finger in front of his face. “I’m not finished yet.”

“As if I’d stand around to hear you shit on me some more.”

“It's not talking shit if it's true, right?” He said, pursing his lips. “Anyways, you're like a ticking time bomb. Your life in Japan may be peaches and cream but it's the complete opposite here. And it's your fucking fault.”

“How the hell is that my fault?”

“Ever wondered why your dad never bothered with you all these years?”
Kagami sat on that a bit. He knew that at least part of the reason was work related and his father had mentioned to him about his depressive state after his mother had left. However, it was quite obvious that the root of the reason was because of his mother. And he hated that woman to bits for causing that tear in their family.

“My mother left and he had to do what he could to provide for us.”

Ichiro looked genuinely surprised for a moment, and then he laughed- cackled, more like. Tears brimming at the corners of his eye. “Left? So they were right. They never did tell you, did they?”

“Tell me what?!” He growled.

“The reason your mother left,” he placed air quotation marks at ‘left’, “was all your doing.”

“I-”

“Such a shame that you're out playing ball with your little friends while the folks here have to clean up after all the broken pieces you made.”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Of course you don't. I've been told you got amnesia after the accident. Dissociative amnesia or something like that?” He smiled. “A small price to pay compared to the gravity of your mistakes.”

“I-I..” Kagami stammered. What Ichiro was saying wasn't false. He remembered waking up in the hospital after the accident, unable to recall exactly what had happened before then. His father looked dead sitting beside him, staring down at his son with empty eyes. He told him not to worry about remembering the accident, that his mother wasn't coming to visit because she had packed up and left, that it wasn't his fault. After that his father had never mentioned the accident or his mother again.

“I..don't understand,” he managed to say, quietly.

“Yeah you do, you just don't wanna remember what happened. You're lucky enough your father spared you the pain and agony all these years.”

The younger male stood in silence. It wasn't true that he didn't want to know what happened. At the time, anger had clouded his curiosity, and that anger manifested into hate. He never felt the need to get closure from his mother, he didn't care enough to.

His mind was muddled with so many thoughts. What had really happened during that time?

“I need to talk to my dad,” he muttered, pushing past Ichiro to get back inside.

Ichiro says something from behind him, but Kagami ignores it. Pushing past the group of girls, conversing loudly, pointless banter that mirrored the severity of his own as he tried frantically to look for his father. In his periphery he spotted Chiyo, eyeing him warily.

He couldn't find him anywhere.

Suddenly a hand grabs his wrist and he instinctively slaps it away.

“Taiga! What in the world?!” Chai says, rubbing at her hand. “What's the matter?”

“My dad. Where is he?”
“Outside grilling food, he’ll be back soon though. Man, you look awful,” she raises an eyebrow. “Guessing the chat with my bro didn't go too well?”

“Fuck off, I’m not in the mood,” he growls.

“Oh, I know what this is about,” a scheming look replaces one of interest. “You're looking for answers.”

Ruby eyes instantly flicker toward her. “You know?”

“I told you didn't I? I know everything.”

So this was what she was always alluding to all this time? His mother? He was baffled at the fact his father apparently told Chai’s whole family of such an important event, leaving him out of it.

“Then tell me what you know. And don't play dumb with me, I’m sick to death of your games,” he seethes.

“Ask nicely, or I won't.”

“Then I'll go ask my dad,” he starts walking away when he's grabbed again.

“Alright alright!” She says. She taps on her chin thoughtfully and then sneers. “Actually, it’s better if I just show you.”

She leads him away from the main party area and down the long hallway. There's a hop in her step and Kagami knows he might end up regretting going to her for answers, but at this point he doesn't care. Answers are answers.

She stops in front of the last door and he notices that it's his father’s office. A room he never goes into for no reason in particular. As a child he was rarely home, spending the majority of his time with Tatsuya and Alex. As a result, he never bothered to go inside. He just assumed it was filled with work related items.

Chai removes a key from her pocket and unlocks the door, waving for Kagami to follow.

“Take a look.”

Kagami walks inside. Eyes moving to take in his surroundings. There's a desk littered with paperwork and folders, a computer on top of it, and a telephone. Shelves aligned the back of the wall, full of books and in the corner of the room stood an altar.

He walks over, kneeling down in front of it to get a better look.

His heart suddenly halts in his chest at the woman displayed in the photo.

Long dark hair streams down her front. A simple white dress hung loosely off her small shoulders, something he had remembered her always wearing. She's grinning widely back at him, pearly whites and forked eyebrows raised playfully. She was beautiful. As beautiful as he remembered her.

His hands go to hover above the framed photo, almost like he wanted to touch. To feel her warmth again, to feel her soothing hands caressing his hair, whispering to him about her day, about his day. All his pent up hatred seemingly dissipating at the sight of her again.

This was where she's been this whole time.
“This is my...,” he whispers.

“Your mother,” Chai finishes.

He stares a little while longer at his mother. Taking in all the features he missed. He thought he remembered her appearance. Now that she was in front of him, he realized his memory hadn't picked up all the pieces.

“How long?” He croaks out, his voice failing him.

“Are you really *that* much of an idiot?”

He looks at Chai indignantly and she's scowling at him. “She's been dead since the accident.”

“W-wait a minute,” he says, trying to process the information. He somehow feels numb. “Why didn't he tell me?”

At that very moment he hears his father’s voice, loudly from the hallway. He's laughing loudly at whoever it is he's talking to.

And suddenly he's livid.

Anger surges through him. Angry at the fact his father kept the fate of his mother away from him, angry that he never attended the funeral, angry that he was led to believe his mother was a horrible person when she was right there the whole time.

Blinded by rage he rushes out the room, hearing Chai’s muffled pleas for him to stop, and before he notices what he's done, his fist has made contact with his father’s cheek sending him flying backwards. The crowd around him screaming in surprise and fear.

“YOU FUCKER,” he bellows, voice cracking and breaking. “WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME-”

He raises his fist again when a strong hand grabs his shirt and shoves him backward, and his back and head lands painfully hard against the wall. His neck is pinned in place by an arm- Ichiro’s arm.

“Dude, what the fuck is WRONG with you?!”

Kagami ignores him and claws at his arm, then rams his side into Ichiro. The other male staggers backwards before a group of people help him catch his balance.

His father, still on the floor, rubs at his face, groaning in pain. Kagami doesn't waste another second, grabbing his shirt collar and jerking him up to meet his eyes. The redhead is seething, his breathing is labored, and his eyes blurred and hazy.

“Why didn't you tell me?!” He shouts again, shaking the man in his grip. “All this time, she!-”

“BECAUSE YOU’RE THE ONE WHO TOOK HER AWAY,” his father cries out. Tears streaming down his father’s face. He grabs Kagami’s hand and prises himself away.

Chai rushes toward his father’s side and glares at Kagami, who stood frozen in place. “I *knew* you were fucking dangerous. God damn murderer.”

*Murderer?* His focus slowly regains itself, and he notices that the guests around him are looking at him with wide eyes, terrified and huddled together.

*Who are they talking about?*
His mom, maybe?

He killed his own mom?

I wonder what happened.

Shh, don't say it too loudly. He'll probably beat you up too.

The voices of everyone around him rang too loudly, mingling into white noise, all juxtaposed together-

“N-no, I don't-,” he looks at his father pleadingly, but he refuses to look at his son in the eye. “Dad, I don't rememb-”

“Don't talk to me,” he snaps. “Get the hell out of my house.”

“Dad!” Kagami took a few steps toward him, but he's grabbed by the collar again and a sharp pain spreads in his ribs when Ichiro thrusts his elbow in his side. Kagami slumps to the floor in pain.

“Didn't you hear him?! Leave before you hurt someone else. Or I'll call the cops,” Ichiro snarls.

Left with no choice, he grits his teeth and stands up. The people around him jumps out of the way as he walks past, and he runs out the door, not looking back.

Day Eleven, Week Two

He spent the night at a nearby park. Sleepless, obviously. His mind much to preoccupied with the current circumstances, he didn't care where he slept.

‘I didn't kill her, That's impossible, It's not my fault, It was an accident, I don't remember, I don't remember...’

Kagami carried himself to his father’s house. He was met with Chai at the door instead. She screamed at his face, once again, leaving him with more unanswered questions. She threw his suitcase and wallet at him and told him to leave them alone.

He only had $50 on him. He didn't know how to get home.

Day Twenty, Week Four

He’s been wracked with nightmares so he doesn't want to sleep. A bloody scene before him in a child’s body. He hears his mother screaming his name over and over.

It's a good thing he doesn't find a place to stay, he thinks.

Day Twenty-five, Week Four

He's only got $30 left, spending it only when he feels like food is extremely necessary. He doesn't mind.
‘I deserve this.’

What he does mind, is his phone. He had shut it off days ago to conserve battery. Once it turned off he had numerous messages. All from friends, worried about him. He turns it off again.

He decides to visit a nearby court. There are players laughing and mocking one another. When they catch him staring, they invite him to join, but he decides not to.

**Day Thirty, Week Five**

He hallucinates his mother everywhere. She's muttering curses at him. "It's your fault," she says. He's not sure if the lack of nutrients is getting to him.

It's getting harder to differentiate between his nightmares and reality.

He’d rather not sleep.

**Day Forty, Week Six**

He’s strolling through mall when he spots a cell phone strap of a little black cat.

For the first time in weeks he thinks of Aomine, afraid that he's forgetting what the tanned male looks like. What he does remember is the light he emits, bright and shining like the way he is on the court.

*Too bright for me.*

It's $1. If he ever returns, he’ll give it to him.

**Day Forty-five, Week Seven**

It hurts to breathe.

‘I can't do this anymore,’ he thinks.

He's sitting on the side of the sidewalk when they approach. A group of other teens tell him there's a party downtown later that night. “A place to relax and let loose. We’ll provide everything so you don't gotta worry,” they said.

They give him the address and leave him to sort out his thoughts.

Kagami doesn't leave from that spot for the rest of the day. One hand gripping on the cell phone strap in his pocket, the other on the crumpled piece of paper.

His conscience tells him to stay rooted.

‘You're a basketball player for god sake. Don't do it.’

‘No you're not. You're trash. You've got nothing left to lose.’
Against his better judgment, he goes.

Day Forty-six, Week Seven

A headache and bouts of nausea meets him when he wakes up. He wishes he hadn't.

Day Fifty, Week Eight

It happened during the night as he was trying to find a place to stay.

A car had driven past him, making a hard turn, screeching excruciatingly loud against the pavement, shattering the metaphorical glass that encased his locked memories, everything spilling out in flashes of red. So much red. He dropped down, hands gripping tightly at the side of his head.

He remembered.

He remembers his mother telling him not to play near the road. He’s sticking his tongue out at her in response, playfully, teasing, like he always did. She continued to yell and he didn’t understand why she’s yelling so damn much. Jeez, so annoying. He remembers getting angry at her for yelling and refusing to move, arms crossed over his chest and he’s pouting. Then he hears the blare of a horn, so loud it drowns out his mother completely and he turns to look at her, eyes wide at his mother’s beautiful face twisted into that of horror before that image is quickly washed away by red.

And he’s screaming, though not aware it, he can’t hear anything besides the roar of the horn and his mother’s muffled scream. He continues to scream until his throat turns raw from the abuse of not using it for long. His mind is racing, too disjointed; unable to comprehend between what is real and what is an illusion.

Passerby’s who witness this rush over to him, shaking him, asking if he’s alright, but he shoves them aside and bolts. Running toward the street where it all happened, deluding himself into thinking his mother will still be there; standing, smiling, calling his name affectionately like she used to.

He gets there in a short amount of time to see the intersection empty. The pavement isn’t painted with blood, his mother isn’t there, the smoke that clouded the area so heavily was cleared. It was peaceful. Peaceful enough to send Kagami over the edge, because god damn it his mother had been standing right here, calling him to come back, to run into her arms like he always had.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

It's all my fault.

I should have listened.

If I had, you would still be standing here today.

It should've been me.

Mom, I miss you. Come back. I miss you so much. I need you.
He stayed there the rest of the night. Huddling himself into a ball where his mother last stood. For some reason, he couldn’t bring himself to cry.

**Day Fifty-six, Week Eight**

Kagami was tired. He walked around aimlessly, not caring where he went, dragging his suitcase everywhere he went. He had sold most of the contents for things he weren’t exactly proud of. He’d ran out a couple days ago, but he had nothing valuable left to sell. He just wanted to see his mom again. Maybe to properly apologize to her.

After walking for quite some time, he was stopped by a traffic light. A blur of various colors whirring by quickly. He seemed fixated on their movement.

*Cars. Lots of cars. Moving fast. Maybe I can-

All of a sudden he heard a familiar voice calling for him. He’d consider the owner of the voice his mother for awhile- or as close to a mother as she could be, with her habits of walking around half naked most of the time. She ran to him, arms outreached and she pulled him into a hug when she got close enough and gave a wet kiss on the side of his cheek.

“Taiga! Where have you been?! Everyone is worried sick.” Alex said, hands inspecting his face obnoxiously. He weakly swatted her away.

“Been around,” he said. The sound of his voice sounding foreign to him.

“Wait, let’s talk in my car. I parked it back there.”

Once in her car, he snuggled himself in the back seat. She buckled herself in before eyeing him in the rear view mirror.

“Taiga, you got your phone on you?”

“No,” he muttered. He’d sold it a long time ago.

She frowned. “Why not?”

“I lost it.”

“I see. Guess that’s why you haven’t been answering any calls, huh?”

He didn’t respond.

“Did you eat yet?”

“Yes,” he lied.

“Tai-”

“Sorry. I’m really tired, all I wanna do now is sleep.”

Alex looked disappointed for a short moment, almost reluctant. He knew she would have questions. Maybe she would demand him for answers later, but for now he would try and appear normal. Or as normal as he could.
“Alex, I’m fine,” he tried his best to reassure her, but it ended up sounding kind of flat.

“I don’t believe that for a second.”

“That’s your problem then,” he muttered. “I’m going to sleep.”

But he doesn’t.

**Back in Japan**

He’s pretty surprised to see Aomine there at the airport. The weight on his chest way too heavy to feel anything else. He wasn’t sure how he felt to see him. The past emotions he used to feel, unrecognizable to the person he was now. His heart didn’t flutter - it dropped. Kagami had always acknowledged Aomine’s light on the court. Even as he did the most meaningless things. He never wasted any movement. Kagami always loved that light. Warm and inviting, yet dangerous and feral if the blue-haired male needed it to be. For some reason now, the other male’s light seemed suffocating- almost like it was mocking him.

Strangely enough, he found himself next to the light for the remainder of the day. Not by his judgment of course- the other male seemed to be following him around, even squishing him against the window on the bus and it took Kagami’s whole entire being not to fall asleep on his shoulder.

Annoyingly, he couldn’t get rid of the Touou ace as he appeared once again at his apartment door later that night.

*Leave me alone.*

*I’m not good enough.*

*You don’t understand.*

He wanted to shout a number of things at him, but he couldn’t. He wondered if he deserved to be around the other male. It didn’t feel right, knowing he had been living such a relatively easy life so far. The redhead figured if he was blessed enough to enjoy Aomine’s presence during the last of his days, he might as well enjoy it.

So he didn’t protest when Aomine made him eat, didn’t swat him away when the other male carded his hands through his hair, didn’t reject him when Aomine was half asleep, mumbling at him incoherently.

"You’re a fucking angel, you know that?” the other male slurred, voice dripping with sleep.

Kagami had tucked him in, placed a hand on his forehead and leaned in close, allowing himself to indulge in the other’s warmth, not caring for the selfishness of his actions.

“Daiki,” he says softly, voice breaking. “I’m sorry.”

That night he drowns himself in pills.

But it wasn’t enough.

Chapter End Notes
Kagami's answer to Aomine's confession will be revealed in the next chapter! See you then!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Just a disclaimer, not every chapter will be filled with drama as I believe there's always a slow build to those type of events. This chapter being one- It's purpose is to just move the story along. I think if I did constant drama, the fic would go way too fast. That being said, enjoy the chapter!

Aomine’s heart dropped upon seeing the other male’s expression. Was he disgusted? Concerned? He looked worried- almost terrified. It was a face he's never seen him make before. Kagami always had an aura of confidence and assertiveness, never backing down from a challenge, always pushing forward despite the consequences- The idiot had played with an injured leg when they met for god sake. Yes, that might’ve been Aomine’s fault, rest assured he surely did regret portraying himself as such an asshole as a first impression. Had he known Kagami would be the same guy he had come to care so deeply about, he would've chosen a different approach. Maybe.

He swallowed dryly. Reciprocation wasn't what he was seeking- at least that's what he thought before he had suddenly confessed- so long as Kagami knew he had at least somebody who valued him.

Yet as seconds rolled by that felt like hours upon hours, he realized that he, in fact, did want an answer to his feelings.

And he felt like such an asshole.

Was he being selfish for thinking about his own emotions over Kagami’s current dilemma?

“I….don't know what to say,” Kagami says finally.

“You don't have to say anything,” he mutters, the slight pang of rejection filling his chest.

It's a good sign that the other male didn't seem repulsed and push him away. Though, he wasn't sure an apprehensive response was a good sign either.

So he decided he would move past it. Now wasn't the time to deal with emotions like this. After all, he would much rather keep their friendship than lose it over a confession that wasn't even necessary in the first place.

“Aomine, I-” He stammers, opening and closing his mouth like a gaping fish.

“Kagami, it’s fine. You don't have to say anything.”

“But-”

“That's not important right now. What's important is how you’re feeling,” he says.

Kagami averts his eyes downward, mumbling something he couldn't quite catch. But he's watching their hands, Aomine still tracing lines in them.
“I...can't,” Kagami says, slowly.

“Huh?”

“Aomine, I don't think I can do this.”


“No, not that. I-” He stops himself and chews on his lip nervously, contemplating whether or not he wants to continue.

Aomine waits, his patience slowly thinning as the other male continues to stall, his eyes looking everywhere but him. “You what?”

“I think you're wasting your time,” He says, slowly.

“What?”

“You heard me.”

This time, Kagami looks up at him. Dull eyes make an attempt to intimidate, but it's futile, there's no heat behind them.

“Kagami, I told you to just ignore the confessi-”

“I'm not talking about the confession.”

“Then what are you talking about?” Aomine growls impatiently. “Basketball? Our one on ones? Being rivals?”

Kagami nods.

“So what- you saying you don't wanna hang out anymore?”

Kagami nods again, wordlessly.

Aomine is rendered speechless, letting it sink in. He didn't understand what had led up to this decision, what was going through the redhead’s mind. Kagami had let him sit close to him, touch him, cook for him, be with him. Why was he suddenly pushing him away?

“W-wait. Kagami, if this is because I asked abo-”

“It's not,” he interjects.

“Then why? What the fuck did I do wrong?”

“You didn't do anything wrong.”

There’s no way that’s true. It was odd. Odd to Aomine that every action, every move the other male made indicated that he was avoiding something. Aomine may not be the best at reading other people’s inner thoughts the way Tetsu could, but he could tell- tell that Kagami was trying to run away. He's never known Kagami Taiga to run away from anything.

“Why?” he says, now pissed more than anything. “What the hell happened to you?”

“Nothing happened to me.”
“That's a load of bullshit and you know it,” he snarls.

“Aomine, just drop it okay? It wasn't any of your business before and it's definitely not any of your business now.”

Aomine huffed. “Listen here you bastard,” he says. “It makes no sense for you to tell me you don't wanna hang out anymore for no fucking reason. If you're cutting it off, then you better have the balls to tell me why.”

“I can't tell you why,” Kagami mutters.

“Are you tired of me? Are you bored with our games? Is it because I keep prying? Or because you didn't like it when I touched yo-”

“No, Aomine, I already sa-”

“Is it because I can't cook well enough? Is it because I said I liked you-”

“No! Aomine, calm down and shut up for a-”

“Do you hate me?”

Kagami tenses up at the question.

“I….don’t.”

“Well then I'm not leaving,” Aomine harrumphs, crossing his arms over his chest. “And you sure as hell can't make me.”

“Aomine, what the fuck.”

“If you don't wanna tell me what happened in America, then I get it.” Aomine says, voice low. He squeezes the other’s cool hand, still in his own. “But don't push me away, that's not fair.”

Kagami sighs exasperatedly, running his free hand through his hair. “God, you're such a pain in the ass.”

“S’your fault for trying to get rid of me.”

“I’m talking about in general.”

Aomine lets a coy smile spread, before ruffling Kagami’s hair messily, earning a disgruntled growl from the other. “Now after that whole fiasco, you owe me.”

“Huh?” Kagami stared at him slack-jawed. “Owe you for what?”

“For emotional damage.”

“Puh-lease, you’re being a big baby.” He made a show of rolling his eyes. “You started it. If anything, you owe me.”

Aomine hums in thought. He’s already done more than his bare minimum, bringing him Maji, fixing his T.V, even resorted to cooking for the other male. He really couldn't resist Kagami’s requests- well, most of them. But Aomine being Aomine, refused to back down. “Fine, let’s make it fair. We’ll owe each other.”
“Idiot, it doesn’t work that way.”

“Okay, I may have started it but you and your dramatic ass said you didn’t want me around anymore.”

“And you were the one that decided to stay against my will.”

“Seriously?! You were holding my hand the entire time!”

“You grabbed it!”

“You could’ve pulled away!”

Kagami groaned in defeat. “Okay, okay. *Fine*, we’ll owe each other. Happy?”

“Very,” Aomine said, smiling triumphantly. “So what do you want?”

“Hmmm,” Kagami ponders a bit. His eyes inspecting his room, most notably, at the mess scattered around his floor. “Well you can start by cleaning up the porridge you made me spill and the rest of my room. If you made a mess in the kitchen then clean that up too.”

“Fair enough,” He shrugs. “I’ll do that right now.”

Standing up, he quickly runs to the kitchen to grab some towels and runs back. He wipes up the spilled porridge and dries the floor quickly, then grabbing the plate to wash in the sink. There isn’t much to clean in the kitchen since he didn’t use many ingredients. So he stores the leftover porridge in the fridge, then clears the rest of the kitchen utensils.

He returns to Kagami’s room afterwards, starting on clearing the floor. The redhead’s suitcase was sprawled open in the corner with clothes littered around it. Aomine gets to work picking them up. Luckily there weren't many clothes to work with, which was strange in some ways; The boy was in America for two months and he seemed to have only brought with him a few outfits. Although it didn't quite add up, he decided not to bring it up again.

While rummaging through the other items across the floor he came across an almost empty pill bottle. He held them up for the redhead to see.

“What's this? You some type of drug addict?”

Kagami eyed them for a while before clarifying. “Those are sleeping pills.”

“You can't sleep at night?”

The redhead shrugged and held out his hand, gesturing for Aomine to hand them over.

“I can't sleep on game days. So I take them,” he replies plainly, turning the bottle around in his hand.

“Hmm,” He hums thoughtfully. “And they work?”

“Apparently not,” Aomine hears him mutter quietly to himself.

“Huh?”

“It's nothing.”
“So anyways...What do you want?” Kagami asks. “And be reasonable,” he adds, noticing the mischievous expression forming on the tanned male’s face.

“Damn it,” he mutters, dejectedly. “I wanted a kiss...”

“What?”

“I said I needed to piss.”

“That’s not what you said.”

“Then why’d you ask?”

Kagami sighs again. “Aomine, you know I can’t.”

“I know, I know,” he says, pouting, resuming his cleaning.

“So...?” Kagami urges. “Choose something else.”

“Basketball?”

“I can’t do that either,” Kagami says, not really surprising Aomine with his answer. With the way the other male looked, he knew he hadn’t kept up with the sport during his time in America. He’d be lying if he said he weren’t disappointed, but he knew their relationship should be more than basketball. This would be the perfect time to expand from that.

“Then...” Aomine mumbled, finger tapping his chin in thought. “A birthday gift?”

“When’s your birthday?”

“A few days ago.”

Kagami’s eyes widened a bit, then counted backwards on his fingers. “So the 31st?”

“Yeah.”

“Ahh,” he breathed in understanding. “Happy birthday.”

“Thanks.”

“Hey, wait a second,” Kagami said, his eyebrows furrowing. “I got you that cell phone strap.”

“You said it was a souvenir not a birthday gift, cheap bastard.”

The redhead groaned, snuggling underneath the covers. “I don’t know what to buy you then. I don’t have much money on me.”

“You don’t have to buy me anything,” Aomine shrugged.

“But you said you wanted a birthday gift.”

Aomine rolled his eyes. “I know you idiot, but gifts don’t always have to be something tangible.”

“Okay, why don’t you just tell me what you want?”

“Your time.”
“My...time.” Kagami repeats, slowly.

“Yeah.”

“Meaning?”

“Means I want you to celebrate with me.”

Kagami quiets a bit, his eyes peeking through the covers, staring at him- maybe contemplating. Aomine thinks it’s cute.

“That’s it?”

“Uh huh.”

“Okay then. What am I supposed to do? Bake you a cake?”

“No, you don’t have to do anything. Just spend the day with me.”

“Whoa...” Kagami mumbles.

“Hah?”

“Sorry, that’s such a simple request coming from a person like you, I wasn’t expecting it.”

“What’d you say?!?”

“Well, you’re usually so demanding,” the other male explains. “This is a different side of you. Kinda creepy.”

“You wanna fight?”

“I’m kidding,” Kagami says, a slight grin on his face. Though, it looked off, the slight gesture almost makes Aomine go into cardiac arrest, a sense of pride flooding through him because he was the one to crack that smile. Yeah, it wasn’t much, but it was a start.

Smile more, he thinks.

“Aomine, stop that.”

“Huh?”

“Staring at me like that,” he said, squirming in his covers. “I asked you a question.”

“Ah, my bad. What was your question?”

“I asked you when you wanted to hang out?”

“Oh, uh..” Aomine said, leaning on his hands and staring at the ceiling. It was a Sunday. Meaning he would be in school the following day, not to mention he had to give the redhead time to recuperate before dragging him out for a whole day. “How about this weekend? Saturday?”

“Sounds good.”

“Alright then,” he says, standing up. “We’ll meet at the usual place, at the usual time.”

Kagami nods, sitting up from his bed. “You leavin’?”
“Well I already finished my side of the deal and you seem to be feeling better, so I guess I’ll let you rest.”

“Alright then.”

“Make sure you lock the door when I leave. There’s leftover porridge in the fridge so eat that. If you need me before Saturday, tell Tetsu. I’ll come right away.”

“Got it, got it,” Kagami says, waving him off. “I’ll be fine. I live alone, remember? I know how to take care of myself.”

Aomine eyed him warily, looking at him from top to bottom. “Whatever you say.”

He took one last look around Kagami’s kitchen and living area before leaving. As he walked out of his apartment complex, he still couldn’t shake the uneasiness away. Their conversation may have shifted to a lighter note by the end, but he was still left feeling empty. The redhead had rejected him, rejected his feelings, and rejected his inquiries. The tanned male had left feeling even farther away from Kagami. Almost like Kagami had placed a lock between the two, not allowing him to trespass.

Nothing was adding up. One moment Kagami was calm and sweet. Permitting him to get close, then he’d switch just as quickly, fighting and pushing him away. Kagami was definitely more unpredictable, which left Aomine feeling on edge. He was able to say whatever was on his mind before, yet now he had to be careful. He couldn’t afford to screw it up.

Kagami had saved him once. Now it was Aomine’s turn to return the favor.

The following days passed by slowly. Luckily, Satsuki hadn’t asked him much about Kagami, though oddly enough she seemed like she was tip-toeing around him. Almost like she was being secretive. She was constantly on her phone, whispering to someone, or texting. Whenever he attempted to get close, she would quickly pocket it and slap him. ‘Don’t sneak up on me like that!’ she’d yelp, quickly changing the subject before he got a chance to ask.

It was a couple days before Aomine’s day with Kagami. He was relaxing on the roof when he heard the pitter-patter of light footsteps skipping behind him. He looked up right on time to see Satsuki and her strawberry-printed panties.

“Dai-chan! Stop skipping practice!”

Aomine clicked his tongue, sticking his pinky finger in his ear and turning away. “No point,” he mumbled. He knew Kagami wouldn’t be playing anytime soon anyway.

“Don’t look so down!” she chirped, seemingly knowing what was on his mind. “Kagamin will play soon. Have some faith.”

“What’s gotten you in such a good mood?”

“Oh, nothing,” she sings. “We can talk about that later.”

“You’ve been giggling to yourself like some creep.”
She gives him a hard slap on the arm. “Keep up that attitude and I won’t tell you!”

“What’s it about anyway?”

“Tetsu-kun wants to meet up at Maji Burger later.”

“What for?”

“I said we’ll discuss it later!”

Aomine scowled at her, hoping to god that the topic of discussion didn’t have anything to do with his feelings for the other male.

“Will Kagami be there?”

“No, he won’t. Stop asking so many questions,” Satsuki pouted, her arms on her hips in a sassy pose.

“Fine, but if I don’t like where the conversation is headed I’m leaving.”

“Dai-chan, don’t be a baby.”

“Why does everyone keep calling me that?” he grumbled.

“There, there,” Satsuki pats him on the shoulder, almost pitifully and he shrugs her off.

A few hours later, they both are walking side by side to Maji. Once they enter the place, they look around for Tetsu when suddenly a high voice calls out.

“Aominecchi! Momocchi!”

“Ah, Ki-chan!” Satsuki says, waving toward him. The blond male quickly jogs up to them both.

“Oi, what the hell Satsuki? You didn’t tell me he’d be here.”

“How rude! That’s how you greet me?!” he pouts.

“Good evening, Aomine-kun, Momoi-san, Kise-kun” someone says from behind them.

Satsuki instantly snaps her head to look behind her, squealing loudly at the sight of Tetsu, capturing him in her arms. “Tetsu-kun!”

“Yo, Tetsu,” Aomine greets.

“Kurokocchi!”

“Thank you all for meeting me,” he says, smiling. “Shall we find a table?”

“Already saved us one!” Kise says, waving for them to follow. They arrange themselves around the booth, Tetsu and Kise sitting across.

“So what’s this about? Make it quick,” he says impatiently.

“What are you in a rush for?” Kise asks.

Kuroko gave a slight smile. “Well, to put it simply we-”
“We’re planning a party!” Satsuki finishes, excitedly.

“Huh?”

“You see, Kagamicchi just got back so I thought it’d be a great idea to have a surprise welcome back and belated birthday party combined!” Kise says, resting his chin on his hands. “Kurokocchi told me he wasn’t in high spirits. I think this’ll be a good way to cheer him up!”

Satsuki smiled and looked at Aomine. “We’ve been planning it for the past few days.”

Aomine looked at Tetsu, an eyebrow raised in question. “You helped plan this?”

He nodded. “I wasn’t too fond of the idea in the beginning, but Kagami-kun really hasn’t been well these past few days. I think this will help get his mind off things, at least for a little bit.”

“We already sent out the invitations!” Kise says. “We’ll be hosting the party at my house. So Kagamicchi won’t suspect a thing!”

“Ah, don’t worry Dai-chan, you’ll be getting cake too. Don’t think we forgot about your birthday,” Satsuki smiles at him. “It’ll be a joint birthday party between the two of you. Isn’t that cute?”

“Don’t need it,” Aomine says. “Just worry about him.”

“Ahh~ How kind of you Dai-chan. You really do love Kagamin a lot huh?”

Aomine’s eyes suddenly go wide, whipping his head in Satsuki’s direction he tries to fight off the reddening warmth of his cheeks. “W-w-what?! Who the fuck told you?!”

“You did, just now,” she said, smiling cheekily at him.

“Shut the hell up!” Aomine growls. “And why’re you not surprised?!”

“Aomine-kun, you’re the only other person besides the rest of us to spend the most time with Kagami-kun. Also, I told them about the other day,” he says, all too nonchalant.

“Tetsu, you little shi-”

“Dai-chan, it was already so obvious,” Satsuki says, rolling her eyes. “I wouldn’t be surprised if Kagamin already knew himself.”

Aomine pursed his lips. They look at him expectantly, awaiting a sharp remark, but he doesn’t say anything. He knows they’ll eventually catch on.

“Don’t tell me,” she says. “Kagamin already knows?”

Aomine refused to answer, looking down to avoid their stares.

“So he does know!” Kise exclaims. “Wow, to think you’d be such a go-getter.”

“Shut the hell up!” Aomine barks. “It just slipped out, okay?!”

From across the table, Tetsu continues to stare. “I didn’t think you’d be so quick to confess. Did Kagami-kun’s disappearance scare you that much?”
“No,” Aomine sighs. “Look, we were arguing and it just happened to come out. That’s that. Let’s not talk about this anymore.”

“Oh man,” Kise murmurs. “Kagamicchi rejected you?”

“I said we’re not talking about this anymore.”

Kise turns to Tetsu instead. “He got rejected, didn’t he?” Tetsu gives a nod in response.

Aomine slides deeper in his seat, grumbling.

“Ahh, let’s just leave it,” Satsuki says, rubbing at his arm gingerly. “He must still be hurting.”

“Am not!” Aomine says. “I’ll have you know, Kagami and I are going out this Saturday.”

Satsuki frowns, and he notices Kise and Tetsu have their brows knitted together as well.

“Saturday you said?” Tetsu asks.

“Yeah.”

“Dai-chan, move the date,” Satsuki says.

“Hell no. Why should I?”

“The party is on Saturday!” she exclaims, arms flailing.

“That’s not my problem, just move it to Sunday or something.”

“Aominecchi, we already sent out the invitations. It’s too late to change the date.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Aomine-kun, Himuro-san and Murasakibara-kun will be coming as well. Please think of them before asking for something so selfishly. You can just spend the day with Kagami-kun on Sunday.”

“Tch.” He already knew what the outcome would be, so he decided it was pointless to continue arguing. “Fine.”

“Great! Dai-chan, what time were you planning on meeting him on Saturday?”

“Around noon. The usual time.”

“That’s perfect! Do us a favor and bring him to Ki-chan’s house!”

“Hah?”

“We were going to ask you anyways, Aominecchi. The plan was for you to pick him up and take him to the party without letting him know so we can surprise him!” Kise says. “It’s even better that he thinks he’s only spending the day with you!”

“Then how am I supposed to ask him to spend time with me on Sunday?” He mumbled, not willing to talk about the deal he and Kagami made. Would that mean the redhead would be opposed to spending an extra day with him?

“Don’t worry, Aomine-kun. I’m sure Kagami-kun wouldn’t mind spending some more time with you.”
“I don’t know about that,” Aomine muttered. Kagami had tried to get rid of him once so far. He's willing to bet the other male wouldn't have a problem doing it again if it came down to it.

*Whatever, I'll just spend as much time with him as I can on Saturday,* he thinks.

“So is it all settled then?” Satsuki asks. “You'll bring Kagami to us on Saturday?”

“Do I have a choice,” he grumbles, a statement rather than a question.

“Lighten up Aominecchi! The party will be amazing!” Kise says, a wide grin on his face. “And who knows? Maybe that’ll be the night Kagamicchi returns your feelings.”

“Shut up Kise,” he snarls, slumping further down in his seat, his friends around him giving him almost a sad smile.

“Well I guess since everything’s settled, it’s time for me to take my leave,” Kise says, grabbing his bag and standing up. “I’ll see you all at the party?”

“Alright, Kise-kun. See you then.”

“Bye, Ki-chan!”

“Momocchi, make sure Aominecchi dresses nicely for the party!”

Aomine clicks his tongue in annoyance and Satsuki laughs. “Don’t worry about that, I’ll pick his outfit for the occasion!”

Kise laughs and waves goodbye, finally departing.

“Well, I think Dai-chan and I should be leaving too,” Satsuki says getting up. “I need to use the ladies room first though. Don’t leave without me!”

Aomine waves at her dismissively as she leaves, then turns back to face Tetsu.

“So,” Aomine begins. “How is he these past few days?”

Tetsu sighed loudly, a look of distress written on his features. “He got into a fight with coach on his first day back. It was understandable, everyone was shocked at his sudden change in appearance- coach especially.”

“She asked him what happened I’m guessing?” Aomine says, and Tetsu nodded.

“Coach can be a little overbearing at times. Kagami-kun just ended up storming off in the end. It’s gotten exceptionally harder to speak with him. Sometimes he’s silent and other times he’ll get angry.’” Tetsu continued. “I assume that’s what led to your argument?”

“Yeah.”

“Even though I asked you not to say anything?” Tetsu says, disappointedly. “That could’ve been the reason why he rejected you.”

“Because I care?”

“No, because knowing you, you probably flared up in the heat of the moment and Kagami-kun felt pressured.”
“Tetsu, look. I wasn’t expecting him to return my feelings anyways,” Aomine grumbled. “He’s way too good for me.”

Tetsu looked astounded for a moment. “That’s unexpected coming from you, Aomine-kun.”

“Hah? Why?”

“Because Kagami-kun is possibly at his worst and you still think he’s too good for you,” Tetsu says, a sad smile on his face.

“It’s true,” he mumbled. “That guy is a lot tougher than I am. I’ll have to give him credit for that.”

“I had no idea Aomine-kun could think so highly of someone,” Tetsu says. “I’m sure Kagami-kun will give into your charms eventually.”

“Idiot. That’s the very least of my worries. As long as I can still be around him, I’ll be fine,” Aomine mentally cringed at his words. God, he was so embarrassing. “Damn, I sound like such a sap.”

“Not at all,” Tetsu says. “Aomine-kun has always been kind.”

“At least somebody noticed.”

Just then, Satsuki returned from the bathroom, looking between him and Tetsu. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” he says, straightening up. “I’ll see you later Tetsu.”

The smaller male smiles at him and nods, holding out his closed fist. “Thanks for agreeing to meet with us.”

Aomine smirks and lightly bumps his fist. “Sure thing.”

Moments later, he’s walking back home with Satsuki, enjoying the coolness of the late summer breeze. His eyes fixated on the stars scattered across the clear sky. They’re twinkling brightly- the scene before him causing him to feel wistful, he couldn’t help but reminisce about the redhead.

*That star is his smile.*

*That star over there is his laugh.*

*And that one is his eyes.*

Bright- insanely bright. But the Kagami now has dimmed way too much, and Aomine knew more than anyone that a light doesn’t shine so brightly forever.

“I’ll save him,” Aomine blurs out, unaware that he’s spoken out loud. His words suddenly jolting him out of his stupor and he quickly looks at Satsuki hoping she didn’t hear anything, but the smile on her face indicates that she did.

“I know you will, Dai-chan,” she says. “If anyone can do it, it’s you.”

Chapter End Notes
Hope you all enjoyed Aomine being pure and fluffy and so in love. He really does care for Kagami a lot! Savor it because he won't be like that for long! I'm rooting for him!

I'll be writing Tetsu as Kuroko starting next chapter (I kept writing Kuroko and then I had to go back and change it orz) This way, I can make it a bit easier for me while I'm writing. Drama will most likely start up again next chapter so look forward to that as well as Kagami's party :oD

Also, updates will most likely be slower. April/May is hell for me because of all the projects, essays, and exams. Please understand. I'll still try my best to post weekly but don't expect too much!

And a HUGGEE thank you to all the kind comments/kudos you guys leave me. It brings me a lot of joy to know you're enjoying the story. They keep me motivated!
The routinely knock on his door is what wakes him up Saturday morning, though the soft trickle of rain thumping against the exterior of his window draws him in toward sleep again- to jump into the dreams he’s most familiar with before Kagami’s departure to America. The screech of sneakers against the court, the quick flashes of red in his periphery, laughter and taunts that ring heartily in his ears.

The morning rain adds a sudden depth to his feelings, the weight of Kagami’s rejection starting to weigh heavily on him, despite his efforts to remind himself not to allow his own selfishness to cloud Kagami’s own feelings. He had promised himself that he would save Kagami. Yet for some reason that promise felt strangely emptier within the past few days. Doubt would snake into the corners of his mind, wondering if he really was capable of saving anyone when he couldn’t save himself those years ago. After all, those who are unfit to save find themselves drowning instead.

A few knocks on his door echoes through his room again before he hears it slowly creak open- he tenses up, expecting Satsuki to come nag him into waking up, but a warm voice calls out in its place.

“Daiki, dear,” she says. “I’m making breakfast, would you like to help?”

Aomine rolls over to see his mother standing timidly at the door. Medium length navy-blue hair framing the sides of her small face, tied messily in a half ponytail. She’s smiling slightly at him. His mother had always had a welcoming presence to her, light and elegant, an aura that had the power to relax even the most wild of persons- the total opposite of him and his father, someone he definitely inherited his height, attitude, and tan skin from. He had never told them about the depression he had suffered from before, mainly because he was afraid, ashamed, and he didn’t want to worry them. His mother especially- she always had the tendency to overreact, a trait he didn’t like dealing with. But if there was someone he truly adored-it was definitely his mother, disguised by his aloof disposition.

It was rare to see her greet him so early in the morning. It wasn’t like she was never home. She just always had early morning shifts at the hospital. Any conversations they had were around the dinner table (they always had dinner late), so seeing her so early in the morning was always refreshing.

“Mom, you’re not working today?” he asked, his voice hoarse.

She shakes her head in response and walks over, sitting herself next to him. She traces her fingers delicately in his hair- something she’s always done for him since he was a child. “I took the day off. I wanted to surprise you.”
“Surprise me?”

“Yes, I thought we could spend the day together. I felt bad for missing your birthday so I asked for the day off,” she says, grinning. “But I have to work double shifts tomorrow.”

Aomine blinked in surprise and sat up, feeling the sudden punch of extreme guilt because he hadn’t told her about the party. He didn’t think he had to since his mother had always been working on weekends. He loved his mom- he really, really did. But he had promised to take Kagami to the party today, even promised to spend the day with him. At the same time, he also knew his mother had always worked hard, she never took a day off unless someone (or herself) was seriously ill. He was astonished that she had thought he was means enough to take the day off for.

He was seriously torn.

“I thought it would be fun if we could bake your cake together?” She continues. “We haven’t done that since you were itty-bitty. Of course, your father is still at work but he’ll be celebrating with us when he comes home. I also planned for us t-”

“Ah, wait mom,” Aomine interjects. “I’m going to another party today.”

His mother’s face instantly dropped, his heart sinking at the exact same moment. “You are?”

“Y-yeah, it’s for one of my other friends... And I guess for me too-but mostly for him,” He stammers, rambling on in an attempt to ease his mother’s disappointed expression- he hated it when she gave him that look, it always sent a wave of panic through him. “He just got back from America and he looks like shit so we’re trying to cheer him up, but it wasn’t my idea, I was going to take him out today but Kise fucked up my plans- And well...sorry.”

His mother laughed lightly. “First of all Daiki, don’t curse. And second, it’s alright. I should’ve asked you before making plans out of the blue like that,” she says, carding through his hair again. “I forget you’re older now, you probably have lots of friends to play with.”

Aomine scowled. “I don’t play with friends, mom. I hang out with them.”

She chuckles. “They both mean the same thing.”

“I’d like to meet your friend, must be a tough boy if he can deal with you.”

“Mom.”

His mother stands up and walks toward the door. “Well, you can still help me make breakfast if you’d like. I’ll be making celebratory banana pancakes.”

Aomine lets out a sigh, partly relieved that his mother wasn’t too upset with him but still panged with guilt for rejecting her offer. He hoped that maybe the party would end early, so that it would allow him to spend some time with her- or maybe he could introduce Kagami to her like she had suggested, and they both would have delicious cake together.

For now though, he’ll settle for some banana pancakes.

It’s nearly the afternoon when his phone rings with a text from Satsuki. A short message that
She bought these just for the occasion?

Aomine roughly pulled off the tags and stickers and put on the whole ensemble, looking at himself in the mirror. He turned around in different angles, inspecting himself- He had to admit he looked pretty good. Satsuki always had an eye for fashion and these were times where she really did him a solid- though, he wasn’t so sure if it was worth all the money since he knew Kagami probably wouldn’t care so much for high fashion anyways.

“Like what you see?” a voice calls out from behind, and he feels himself jump up at least two feet in the air, before whipping around in surprise to see his mother giving him a knowing look at his doorway.

“Mom! What the fuck?!” Aomine cried, shutting the door in her face. He hears the sound of his mom’s muffled laughter from the other side, but it receded just as quickly when she became aware.

“Daiki! Don’t curse at your mother!”

A few moments later, he’s at the door, preparing to leave, texting Satsuki that he was on his way to pick Kagami up. His mother walks over to him, most likely to see him off.

“Have fun Daiki, don’t get into any trouble,” she warns playfully, but he can tell she’s trying to mask her disappointment.

He grunts in response and waves goodbye. “I don’t know when I’ll be back so don’t wait around for me for dinner.”

His mother nods in understanding. “Alright, be safe!”

Aomine heads toward the usual place- the court where he and Kagami first met. The sky is dark and gloomy, clouds swirl angrily in preparation for the downpour they’re expecting later tonight. He doesn’t bother to bring an umbrella just because carrying it around is such a pain, so he opts for wearing a black Cavaliers snapback instead.

Once he spots the chained fence, he picks up his pace, spying a dot of red already there and waiting. He was hoping deep down he would be greeted by the sound of a basketball echoing through the court, but he’s greeted only by an eerie silence. Almost like Kagami wasn’t there, wasn’t real--Like he would disappear if so much a squeak were to resound through the silence.

Kagami is standing on the edge of the court, his back facing Aomine. It’s somewhat spine-chilling because it seems like he’s staring at nothing- The only thing in front of him was a concrete wall. The male’s body is still, like he’s at peace, but disturbingly so. Aomine notes quickly that the other male seems grayer, like a different shade of the sky. If his hair were any darker, he definitely would’ve been the storm itself.

“Yo,” Aomine calls out, his voice piercing through the quietness. The redhead turns around, hauntingly slow. But once he catches sight of Aomine standing there, his face brightens a bit- or at least that’s what Aomine thinks.

“M’bad,” he decided it was best not to tell Kagami that he had spent the majority of his morning mixing pancake batter with his mom.

Kagami jogged up toward Aomine, stopping a few feet in front of him. He cocked his head to the side with an eyebrow raised. “First time you’ve ever apologized for being late. You feelin’ okay?”

“Shut up,” he muttered, scratching the back of his head nervously. “Ready to go?”

The redhead nodded in answer, following Aomine closely as he started to trot off. His hands stuffed in his pocket, feeling the charm on his cell phone he had gotten around to putting on. Silence enveloping the atmosphere once again. They walk for a couple more blocks before Kagami speaks.

“What’ve you got planned for today?” Kagami asks, his gaze on the gray clouds above him. “I hope you don’t have anything outdoorsy planned.”

“I don’t,” Aomine says, bluntly.

“Oh.”

Silence befalls them again. Aomine isn’t particularly nervous, no not at all. If he were being honest, he felt a little vexed knowing that Kagami was acting like everything was normal and he wondered if Kagami had felt anything regarding the confession he’s made a week prior. Once again, the feeling of selfishness creeps in on him. He steals a side-eye glance at Kagami, who’s walking with his head downcast, staring at his own feet (or Aomine’s) following silently. He takes a few shaky breaths, reminding himself that it wasn’t about his stupid emotions—it was about Kagami’s.

“You didn’t bring an umbrella with you?” Aomine asks and Kagami perks up slightly.

“You don’t have an umbrella either,” the other male mumbles.

“Yeah but I have a hat.”

Kagami just simply shrugs in reply.

“Well, we won’t be spending much time outdoors anyways,” Aomine says, slowing his pace to match Kagami’s.

They continue to walk shoulder to shoulder, bumping against each other occasionally, until they arrive at the train station. Kagami looks at him questionably.

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere,” Aomine snorts.

“That doesn’t sound suspicious at all.”

“Don’t ask too many questions,” Aomine says. “Let’s go.”

He leads Kagami on the train, it’s relatively empty despite being a weekend, so they easily snag a seat. Unlike the bus ride from the airport, Aomine notices the distance between the two, the gap almost the size of another person and he wonders if he smells too much like pancakes—but if that were the case, wouldn’t Kagami be all over him?

Trying not to dwell too much on it, he occupies himself by looking outside at the passing scenery,
something's he's quite familiar with, yet he knows if feels different with Kagami there with him.

He soon feels eyes boring into his skull, like someone is full on staring at him- not even attempting to be discreet, and he turns to find Kagami’s gaze on him. It was similar to the way Kuroko had looked at others. Blank but purposeful.

“What?” He asked.

“Are you pissed at me or something?” Kagami asks, frowning slightly.

“Hah? Why would I be?”


Aomine gives him a weird look, then turns his gaze back on the landscapes outside. But out of the corner of his eye, he sees red scooting closer toward him until the gap between them was just a few inches apart, and Aomine can feel the warmth radiating off of the other male. So Aomine does what he's done before and closes the distance between them, averting his gaze from outside to inside, positioning himself so that his arm and shoulder aligns with his.

It was different from the moment on the bus. Kagami has the freedom to move away this time- but he doesn't.


“Huh? What are you talking about?” Kagami asks. “You sang happy birthday for me, remember?”

“You actually counted that?”

“Well I said I would,” He says.

“Mmm,” Aomine hums thoughtfully, trying to remember that exact moment. “I don't think that counts.”

Kagami nudged him slightly. “Ahomine, you were the one that said gifts didn't have to be something tangible.”

“Anyone can sing you happy birthday Bakagami, it's nothing special,” he says, nudging him back. “It's easier if you just tell me what you want.”

“If I can get the Aomine Daiki to sing me a song, I think that's pretty damn special,” Kagami scoffs. “And besides, you can't give me the things I want anyways.”

That statement hit him pretty hard in the chest. You can't make me happy- is how he takes it. He's sure that the redhead probably meant it in a different way. Kagami was always like that, saying things how it is, no underlying meaning in any way. Maybe the pain of rejection made him interpret things in a different light.

Kagami seemed to sense his thought process, so he tries to clarify. “Ah wait- that's not what I meant, Aomine.”

Aomine shrugs it off. “Nah, I know what you meant.”

“I meant to say, that- uh..you've given me enough already,” Kagami says. “And besides, it's your birthday. Don't worry about me, I’m fine.”
Aomine gives him the shifty eyes before nodding. “Mmk,” he says.

He doesn't feel like picking a fight with the other male and he definitely didn't have the intention of making the rest of the ride awkward. So he did his best to push his bitter feelings out of the way.

The rest of the train ride is spent in silence- luckily, it was comfortable silence and the ride was pretty short in general anyways. Their sides still pressed together until the train halts and they exit the train.

“What are we doing here?” Kagami asks, looking around. He knew the other male might’ve been familiar with the area. So he doesn't waste any time on chatter, leading the redhead again and texting Satsuki quickly telling her that they would be arriving soon.

They arrive shortly, crossing the busy street, then stopping in front of a massive house, decorated with pillars that held up the roof elegantly within an enclosed gate (rich bastard), the gate readily open to invite guests inside. It was a grand house, not as grand as Akashi’s but grand nonetheless.

He sees Kagami eyeing the nameplate on the front of the house.

“Kise's house? What're we doing here?”

“Just shut up and let's go,” Aomine mutters, not looking forward to the massive headache he just knows he's going to get once he enters.

“Pushy,” Kagami grumbles, following him.

They walk up the path and stop in front of the entrance, and Aomine motions for Kagami to go in first. The redhead eyes him warily but complies. The tanned male following right at his heels. Kagami creaks the door open and-

“SURPRISE! WELCOME HOME AND HAPPY BIRTHDAY KAGAMI- and Aomine,” they all cheer, releasing an array of different shades of red balloons and letting the party poppers go crazy.

I was an afterthought, Aomine thinks bitterly. He turns to look at Kagami whose eyes had widened in shock and he seems utterly surprised, frozen like a deer in headlights.

“W-whoa,” Kagami finally says and he smiles slightly. Almost like an uncomfortable smile, but Aomine knows he's happy by the slight flush of his now pink cheeks. He turns to Aomine, eyes twinkling a little more than before. “Did you-?”

“Wasn't my idea,” Aomine says.

Everyone is there. Seirin, Kaijo, Rakuzan, Yosen, Touou, and Shutoku. Even the third years who had since graduated. Aomine can tell most of them seem a bit shocked at Kagami’s appearance but they try to hide it behind wide grins. Each taking turns to greet the redhead, congratulate him and welcome him back warmly.

“Kagamin! We’ve missed you so much!”
“Kagamicchi! Don't scare us like that!”
“Kagami-kun, happy birthday and welcome home.”
“Welcome back, Kagami.”
“Shin-chan! Look more excited! Welcome back! Man, you sure had Shin-chan worried. You shoulda seen him!”
“Ahh~ Kaga-chin, happy birthday.”
“Taiga, it's such a relief to see you home safe. Welcome back.”
They all surround Kagami, leaving Aomine to just watch from afar, feeling a bit left out. A black haired male comes up next, a beauty mark below his eye, and a necklace that matched the one around Kagami’s, and Aomine recognizes him as Himuro Tatsuya- Kagami’s supposed brother. His facial expression is stoic, but he can tell he's the most worried out of everyone else.

“Taiga!”

“Oh- Tatsuya!” Kagami says, as Himuro pulls him into a tight hug. Aomine feels a tug in his chest.

“Welcome home and happy birthday,” Himuro says, he pulls away and looks at Kagami closely. “We need to talk later.”

Aomine can see Kagami pale a little bit. He knows that Himuro guy would want to know what happened in America. They were childhood buddies, a relationship that Kuroko had told him was similar to his relationship with Satsuki. However he knew that any talk regarding Kagami’s trip was bad news, so Aomine decides to step in, but right when he does something large looms over the other two.

“Kaga-chin, here. Your present,” Murasakibara says, walking right between Kagami and Himuro, handing the redhead a grocery bag he could only guess was filled with snacks and goodies.

“Oh, thanks,” Kagami says grabbing the bag and looking at the contents inside.

“Let me go grab my present!” Himuro says, and he runs off in the other direction.

Akashi walks up next, handing the redhead a cleanly wrapped box, a bow tied neatly around it. “This isn't much, but I hope it'll do. You're welcome to open it now if you'd like.”

So Kagami does. Unwrapping the box carefully and his eyes widen as he pulls out a sleek red phone. “W-what?! This is-”

“I was informed by a certain someone that you were without a phone,” Akashi says gesturing toward Kuroko who was conversing with Satsuki.

“But this-”

“It's important to be in touch with those around you,” Akashi says, a kind smile filling his cheeks. “If you are in need of any of us, know we are a phone call away.”

“T-thanks,” Kagami says, flustered. He carefully places the phone back in its box and capping it. Akashi smiles once more and nods. “It's nothing.”

“Kagamiicchiiiiiii!” Kise calls, running towards him embracing the stunned male. “We missed you so much!”

“Kise,” Kagami says, wiggling out of the blond’s grip.

“Here! Your present!” Kise says, handing over another box. The wrapping is done someone messily, indicating that he had tried to wrap it himself.

“Can I open it?” Kagami asks and Kise nods excitedly.

“Of course!”

Kagami unwraps it and pulls out a cream colored scarf and matching gloves.
“Wow, thanks. This is great,” Kagami says, feeling the material in his fingers. Aomine snorted, knowing Kise it was probably a brand new item.

“I'm glad you like it! Kurokocchi told me you weren't too fond of the cold. So I thought this was perfect!”

“Thanks Kise. It's really nice,” he folds the items and puts them in the box.

Soon Midorima follows suit, handing Kagami his gift which so happened to be the lucky item of the day. Kagami holds the snow globe in his hands awkwardly.

“Thank..you,” Kagami says and Midorima nods.

“You're welcome.”

“Shin-chan! That's so lame! Here, I got you something better,” Takao hands Kagami a small box, and Kagami takes it and opens it, revealing a few headbands inside.

“This'll be useful, thanks,” Kagami says, placing the cover over them again.

Himuro soon returns, handing Kagami a box. Kagami rips open the lid immediately, pulling out a number of loose fitting t-shirts, the ones Aomine always sees him wear at home.

“Thanks Tatsuya! I've been needing some more clothes,” Kagami says, folding them neatly back in the box.

“No problem,” Himuro says, smiling.

Then Kuroko steps up, a small box in his hands. “Happy Birthday, Kagami-kun.”

“Thanks,” Kagami says, smiling slightly again, giving Aomine another squeeze of the heart because he hasn't been able to make Kagami smile so easily and here Kuroko was, making him smile just by saying happy birthday.

Kagami opens up the box to reveal a set of wristbands. “Wow, thanks Kuroko.”

Kuroko offers a smile. Soon Satsuki comes up and gives Kagami her present, along with Seirin, and the rest of the other members of their respective teams. Aomine had also been approached by a few others who's given him small gifts, nothing in comparison to what Kagami was getting- but he doesn't mind at all. Relieved to see the redhead socializing a lot more than he's witnessed since he returned. However he couldn't deny the achiness of his chest as he spent the majority of the time watching from afar.

Aomine really regrets not getting him a gift.

Hours pass by and he still isn't able to get some alone time with Kagami- something he expected, but he still couldn't rid his mouth of the bitter taste he gets watching the other male being surrounded by so many people. Jealousy? It could be. He wasn't jealous because Kagami had directed his attention to someone else- no, that wasn't it. It was because he couldn't give Kagami that sense of comfort and camaraderie that others were able to give him just by standing next to him. And he didn't dare intervene to take Kagami away from that, even for just a second.

Don’t be selfish, he reminds himself.

Another hour passes, the light of day outside long gone and he's standing awkwardly on the edge of
the living room watching the party guests play stupid games like charades. Kagami doesn't play—
he's sat on the couch watching the others play instead, squished in between Kuroko and Kise.
Aomine soon realizes that he's stared at the color red for so long, he's beginning to see dots of red
in his vision, then a voice next to him stirs him out of his thoughts.

“Oha-Asa warned that Virgos must be extra vigilant today. Do not make any rash decisions or let
moments of intensity blur your judgement.”

“Hah? You came to annoy me just for that?” Aomine clicked his tongue in annoyance.

“Yes.”

“Give me a break,” he mumbles.

“You can choose whether or not to heed my advice,” Midorima says, a stern look on his face. “You
should be grateful I even bothered to tell you.”

“You want me to thank you?”

“No need,” he says, walking away in Takao’s direction, leaving the navy haired male alone again.

Aomine sighs and eyes the redhead for a last time before he moves, his feet leading him wherever.
He passes by the mountain of presents Kagami received, a scowl forming on his face. He
eventually stops in front of the balcony, a roof shielding it from the rain that's already started. He
steps out, it's a bit chilly but he doesn't mind, as long as he gets a break from all the noise.

He indulges himself in the sound of rain, he never liked the rain very much, reminding him of days
past that he surely did regret, but he couldn't deny the soothing effect it had. He's focused so much
on that sound that he barely hears someone walk up behind him.

“Hey,” the voice says. Aomine turns around to see Kagami closing the sliding door. “Mind if I join
you?”

Aomine shakes his head and fixates his gaze on the downpour again, trying to ease his heart. For
some reason, he wasn't ready for a conversation with the redhead. It doesn't help when Kagami
places himself close to Aomine again.

“Aomine,” Kagami calls.

“Hm?”

“Thank you,” he says, making Aomine’s heart flip in his chest. Aomine looks at him warily.

“Don’t thank me. All I did was take you to the party.”

“Yeah, well. Kise told me you gave up your day with me to take me here instead,” Kagami says.

Damn that Kise, Aomine thinks.

“It's fine. Not like I had anything better for us to do anyway.”

The redhead teeters back and forth on his toes. “What did you have planned originally?”

“Didn't think about it.”

“What? You were just planning on improvising the whole day?”
“Yeah.”

“You're an idiot,” Kagami says.

“I said we would spend the day together, I didn't say it would be anything extravagant,” Aomine says rolling his eyes. “Why? Were you expecting something profound?”

“Mm,” He hums. “Thought it would be like a date or something.”

“Would you have liked it if it were?”

“I dunno,” he says, shrugging. “But I had fun today. So thank you.”

“Told you not to thank me,” Aomine mutters.

The sound of rain washes between them as they stand side by side just relishing in the warmth radiating from each other’s bodies in the cool weather. Aomine wishes he were able to strike up a conversation with Kagami as easily as everyone else, he's searching for a topic of interest when Kagami speaks.

“Sorry your birthday party ended up being mine,” he says, and Aomine frowns. The apology sounding foreign as it escapes the other male's lips. There wasn't any need for an apology.

“It wasn't meant for me from the beginning. It was for you, don't apologize.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Kagami, I said don't apologize,” he growls. He suddenly remembers his mother is waiting at home. “Besides, I can just celebrate at home.”

“Sounds sad.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Aomine says.

After a few moments of silence, Kagami speaks again.

“What're they like?”

“Huh?”

“Your parents.”

Aomine quiets for a moment, a bit shocked at the sudden question.

“They're good people,” Aomine says, not really knowing what to elaborate on exactly. Not many people asked him about his family- There really wasn't any need. He had a simple family, nothing special.

“I see,” Kagami says. “What do they do?”

“Dad’s a salary man,” he says laughing dryly. “My mom is a nurse at the hospital.”

“Oh. Must be tough working in a hospital with the irregular hours and all.”

“Yeah, she's never home for half the day but she always makes it home on time for dinner. So it's fine.”
“What about your parents?”

He doesn’t say anything right away, maybe thinking of what to say. “My dad.. is a consultant.”

“How, and your mom?”

Kagami quiets again for a short moment. “She's not around.”

“Did she leave?”

Kagami nods, a longing expression on his face that Aomine couldn’t quite explain and Aomine decides not to pry any further. He’s not sure what’s safe territory around the other male just yet, so he tries a different route.

“Would you wanna meet them? My parents I mean,” Aomine asks.

“Whoa, that's a big step,” Kagami says, he's trying to sound lighthearted but his words weigh heavy.

“Not like that you dumbass,” Aomine scoffs. “My mom says she’d like to meet you.”

“She knows about me?”

“Sorta. She took the day off today to spend time with me so I had to tell her I was spending time with a friend.”

Kagami frowns at that. “She took the day off for you? Why?”

“Yeah. Wanted to spend my birthday with me so she took the day off.”

“And you declined?”

“Well obviously, I’m here aren't I?”

“Why did you decline?”

“I had to,” Aomine says. “Besides, its fine. She's still waiting for me at home.”

“But what if she's not?” Kagami says, his voice low and threatening. The tone Aomine typically hears from the other male before the start of a game.

“What?”

“What if she's not home when you get there?”

“Why wouldn't she be home?”

“Maybe she decided to leave too.”

“She’ll be there Bakagami. What're you getting so worked up for?”

“But you don't know that for sure.”

“Yes I do, Kagami, what's the problem here?”

“The problem? It's that you're a goddamn idiot. You should've stayed home.”
“Hah? Have you forgotten we made plans for this? I wasn't gonna throw it out the window just because my mom wanted me home and she was fine with it either way.”

“That's why I said you're a fucking idiot for making a stupid decision like that.” Kagami growled. “You could've just told Kuroko to pick me up. I would've been fine on my own.”

“Tch,” Aomine clicks his tongue. “You don't want me around or something?”

“No, I just think you should've stayed home.”

“For a birthday dinner? Kagami it's no big deal. I spend my birthday with them every year, I see them every single day. One day won't hurt.”

For some reason Kagami looks hurt instead, his brows knotted upward, but that expression quickly morphs into a frown again- like he didn't want Aomine to see.

“Aomine, I don't think you made the right choice.”

“It's not any of your business what I choose to do. I chose to be here, so deal with it.”

“You're such an ungrateful asshole,” Kagami snaps. “Aomine, just go home.”

“What the hell is wrong with you? Stop nagging me! You're so annoying.”

“If there's anything wrong here, it's you.”

“Shut up! Geez, stop fucking with me Kagami,” he snarled. He couldn't comprehend why Kagami was getting so pissed. “It's just a measly dinner. Stop acting like she's gonna die tomorrow!”

“You don't know that,” Kagami mutters dejectedly and for some reason Aomine wants to fly off the handle.

“God, Kagami can you just stop with that?! Don't deflect your mom issues on me just because you don't have one.”

Aomine sighs exasperatedly. He knew Kagami had been unpredictable since his return, but he never expected the redhead to get so triggered just talking about his mom.

He runs his hands down his face. He knew he had a tendency to say things out of anger, but he thought it was warranted this time around. After all, Kagami really had no business in telling him where he should and shouldn't be.

Just then, Aomine realizes that Kagami is quiet- too quiet. He turns to look at him. He's biting into his bottom lip. Hard- any harder and he feared he would've busted his lip. His face distorted into a mix of pain and hurt, the rims of his eyes starting to turn a dark shade of red, and water collecting at the corners. That's when Aomine knew he went too far. Regret surging through his whole body. He knows now that he should've just kept his mouth shut and let Kagami nag him. Especially knowing that anything could set the other male off. His hands instinctively go up to hold the sides of his face.

“Kagami, wait I-”

“Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you,” he chants, his voice cracking and he roughly shoves Aomine away, but Aomine grabs his wrist.

“Kagami, stop! I didn't mean-”
“Don’t fucking touch me,” he grits, prying away, the male turns quickly on his heels, leaving the balcony. Aomine follows right behind him, trying to reach out for his sleeve.

“Ah! There they are! Kagamicchi, Aominecchi it's time for cake! Let's-?”

The overlapping chatter happens all at once, but Aomine disregards it, his eyes focusing only on the redhead in front of him weaving past worried faces that try to stop him. Suddenly a strong grip grabs his arms and Himuro is in his face with a menacing expression.

“What did you do?”

“Get the fuck off me!” Aomine growls, yanking his arm away. By that time he sees Kagami bolt out the front door and he follows, the voices in the house calling for him to stop.

Aomine chases after him, the rumbling of thunder echoes loudly through the sky, signaling the start of the storm. The blurry red figure is moving all too quickly, just running. Running down the path, into the direction of the street.

“KAGAMI, WAIT GODDAMNIT,” he screams through the sound of the storm, arms reaching out to grab him. “KA-”

Aomine doesn't see it- or rather the car doesn't see him. He tries to stumble out the way but he's either too slow or the rain-soaked ground lurches the car forward, even faster. Everything happens all too fast, a messy blur of metal, rain and concrete. The only sound he hears at first is of a car screeching against the wet pavement, piercing through his ears followed by the resounding snap of thunder. He thinks he hears red but he wishes he hadn't, because the voice he hears is breaking and screaming and it hurts more than the physical pain that's welling up in his chest, spreading out toward the rest of his body.

The next thing he knows he's crumbled on his side on the asphalt, his head throbbing massively and there's a sharp, stabbing pain in his side that makes it hurts to breathe, and he feels himself slowly going numb. His vision is blurred and his hearing botched, the only sound he hears is the horrid screams coming from the side of the street. He can faintly hear the sound of Kise and Satsuki crying and Akashi calling for an ambulance. But Aomine focuses on only one thing- Kagami. He doesn't hear him anymore, can't see him past the smoke and fog, and he wants to call out for him again but pain clogs his throat, leaving him inaudible.

As he’s laying there, he suddenly feels stupid for lashing out at Kagami. Realizing that maybe the redhead had regrets he didn’t want Aomine to have. He just wanted to spoil him like everyone else, wanted to make him smile, and make him feel special, he should’ve gotten him a gift like everybody else, or just went for it and kissed the damn fool- and he feels hopeless and idiotic because he realizes if he were dying right now, it would've been a shitty way to go, not being able to accomplish any of that.

Finally out past the blur of rain and smoke, he sees him. Hands gripped tightly in red hair, hunched over and curled up in a ball, his body wracked with violent tremors. Aomine thinks he's hurt and he wants nothing more than to drag himself over there and say he's sorry, to reassure him that everything was okay- that he was okay, that everything was going to be okay. Then suddenly, he sees Kagami finally moving, crawling towards him, his lips moving fast and frantic, saying something but Aomine can’t quite make it out past the hiss of the car next to him and the thrum of the rain.

Then Kagami is next to him and like magic, everything stills, and he hears him.
'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry,' he keeps chanting over and over.

Aomine opens his mouth to say something- But he can't, because his hearing reduces to just a mere ringing in his ears, he feels his body resisting his movements and his vision starts to fail him. And then finally, he gives into the darkness enveloping him.

Chapter End Notes

You know what they say, it always gets worse before it gets better :o)

I just made up something for Aomine's parents and Kise's house. Hope you don't mind!

See you next chapter!
He felt like he was submerged under water. Breathing, but it was hard. Most of his energy was spent on doing just that. In, out, in, out. If his concentration faltered just a tiny bit, he felt like he'd sink deeper, deeper, deeper-- until he couldn't breathe anymore. His eyelids were screwed shut, his strength failed him many times as he tried desperately to open them time and time again. Almost like he were in a nightmare, yelling and screaming at himself to wake up. Wake up, wake the fuck up - but he couldn't.

Occasionally he'd hear voices around him, most of them were for the most part, unrecognizable, but he had learned to differentiate the voices between a male or a female. One voice in particular, was a male. And he spoke a lot- Always filling in the void, but it didn't bother him much; it fact, it actually aided in keeping his sanity in tact.

‘I'll be…’

‘...you're...goi..okay...’

‘..’m....rry.’

‘Da.i…’

‘...ove..you’

‘Please...wa...soon.’

Aomine wasn't sure who was speaking, but his voice was quieter than the rest, mumbling about things the tanned male didn't understand- But mostly, the voice would repeat the same phrases. Aomine couldn't quite make them out, but he recognized the same sounds. Sometimes he would feel a sensation on the skin of his forehead, an extremely cold and numbing touch that reminded him of winter days, but usually the feeling wouldn't last long- an array of touches would always follow shortly after, warm and thawing. They were sequential, a spreading warmth on his cheek after a broken phrase. Over and over, before the voice would leave for who knows how long, but it always came back.

‘...ove..you’

‘.I..ov..you’

‘...lo…..y.u’

It wasn't a regular occurrence, but when it did happen, Aomine didn't mind the darkness all too much.

He wasn't sure how long had passed, the essence of time wasn't of importance to him anyways.
only thing he's noticed is that the voice gets clearer, more decipherable, as with the other voices around him.

The male voice often gets swapped out for female voices most of the time now. A voice he recognizes to be soothing and somewhat maternal and another that's constantly crying. It's annoying, but at the same time, he wants to reach out and pat her head and tell her everything will be okay.

Some more time has passed and it's not so hard to breathe anymore. The voices around him clear as day and he likes listening to them. It was kind of like a radio. However, he finds himself searching. Searching for the voice that hasn't come back in days, months, or even years. For some reason it was important to him. Like he had unforgotten business.

And then he hears it. His voice seemed duller than he remembered and not as loud as everyone else's, but loud enough regardless.

“Hey,” the voice began awkwardly. “You look less shitty today.”

*What the fuck.*

“Ahh, wait. I didn't mean it like that. It's my fault you're in here anyways,

What I meant to say was, I'm glad you're getting better. You had me worried sick. Everyone else is waiting,

The doctor said you should be waking up soon,

So this'll be the last time I'm here.”

*What?*

“I'm not sure if you'll remember when you wake up, but I'll say everything now. So I can go in peace, without having any regrets.”

*You're leaving?*

“I know you're gonna get pissed at me for saying this so many times, but I'm sorry. I shouldn't have picked a fight with you on that day. I shouldn't have said those things, I shouldn't have ran away.”

“And I’m sorry for being unfair to you. I never said this, but I really did appreciate you being there for me when I came back.”

“You even told me you liked me. Are you an idiot?”

“I’ve said this many times lately, but I like you too. Well- a lot stronger than that. I should've told you then, but I couldn't.”

“Truthfully, I don't deserve it. Not then, not now. I've had the luxury of living most of my life surrounded by things I love and people that love me. I've dragged down enough people with my selfishness. And at this point, I've been incredibly selfish indulging in your feelings that I never returned. So I have to--”

The voice stops himself to take a shaky breath.

“I have to say goodbye now,” the voice whispers.
“You deserve someone more than me. And God, Aomine, if anyone's a fucking angel around here, it's you.”

And then the cold touch is on his forehead again, feeling and running down the sides of his scalp. Aomine knows what's coming next, his ears finally clear enough to hear the mysterious broken phrase.

“Daiki,” the voice says.

“I love you. I’m sorry.”

Oh.

And then warmth meets him. But not the same one he expected. Instead of the peppering warmth on his head, there's just one--on the very corner of his lips and he realizes now that the radiant warmth he's been feeling has been kisses all this time, and this one was a goodbye kiss.

He tries desperately to move, to thrash his body around in protest, to scream at the voice to not leave, don’t you fucking dare, but he can’t.

Memories pour in like a broken dam, flooding his brain in broken fragments, but he remembers.

Kagami. That voice is Kagami. He's leaving. I have to stop him. I have to tell him-

So he fights like a maniac, trying to move his body in any way he can, to speak and scream, and he wants to cry thinking he's trapped in his own body, the same body that's never failed him before but is failing him when he needed it most.

“A-Aomine?” Kagami says frantically.

And he hears the sound of a chair being pushed back and footsteps pounding loudly on the floor, fading away and Aomine curses at himself because he knows that's Kagami running the fuck away again, and he wants to give the male a solid punch in the face.

Then suddenly the darkness around him splotches into whites and lights, cracking and dissipating, he can feel sensations in his fingers, a stinging pain in his arm, his legs tired and unmoving.

Then he surfaces.

Everything is blindingly white, there's an annoying rhythmic beeping sound beside his bed and he wonders why he didn't hear it before. Aomine immediately goes to rip out the needle stuck in his arm and the tubes running into his nose. He tries to sit himself up, but everything hurts. His ribs restrict his breathing and he realizes quickly that his right arm is in a cast, his head wound tightly around with bandages.

He holds his breath and scoots himself to the edge of the bed, grimacing in pain. He talks himself through it, he’d rather die trying to find Kagami than let the bastard run off like the coward he is. He just knows Kagami chose to say goodbye while he was in that state, knowing full well Aomine wouldn't be able to protest.

As he pushes himself more and more, he places his feet on the floor and attempts to stand but his legs are too weak to hold him, and he tumbles on the floor, dragging the IV stand and the blankets down with him. He grits his teeth in pain and frustration. His head whirling and he's starting to
daze out again, but he fights it. So be it. He'd crawl. He wasn't going to let Kagami win this one.

Suddenly a couple nurses and a doctor runs in. The nurses surround him and he fights against their hands feebly.

“Kagami, where is he?” He tries to say, but his voice is failing him from lack of use. The nurses try and grab him again but he shakes them off, not caring for the pain burning spreading through his body. The only thing on his mind was getting to the redhead.

“Aomine-san, if you continue resisting we’ll have to put you back under,” the man in the white coat says firmly.

Unable to speak, Aomine shakes his head. His brain jarring, and he mouths Kagami’s name over and over again, trying to get them to understand. But they're still getting handsy with him.

Then he sees him. Kagami stood at the door, his face pale and twisted in worry, but he doesn't move. He just stares at Aomine, his mouth gaped open.

“Kaga-” Aomine croaks out, his voice rough and hoarse. But he tries again. Louder so he can speak over the fussing the nurses around him are doing.

“Kagami…” He says, louder. His voice cracks, the words sounding foreign in his ears. “Don't leave.”

Kagami’s eyes widened, and Aomine sees that he's clenching his fist tightly. The whites of his knuckles showing.

“Don't leave,” Aomine says again, feeling water brimming in the corner of his eyes, but he doesn't let them escape.

The nurses around him quiet. Kagami bites his lips and looks down, his brows knotted together and then he slowly nods.

The redhead walks over and kneels down in front of Aomine. “Okay,” he says quietly.

A few moments later, Aomine is in bed again. The IV drip reattached to him and Kagami is sitting beside him silently. He hasn't said a word since, and Aomine really wants to talk to him, but he feels beat, his body fatigued and sore. His eyelids weigh heavily, but he's afraid Kagami will leave once he goes to sleep again.

“Kagami,” Aomine slurs. “Mm, I wanna talk.”

“We can talk later,” Kagami says, finally breaking his silent streak. “Just go to sleep.”

“No,” he says, narrowing his eyes at the boy.

“You're basically half asleep. Having a conversation with you now would just be a pain.”

“M'not half aslee..” Aomine muttered, trailing off.

“You can't even speak in full sentences,” Kagami says, frowning. “Don't be so stubborn. Just sleep.”

“If I sleep..you'll leave,” Aomine says.

Kagami stares at him for a bit, then his face softens. “I won't leave.”
“Yes you will. You tried to leave me when I was in a coma,” he slurred. “You dick.”

Kagami looked at him in surprise. “You heard all that?”

“Mmm,” Aomine hummed. “I heard everythin’.”

“Everything?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh,” Kagami mutters, his face riddled with guilt and a bit of embarrassment.

“Kagami,” Aomine calls, and Kagami looks up.

“What?”

“I wanna talk,” Aomine says again, yawning.

“We’re already talking,” Kagami says, sighing. “We can continue later. Just sleep already.”

“You're gonna-”

“I won’t,” he says. “But if you don't sleep now, I'll leave.”

“I'll go after you again,” Aomine says, and Kagami groans. Aomine smiles a little at the response. He can feel his brain fogging up from the medication.

“Kagami, your hand,” he mumbles.

“What about it?”

“Wanna hold it,” Aomine mutters, bringing his hand out from under the covers, holding it out.

Kagami places his hand in his, instantly sending chills throughout his body. It was so damn cold.

“What the fuck? Why do you feel like an ice cube?” Aomine grits, he holds tightly on his hand and brings it under the covers, trying to warm it up.

“Sorry,” Kagami says.

Aomine turns to look at Kagami, taking in his features. To be frank, Kagami looked like death itself. Even more than he did, but seeing Kagami next to him with his hand in his did funny things to his heart. Kagami looks back at him with a weird expression.

“What?”

“Nothin’, just wanna look at you,” Aomine muttered.

“You're high on painkillers,” Kagami says.

“Am not,” Aomine murmured, sleep tempting him even more so with the hand warming up in his.

“Kagami,” he called again.

“Hm?”

“I wanna kiss,” Aomine mumbled.
“Huh?”

“I wanna kiss,” he repeated.

Kagami gives him a reluctant look, but he leans down and gives him a kiss on the top of his head, earning a dissatisfied groan from Aomine.

“Lips are down here,” he grumbled. Kagami rolled his eyes.

“Not when you're half asleep.”

“Why? You gave me plenty of kisses when I was unconscious,” Aomine frowned.

“Yeah, on your head.”

“Not earlier.”

“T-that was different, and I didn't kiss you on the lips that time either,” Kagami mumbled.

“Then you'll kiss me when I wake up?” Aomine asked.

“Maybe.”

Aomine grinned at him, squeezing Kagami’s hand. “Okay.”

“Go to sleep, idiot.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Aomine says, finally allowing his eyes to close. Sleep instantly encases him. He mumbles out a “I love you,” to the other male, but he doesn't stay awake long enough to hear a response.

He has a dream of a woman, long flowing red hair, and she's beautiful, a certain elegance catching his eye, reminding him of someone. He just watches her from afar, but she catches sight of him and smiles.

Aomine cracks open his eyes, blinking away the sleep. The medication wore off some time ago leaving his body feeling heavy and sore with a throbbing headache. The first thing he notices is his empty hand and he tries and sit up, eyes darting around the room quickly but a hand gently pushes him back down.

“Aomine-kun, you're in no condition to move,” he says, and Aomine looks up to see Kuroko hovering above him.

“He left me,” Aomine says, dazedly. “I can't believe it. He-”


He moves his body, allowing Aomine to see past him. Lo and behold, the redhead is slumped over on the couch in the corner of the room, buried underneath a mountain of blankets, sleeping soundly.
“The nurses were in here earlier and told him to move I think. He was already laying there when I arrived. You both have been asleep for about a day.”

“I see,” Aomine said, he pointed to the mass amounts of blankets on him. “Can he breathe under there?”

“Your mother comes by to check up on you from time to time. I heard from the other nurses she was the one that put them on Kagami-kun. He hasn't been sleeping much anyways, I'm glad he's finally resting.”

Aomine hummed. Knowing his mother, she probably felt Kagami’s skin and thought he was cold. It didn't matter anyways, Kagami looked relatively comfy over there.

“I also heard that you caused quite a scene earlier. How reckless can you be?”

“Shut up, you wouldn't understand.”

“I understand it had something to do with Kagami-kun,” Kuroko frowned. “Even so, you shouldn't have done something like that. What if you had worsened your injuries?”

“Tetsu, that idiot tried to leave me. Told me he thought it was better to go in peace, I wasn't gonna let him.”

Kuroko looked surprise for a moment. “He spoke to you?”

“Yeah.”

“And you heard him? While you were comatose?”


“No, well, ever since the accident Kagami-kun hasn't uttered a word to anybody. The doctors tried talking to him too, but he refused to speak.”

“Really?” Aomine frowned. Kagami had been speaking to him frequently, it was strange to imagine the loudmouth unusually mute.

Kuroko nodded grimly. “They think he might've been traumatized. So they let him stay around in the hospital while you were out. I guess it's fine if he's been talking to you, everyone was really worried.”

Aomine nods, but before he can say anything else, Kuroko interjects. “What worries me is how he said he wanted to go in peace. You don't think he's..”

Kuroko trailed off and Aomine quoted a curious eyebrow. “He's what?”

“Suicidal,” Kuroko finished. Aomine frowned at that. He couldn't imagine Kagami being the type to throw in the towel. But it worried him a bit, knowing that Kagami looked one step away from it. At that moment, something in his brain clicked. If he were planning on doing something like that, there wasn't a reason Kagami would've chosen to stay with him--unless..

“I wanna talk to him,” Aomine said, trying to lift himself up again but Kuroko pushes him back down.

“Aomine-kun, let's let him sleep. Besides, I may have overrea-”
“Does he take sleeping pills?”

“Pardon?”

“Kagami--he told me he took sleeping pills on game days. Is that true?”

Kuroko frowned. “Not that I know of. He was never the type to use sleep aids, no.”

“Motherfucker-”

“Wait, Aomine-kun. Explain. What’s this about sleeping pills?”

“The day after I slept over, he got real sick and puked a lot. Then I found ‘em. It was pretty empty but he told me he took them on game days.”

“So you’re saying he attempted to overdose?”

“Well, it makes sense doesn’t it?”

Kuroko bit his lower lip, not speaking.

“Tetsu, lemme talk to him.”

“Aomine-kun, don’t say anything yet. I fear that if you do, he might leave. Besides, he’s been here with you this whole time, we’ll just monitor him closely,” Kuroko said. “If we notice anything strange we’ll tell someone immediately.”

“But-”

“That happened over a few weeks ago Aomine-kun. Worry about what he’ll do next, not what he did then.”

“Easy for you to say, Tetsu. You think I can just sit around and watch him damage himself?”

“At this point, anything you say will just provoke him. Just be there for him, reassure him that you’re there no matter what,” he said.

“In case you haven’t noticed, love doesn’t always fix a person,” he muttered.

“And anger will?”

Aomine just grumbled in response. Why did Kagami have to be so damn complicated.

“Fine, I won’t say anything. But if he gives me a reason to, I won’t hold back.”

“Thank you,” Kuroko sighed, he turns to look at the sleeping boy, then turns back. “I’ll let everyone else know, as well as Alex-san and Himuro-san. They deserve to know.”

“You can try,” he mumbles, shifting uncomfortably in his bed. “That Himuro guy seems like the type to confront him about it though.”

“He did confront Kagami-kun earlier.”

“He did?”

“Yes, a couple days after the accident.”
“And?”

“Like I said, Kagami-kun hasn’t spoken to anyone since then. Himuro-san gave up after awhile and he had to return to Akita. I'm sure he’ll try and mention it again when he gets the chance.”

“And you really think telling him about Kagami’s attempted suicide is a good idea?”

“No, but they deserve to know.”

Aomine sighed. Kuroko was right. It's not like they could keep it a secret. If anything it could help them. The more people Kagami was surrounded by, the better.

He looks at Kagami across the room, his fingers twitching to hold him again.

“Think you can bring me over to him?” Aomine asked, earning a look from his former shadow.

“You're not supposed to be getting up,” Kuroko said.

“I've been laying down for how long now?”

“A couple weeks.”

“A couple weeks?!” Aomine said, craning his neck to look at Kuroko. He nodded, and Aomine plopped his head back on the pillow. “God damn.”

He liked sleeping, yeah, but not moving for a couple weeks seemed like a stretch. His muscles were already screaming to be moving again, but he didn’t want nurses tackling him. He looked at Kuroko again.

“Think you can bring him to me then?”

“I don't want to wake him,” Kuroko said frowning. “Also, he may be thinner but that doesn't make him easier to carry. What if I drop him?”

“You won't drop him, it's a short distance. And if you're so worried, just wake him up and tell him to get over here. Please Tetsu?”

“You really think two men as big as yourself will be able to fit in such a tiny space?”

“I'll make it work, Tetsu c’mon.”

Kuroko sighed. “Honestly, you're such a diva.”

He watched as Kuroko walked over to Kagami and shook him gently. The pile of blankets shifted slightly, then stilled again. Kuroko gave Aomine a look, but he urged the boy to continue. So Kuro sighed again and turned back around.

“Kagami-kun, please wake up,” Kuroko said loudly, shaking him again. Kagami stirred some more and groaned.

“M'tired,” he heard Kagami mumble.

“I know, but Aomine-kun wants you over there.”

“Tell him to fuck off.”
“He wants you to lay with him.”

Kagami mumbled incoherently and wrapped himself up in the blankets, staggering over to the left side of Aomine’s bed and he glared down at him.

“Move over,” he grumbled, and Aomine complied, scooting himself to the edge of the bed and patted the empty narrow space next to him.

Kagami carefully placed himself beside him, being aware of Aomine’s injuries. He looked up at him. “Don’t get any funny ideas,” he warned, curling up on Aomine’s side.

Aomine snorted. “Relax. Our first time won’t be in a hospital…with an audience,” he said giving Kuroko a look. They both groaned loudly.

“I’m going back to sleep,” Kagami muttered, rubbing his head into the pillow before his body relaxes, his breathing slowed into even breaths and his head was nuzzled against Aomine’s shoulder.

The posture made Aomine more uncomfortable, but he didn't mind.

“Wouldn't this be a difficult situation to explain? Your mother does work here,” Kuroko asked.

“My mom… would be okay with it, probably. I haven't seen my dad yet, so I dunno how he’ll react,” he said. “I guess we’ll find out later.”

Kuroko nodded. “I hope things go well for you both. Unfortunately, Kagami’s current dilemma won't be the only obstacle you face.”

“Don't remind me,” Aomine says, disgruntled.

Kuroko smiles pitifully at him. “I think I'll need to leave now. It's getting pretty late,” he said, glancing at the clock beside Aomine’s bed.

“Mmk, thanks for visiting I guess,” Aomine said.

Kuroko grabbed his things and gave him a serious look. “Remember, don't say anything. Watch him closely.”

“I got it, I got it,” Aomine muttered. “You don’t think I know that already?”

Kuroko sighs and waves goodbye, then walks out the door.

Everything is silent now, besides the soft sound of deep breathing from the male beside him, and whirring of cars passing by.

He allows himself to let his mind float, letting his eyes close when the image of the red-haired lady flashes in his mind. He opens his eyes again and turns to look at Kagami. His fiery hair has gone dull, but otherwise, his hair would've matched the same shade of red the woman had in his dream.

Just then, there was a knock on the door, and his mother walked in. She smiled warmly at him when she saw he was conscious. “Daiki! You're awake!”

She instantly spotted the sleeping figure next to him. She gave him a curious look and walked over.

“I wanted him to sleep here,” Aomine mumbled, afraid Kagami would get in trouble for taking the bed.
“That's fine, honey. As long as it doesn't bother you. How's your pain level? Need any painkillers?”

“Medicine would just make me tired,” he said, yawning.

“You're already tired, silly,” she said, ruffling his hair affectionately. She stares at Kagami beside him.

“How is he doing?”

“He's fine I guess, catching up on sleep,” he replies.

“He seems like a sweet boy. He's been here ever since you were admitted,” she said. “If he's not in here, he's usually sitting around in the hall.”

“Tetsu told me,” he says, sighing.

“You have such caring friends, I’m very happy for you,” she says, ruffling his hair again.

“They're alright,” Aomine shrugs.

“Oh, you're just shy,” she says, smiling. “Well now that you're part of the living again, I need to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“Do you remember how you got into that accident? I don't dare believe my son is stupid enough to not look both ways before crossing.”

“We-uh..we got into an argument and he ran out so I chased after him.”

“Huh,” she said quirking an eyebrow. “Mind telling me what it was about?”

“I don't remember much of how it started, only how it ended.”

“How did it end?”

“I told him not to deflect his mom issues on me just ‘cause he didn't have one,” he muttered.

“Daiki!” She said, a look of disappointment and surprise on her face. “Why in the world would you say something like that?”

“I dunno, he was pissing me off and I--just said it. I'm sure he said something stupid too,” Aomine said.

“Doesn’t matter if he said something stupid, I taught you better than that,” she said crossing her arms. “The minute he wakes up, you apologize to him, okay?”

“I was planning to,” he nods. His mother smiles and gives him a kiss on the top of his head. “I'll be back with some painkillers and some food. You're hungry right?”

“Not really.”

“How's porridge?”

“Porridge sounds good.”
“Aomine, just eat.”

“No.”

“Don’t be such a stubborn brat, just eat it.”

“No.”

“Aomine!”

“I told you I’m not gonna eat unless you eat with me.”

“And I told you I already ate earlier!” Kagami glared at him.

Almost a week has past since Aomine first woke from his two week coma and he was going to be discharged later today. He still hasn't worked up the courage to apologize to Kagami yet, often missing opportunities to because they were either bickering or dozing off.

Kise and Midorima had stopped by earlier in the day to drop off some much needed Maji. Aomine was excited to dig into his teriyaki burgers, and Kagami-- not so much. A red flag that popped up for Aomine signaling that Kagami was either starving himself or just haven’t been eating as much as he used to. Both were concerning, judging from the redhead’s much thinner frame.

“Don’t fucking lie to me, you were here the whole time!” Aomine retorted, shoving the burger in the other male’s face. “Now eat the goddamn burger!”

“If anyone needs to eat, it’s you! Just eat and get better already!” He growls, shoving it back.

“Hah?! You’re the one that looks like a skeleton! You need to eat something too!”

“Get off my back! I said I wasn't hungry!”

“I swear Kagami, if you don't eat this burger right fucking now, I’ll shove it down your goddamn throat.”

“I told you I ate already, now fuck off!”

“For fucks sake Kagami, quit lying to my face. Why can't you just eat for me? You haven't been eating much this whole week,” Aomine muttered.

Kagami doesn't budge, he just glares at him.

“Kagami, please,” Aomine urged.

Nothing.

“Kagami.”

“....”

“Kagami, I love you.”

“You can't say I love you everytime you want me to do something Ahomine,” Kagami muttered.
“Shouldn't you do stuff because you love me?”

Kagami groaned. “It won't work. Just give up already.”

“Fine,” Aomine said, stuffing the burgers back into the bag. “You don't wanna eat, I won't eat either.”

“Aomine, stop that. You need to eat.”

“If you don't have to eat, then neither do I.”

“Yes you do, Aomine please.”

“No,” Aomine muttered, placing the bag on the table beside him and going back under the covers, rolling on his left side to turn away from him.

He didn't care. As stubborn as Kagami was, he would consider himself just as difficult to deal with. No way he would let Kagami get his way this time-- in hindsight, it's not like he really let Kagami get what he wanted anyways. A bit of guilt takes root in the pit of his stomach. Aomine would have to ask Kagami what he wanted for once.

He's not sure how long has passed. The redhead was dead silent now and he's tempted to turn around and take a peek, hoping he hasn't hurt the other male again. The tanned male almost gives in, he's about to turn around when he hears the sound of the bag crinkling and he rolls on his back to see Kagami digging through it.

“I'll only have one,” he mutters and Aomine smiles. It's not the amount he usually eats, but it's a start.

He watches as Kagami unwraps the burger and takes a small bite out of it. Chewing slowly.

“Good?” Aomine asked, taking the bag and grabbing his own burger.

“Mm,” Kagami hums, taking bigger bites, his chewing picks up speed. At this rate, he wouldn't be surprised if he ate another one. “S’good.”

“I'm glad,” Aomine chuckles, leaning over to wipe a smudge of ketchup on the other male’s cheek. “So uh..Kagami. I need to tell you something.”

He stops chewing and looks up at him. “Sure.”

“About that day, on the balcony,” he started, picking nervously at the wrapping. “I didn't mean what I said. Y’know about--”

“It's okay,” Kagami says. “Wasn't your fault. You were right anyway.”

“Doesn't matter, I shouldn't have said it. So, my bad,” Aomine stammers. “I mean-- I’m sorry Kagami. I really am.”

“Don't apologize, I started it, I shouldn't have said the things that I said either. You were right to get pissed at me. I would've done the same thing,” Kagami muttered.

“Kagami, you've been apologizing for everything. Are you Ryo now?” Aomine said, frowning.

“Sor- I mean..no,” Kagami mumbled softly. “I've been a real shitty person. They were right about me.”
“Who told you that?” Aomine growled. “I mean sure sometimes you're a massive pain but you're not a bad person.”

“You got hit by a car.”

“How the fuck is that your-”

“You could've died, Aomine. All because I said-”

“Stop that! I didn't die and you didn't say anything wrong. I overreacted, okay?”

“But if I had listened to you-”

“No, shut the fuck up Kagami. Stop thinking about what could've happened instead of what did happen. I'm sitting right in front of you alive and breathing and you're still caught up in that?”

“You don't understand-”

“You're right, I don't. What I do know is that you're so goddamn riddled with guilt that you even stooped low enough to damage yourself. Don’t think I didn't notice,” Aomine barked.

Kagami stared at him wide-eyed, and he immediately looks down. Focusing on the burger that's long gone cold in his hand. He places it on the table beside him. “Aomine, you don't-”

“I don't wanna hear any more bullshit coming out of you,” Aomine snapped. “If you feel so bad then just move on already.”

He angrily places the burger back in the bag again, no longer having an appetite. He hadn't meant to tell Kagami so soon, but he couldn't help it. The Kagami before the accident would've yelled back, but this Kagami was unusually quiet. He wasn't sure if the lack of fight was a good thing.

“Kagami? Say something will you?”

The boy's face is hidden, his gaze low and long locks of red hair cover his eyes--but it doesn't take much to know he was crying. His shoulders begin to tremble, the same way it did that night on the balcony and tears stream down his face uncontrollably. Panic surges through him instantaneously and Aomine instantly tosses away all the anger he felt and latches his hands on to the other male’s shoulders.

“Kagami, I’m sorry. Shit I fucked up again. Kagami I’m-”

But the male just cries harder, hunching over like he's in pain and his breath hitches sporadically and Aomine doesn't know what to do or how to comfort the male because he was never good at being there for people, never good at knowing what to say--

So he acts without thinking and pulls him in tight, not caring for the pain he feels in his ribs. He chants I love you’s and I'm sorry over and over again, placing delicate kisses along the side of his face and neck, down to his trembling shoulders and rubbing soothing circles into his back-- But Kagami doesn't calm down, he starts speaking through the tears, his voice cracking and strained.

“I can't do it. I'm sorry, Aomine. It hurts so fucking much. I can't do it, I can't do it anymore. I'm tired. I want to go, I need to see her, I miss her. It's my fault, it's my fault that she's gone, that you got hurt. I’m sorry, Aomine, I’m sorry, I’m sorry..”

And he doesn't stop, the words replaying over and over again cruelly stabbing at Aomine’s very
own core and not long after, he feels tears welling in his eyes, and this time he doesn't restrain himself, letting them flow out as he cries with Kagami because he doesn't know what to do or how to help or why the male is breaking so much in his arms when he's trying desperately to hold him together.

And just then his mom bursts through the doors, a look of worry and alarm on her face as she sees the two crying and Aomine looks at her in panic. Trying to get the words out.

“Mom-- its Kagami, I think he's hurt and I don't know how to help him. Please, I don't know what to do. Mom--” he chokes in between tears.

And his mother rushes over to them both, and sits herself in front of Kagami, removing him from Aomine’s arms but he stays hunched over, his body convulsing in sobs and the deafening wail pierces through his ears and Aomine just wants it to stop, wants everything to stop and rewind because it's his fault for shattering the wall Kagami built to keep himself from breaking apart.

Outside the door, he sees Kuroko and Satsuki, along with Midorima, Takao, and Kise standing there. Their faces pale, hands over their mouths, and he knows they want to enter but they can't, afraid to surround the other male and make the situation worse.

On his side, his mother is still trying to calm Kagami. Whispering soothing words to him, “Breathe, you're going to be okay. Just breathe.”

Kagami just shakes his head frantically, trying to push them both away, but his mother denies his attempts at trying to escape and he screams at her, at him, at everyone.

“Why are you doing this to me?! Why can't you leave me alone?! Why can't you just let me go?! I can't do this anymore!”

At that point, nurses from the halls have heard the commotion and they stick their heads in, concerned. “Aomine-san, what is--”

His mother looks at one of the nurses and gestures toward Aomine. “Please, take my son out. Let me deal with this.”

Aomine looks at her in surprise. “Mom, I want to sta-”

“Daiki, he'll be fine but I can't have you in here. He might get aggressive.”

The nurse leaves and rushes back in with a wheelchair, propping Aomine up quickly and wheels him out, he's unable to get a glimpse of Kagami as he leaves the room. But he's not sure whether he wanted to, because the cries from his room gets louder, echoing loudly in his ears and he can't help but break down again.

Chapter End Notes

Just so you know, it wasn't Aomine's fault! Kagami reached his breaking point after hearing he had to move on, and he's been holding it in for so long (which is why he kinda refused to speak.) This was posted during class so sorry for the mistakes!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Messy chapter because my life is a legit mess right now. Why do professors decide to make everything due on the same week? It's crazy!
I keep telling myself to go back to writing 3k words per chapter but apparently I like to torment myself lol. Anyways, enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was an uneasy silence, constricted and tense that filled the room so heavy he wouldn't be surprised if the walls cracked and tumbled down. There was a ringing silence in his ear, accompanied by the echoing screams he thought he could still hear, but the truth was, they were far from it-- Down many corridors and led to an empty room, where they all sat fidgeting around.

The nurse left them alone for the time being, only after pestering him about how he should've rang for help instead of trying to handle the situation on his own knowing his own health condition. He didn't give a damn, but at the same time, he wondered if the end result would've been different.

He rubbed his eyes for the nth time. Red and swollen, the same eyes that mirrored the other occupants in the room who witnessed the event. Neither of them had said anything, just followed Aomine as he was whisked away. They all sat in the room, crying silently (except Kise and Satsuki who had to leave the room), as they did their best to console him by patting his shoulders out of comfort or pity, but he shrugs them off unceremoniously.

It's been about an hour and a half since then. Since he held a broken Kagami in his arms. It's given him time to think. Time well wasted because he had more questions than answers.

Kagami had told him he loved him, but since Aomine had woken, he stopped saying it. Aomine knew he didn't really need to say it, his actions spoke plenty loud. He was spoiled with forehead kisses from the redhead, a hand in his whenever he wanted and during his week spent recuperating, Kagami never left his side- just like he promised.

Now he wondered, if those actions were out of pity, or were done to simply pass the time until Kagami decided it was time to go.

Kagami loved him. He knew that. But now it was clear to him Kagami didn't love him enough to stay. Or rather, Kagami didn't love himself enough to stay.

Aomine bit back tears again, ashamed and angry at himself because he couldn't protect him like he wanted, like he promised.

‘I could've done more,’ he would think to himself.

‘Like what?’ Another part of him would say. ‘All you do is pick a fight with him.’

And that was it. He had nothing to offer Kagami, and that's what killed him inside.

He rubbed at his eyes again, blinking back his tears harshly. He just wanted to see him.
Carefully, a hand sneaks up on his shoulder again and he doesn't have to look to know who it is. Dainty hands massage him gently, soothing him and he doesn't push her away this time.

“Dai-chan, would you like to talk about it?” She says softly.

“No,” he responds flatly, focusing on his shoes, afraid to look up at the others who began to sit themselves around him.

“I’ve never seen anyone react like that before…” he hears Takao mumbling to Midorima. “You think he’ll be okay?” Midorima shushes him.

“Aomine-kun, I know you're hurting but this is something that has to be addressed,” Kuroko adds. “Please tell us what happened to Kagami-kun.”

“I don't know.”

“That response will get us nowhere,” Midorima asserts strongly, pushing up his glasses to hide his puffy eyes. “You obviously said something that sparked such a reaction.”

“I don't know, okay?!” Aomine shouted, rubbing at his face. “I just- he kept saying everything was his fault and I told him to move on. Then he-- he just started crying and then--I don't know, I thought I was helping him.”

He sighs exasperatedly, tugging at his blue strands. The events play over and over in his head, and to be frank, it scared him. The way Kagami had acted scared him, what he said, how he reacted to Aomine’s touch. He was almost convinced that Kagami would’ve crumbled in his arms right then and there.

“I don't think it was your fault, Aomine,” Akashi speaks up.

“Well it sure as hell feels like it,” he mumbles.

“I agree with Akashi-kun,” Kuroko offers a encouraging smile. “I'm sure if it hadn't happened now, it would've happened eventually.”

“Kurokocchi is right,” Kise chimes in, trying to lift the mood. “Kagamicchi is strong but even the strongest have their moments. We just need to get him back on track!”

“Everyone is right Dai-chan,” Satsuki smiles slightly, giving his shoulder a slight squeeze. “And lucky for Kagamin, you were there with him. Imagine if he were by himself.”

He didn't want to imagine it. “Dunno if you’d say he was lucky considering the fact he had a mental breakdown because of something I said.”

“Are you giving up on him Aomine-kun?”

“I don’t... I just-- I dunno how much more I can handle it...seeing him like that,” he mutters dejectedly. “I'm not good with shit like this.”

“That is true,” Kuroko started. “But Kagami-kun loves you, therefore you should be the one to do it.”

“You really think I'll be able to save him just because he loves me? Did we witness the same Kagami just now?” Aomine scoffs. “He said so himself, he couldn't do it anymore. He’ll end up hating me if I try and get any closer.”
“That wasn't Kagami-kun talking, it was whatever that was eating him up inside,” Kuroko assures him. “Bring him back to his former self, like he did with you. It's possible, isn't it?”

“I mean…” he starts. Sure it was possible. He was aware of his own stubborn mentality, even throughout that, he still accepted the depression he's been through. Yet he wasn't sure if it was possible for him to sink to the level of depression the redhead was going through. If that were the case back then, he wondered if Kagami would've been able to save him.

“Aomine-kun, do you love him?”

He frowns. “Of course.”

“Then there’s your answer,” Kuroko says, a knowing smile on his face.

A knock on the door resounds behind them, and they turn around to see Aomine’s mother there. She looks a bit disheveled and tired, but otherwise, she seems unharmed. She walked in, a warm smile on her face while everyone around him stood up alarmingly fast.

“Kagami-kun is okay,” she says and Aomine lets out a discreet sigh of relief. “We had to sedate him so he's resting now.”

“Sedate him?!” Satsuki exclaims worriedly.

“Yes, he was starting to get violent so we had to,” she says. Everyone, including himself, gave her a petrified glance. “Oh don't worry! He didn't hurt anyone, just knocked over some things.”

“May we visit him?” Kuroko asks.

She shook her head. “It won't do you any good to see him now. In the meantime I'd like you to look after my son. His father should be here very soon to bring him home.”

“Wait a minute,” Aomine says. “I want to stay with Kagami.”

“I'm sorry. If this were any other time I would've said yes, but your health comes first.”

“I feel fine, mom. Let me stay with him,” he pleads.

She shakes her head again. “Like I said, he’s resting. if all is well, he should be out of here in a few days.”

“A few days won't make much of a difference mom.”

“Right now, you need to rest. Today hasn't been easy for anyone of you,” she says, a mixture of sternness and concern.

“I can't believe this,” he growls. “I'm not leaving.”

“Daik-”

“I said I'm not leaving! If you want me gone, you'll have to drag me out of this fucking place.”

“Daiki, that's enough!”

“Dai-chan, maybe you should-”

“Shut up Satsuki, stay out of this!”
His mother taps her foot impatiently and looks around the room, clearing her throat loudly before asking.

“Please leave my son and I alone for a moment.”

Awkward expressions are quickly exchanged throughout the group, but then they nod and one by one, leave him alone with his mother. She closes the door behind them, a dark look on her face and he prepares to get the scolding of his life.

“Daiki, tell me what happened in there,” she says lowly. “Was this random? Or did something lead up to it?”

He blinks at her, confused for a bit. She raises an eyebrow, almost like she knows the answer, but wants to hear it for herself. “And tell me everything.”

And so he does. Right from the moment they start fighting over Maji up until he’s wheeled away. His mother nods occasionally, urging him to continue, and by the end of it, she sighs. “I think I may have an idea of what's going on.”

“Well? Are you gonna tell me? What's wrong with Kagami?”

“I can't say what's happening for certain so I'll tell you once I gather more details,” she says. “But like I said, I need to call his family and notify them of what happened first.”

Aomine groans. “Mom, tell me! I can't help him if I don't know.”

“Yes you can, just be nice and attentive. You don't need a reason to be nice you know,” she says, frowning. “Be more mindful of the things you say. You have a habit of speaking before you think.”

“I know,” he mutters. “But he never used to react this way. He used to fight back and we’d get over it.”

“Understandable,” she says. “Just be there to for him. That's all you can do for now.”

“I can't if you won't let me be with him,” he grumbles and she rolls her eyes.

“Fine,” she says. “I'll let you stay with him, but if you rile him up again that'll be the last time you see him until I say so. I'm serious.”

“Okay, okay,” he agrees. “I'll behave.”

“Good,” she says, walking toward the door. “A nurse will come and grab you in a bit.” She pauses a bit to turn around. “Also, don't think I'm letting you off the hook for speaking to me like that. Your punishment comes later.”

And with that, his mother leaves and allows his friends to reenter. They walk in sheepishly, faces mixed with pure discomfort.

“That was rather short Aomine-kun,” Kuroko says.

“Aominecchi! You need to respect your mom!” Kise nags, waving his finger at him.
“Yeah, that was very uncalled for!” Satsuki says, scolding him.

“Tch, get off my back will you? I got what I wanted anyways,” he picks at his inner ear with his pinky.

“You're staying the night?” Takao asks and Aomine nods.

“Now that we know Kagami’s condition, I suppose we better be on our way,” Akashi says. “Please keep us updated on his progress, as well as yours.”

Aomine nods. “Thanks.”

“Takao, let's go,” Midorima demands. He walks over to Aomine and glares down at him. “This had better be the last time you let your emotions get the better of you. Seems like Kagami pays the price for it every time.”

“Ehhh? Shin-chan, you're surprisingly protective of Kagami!”

“I am not, I'm just tired of his foolish behavior,” He grunts, fumbling to adjust his glasses.

“It's fine,” Aomine mutters. It wasn't like three other people pointed it out anyways. “I'll work on it.”

Midorima offers a last nod in response, then drags Takao out, following briskly behind Akashi.

“Midorinmacchi isn't very honest with his feelings either,” Kise says, chuckling. “He worries a lot about you both.”

Aomine wrinkles his nose. “Is that why he came to visit twice?”

“He thought if he brought Takao-kun, it wouldn't raise any questions,” Kuroko says, smiling slightly.

“Midorin really has a roundabout way of doing things,” Satsuki giggles.

Another knock at the door interjects their conversation and Aomine turns to find his the nurse there. She's petite and he wonders if she'll be able to push his wheelchair easily.

“Uhm, I was told to escort you to Kagami Taiga’s room?”

“Yeah,” he nods. She looks a bit squeamish and walks over awkwardly, quickly bowing to the others in the room before she grabs hold of the handles of his wheelchair. There's a barely audible grunt as she pushes him, and he's not sure whether or not he finds it endearing or offensive.

As he's being pushed away, he looks back at everyone, waving goodbye. Kise, Kuroko and Satsuki all wave back to him, a sad smile on their faces as they mouth him to stay strong.

It takes the tiny nurse awhile to wheel him to Kagami’s room. Frankly, he thinks he could've walked there faster but he knew getting up and walking off would've done no good. Especially since he didn't know where the redhead’s room was anyways.

Finally they arrive, the nurse barely gets through the door when Aomine quickly stands up, startling the nurse.

“A-ah! You're not supposed to be getting up!”
“M’fine,” he says.

He walks toward the bed where Kagami is kept. Once again, he’s tucked into numerous layers of blankets, and Aomine is only able to see a red tuft sticking out at the top.

The tanned male gets closer and swallows dryly at his appearance.

He just looks so drained— almost like the life was sucked out of him. His eyes were unbelievably red and swollen around the rims, his brows were scrunched up, and his lips were cracked and dry, moving as if he were speaking, but all he heard were faint whimpers coming from the boy.

Worriedly, he looks at the tiny nurse who was busy setting up a sleep area for him.

“Hey, is he okay? He looks like he's hurting,” Aomine says.

“Uhm.. he should be okay,” she says, he hears a tiny ‘I think’ afterward and he's about to say something when his mother walks in.

“Oh, I see you're already here,” his mother says, nodding at the tiny nurse. “Thank you for setting this up. I'll handle the rest.”

“You’re w-welcome!” The tiny nurse stammers, bowing to both him and his mother, then scurries off.

“I just came to check on him real quick,” she lifts up his covers, revealing an IV attached to his arm.

“Wait, why did you-”

“Just because he seems malnourished,” she probes around it gently before lifting the cover back now and tucks him in. “Won’t be in for long, don't worry.”

Another soft whimper emits from the boy's lips and he's getting increasingly worried. “Mom, he still sounds hurt.”

She chuckles understandingly. “He's not hurt, just having a nightmare.”

“Well can't you do something about it?”

“Honey, as much as I'd love to, there's no way we can treat everything,” she sighs. “You can try and soothe him by talking to him. But if he starts having another meltdown, push the call button.”

His mother walks over and pulls a chair next to him, placing a pillow for comfort and he sits down. “Remember, call if something happens. Rest and if you get sore, drink your medicine. I'll be back later.”

He nods and she ruffles his hair, placing a chaste kiss on his forehead before leaving the room.

Aomine sits in the silence for a bit, blue eyes never leaving the sleeping boy’s face. He scoots his chair closer, adjusting his seating position so that the bed provides an armrest for him. He decided he would talk to him.

“Uh..” he starts out, his voice sounding strange to him in the emptiness of the room. First off, he's not sure what exactly to say. His mind in a bunch of different places. Obviously, talking about Kagami’s problem was off the list.
Positive, he had to think of something positive to say.

Wait, wouldn't it be better to tell him those positive things out loud?

Frustrated, he sighs loudly. ‘How the hell did Kagami find things to talk to me about for so long?’

“Well...uhm..” he says again, clearing his throat. “I hope you get better soon.”

‘God fucking damnit,’ he thinks.

“I mean, I miss playing ball with you..Not that I can play right now anyways since y’know, my arm and ribs are fucked up but-- I also miss your cooking. I dunno if I can live the rest of my life without tasting it again..”

Why am I talking like he's gonna die?

“Well, did you know you smell so fucking good? I mean.. I don't know if you showered lately, but how can you manage to smell so god damn amazing all the time--”

He slowly brings up his hand to brush against Kagami’s jaw. His fingers moving upward to trace the outline of his hollow cheeks, up to the edge of his eyes, wiping at the wetness that was accumulating there, then up past his eyebrows. Aomine then moves his hand to the top of his head, massaging gently at his scalp, relishing again in the feel of the redhead’s soft locks.

“There's a lot of stuff we still gotta do together,” Aomine mumbles. “So don't you dare fucking quit on me.”

Kagami’s face relaxes a little, or at least he think it does. Whichever it was, it's enough to keep him going, to keep talking and touching. Aomine continues to lazily massage him for who knows how long. Time of little importance to him, he mainly focuses on the tensing and relaxation of the other boy’s face.

Occasionally, Kagami’s eyes will open. Hazy, now black eyes will blink blearily at him before they roll close again, drawn back into sleep-- but somehow awake enough to feel and hear, sighing contently at Aomine’s soft touch, his whimpers replaced by soft hums rumbling from his chest.

Feeling himself getting fatigued, he decides to sleep in the chair ignoring the sleep area built on the other side of the room. He leans down, planting light kisses down Kagami’s face before leaning his head back on the chair and closes his eyes. His mind drifting to better days filled with burgers, flashes of red, and the sound of shoes squeaking on the court.

He's first awoken by the clap of thunder and rain pelting loudly at the windows. It's dark in the room, the curtains were drawn closed with only a sliver of light emanating from the hallways.

For sleeping in a chair, he's surprisingly not sore. Once he gets his bearings he realizes he's sandwiched between two pillows with a blanket on top of him.

Aomine rubs his eyes sleepily, then blinks, trying to clear away the blurriness of his eyes. They still feel tired and swollen, achy almost. It takes him a moment before he realizes there’s a pair of eyes looking right at him.
Lifeless, tired eyes stare at him. They were almost empty, like he was looking right through him. The shadows of the room just accentuated the grays around the rims. All he could think was 'those aren't Kagami’s eyes.'

Kagami doesn't say anything; doesn't move. Just blinks and stares--kinda creepily. He wonders if maybe the redhead was expecting him to say something first, so he does.

“Good morning,” Aomine says.

For a moment, he doesn't speak. Kagami averts his eyes briefly, but then returns his gaze.

“Morning,” he responds, his voice raspy and soft, abused from the screaming from earlier. If he weren't paying attention to the boy’s lips, he knew the sound of the rain would've drowned him out.

There's a lot of things he wants to ask him, but he decides not to bring up the events that happened earlier. The emotions still hung freshly on his chest and he doesn't think it's a bright idea to revisit that so quickly. He's now fully aware he has a problem with communicating his feelings in a way that doesn't inflict some type of pain or guilt on the boy. So he'll make do with other methods.

‘**Distract him,**’ he thinks. ‘Actions not words. Be nice. Just say nice things.’

He leans down again and pecks his nose experimentally, then back up to gauge the redhead’s reaction. He doesn't really do anything, just blinks in surprise and looks up at Aomine, a bit confused at the sudden display of affection.

“Wha..”

Aomine leans down again to plant another kiss, right where his eyebrows split.

“Aomi-”

He reaches up to card his hand through his red hair again. Kagami closes his mouth and turns his head toward him slightly and Aomine uses this opportunity to place another kiss on the redhead, this time on his forehead.

The other male doesn't try to protest this time, he just closes his eyes and breathes deeply as Aomine’s long fingers continues to feel and brush through his hair.

“Feels nice?” Aomine asks.

Kagami nods.

They stay like that for awhile. Aomine soothing him and Kagami relaxing underneath him. The rain serves as a nice backdrop, comforting the redhead even further. He watches as Kagami’s chest rises and falls steadily. For how peaceful the boy looked, he couldn't believe that he was so broken inside. The rhythm starts to get slower and he's sure the boy has fallen asleep again until he speaks. His voice a calming whisper in the midst of the storm.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “For before.”

This time, Aomine doesn't stop him from apologizing. He leans closer to the redhead and bumps his forehead against his and he stays there, taking in the male’s musky scent.

“Yeah, I know,” Aomine says, he angles his head downward, peppering more kisses down the side
of his neck, before fitting his head into the crook between his shoulder and neck-- the way he had
done before. “You'll be okay.”

Kagami slowly latches onto the sleeves of his shirt, rubbing his face into Aomine’s shoulder.

“You probably think I’m a fucking loser,” Kagami mumbles.

Aomine hums. “You are,” he says. “Since the day I met you.”

Kagami nudges him weakly, separating himself much to Aomine’s disappointment. The redhead
gently pushes him back into his chair then sinks back into bed. Aomine stares at him dejectedly.

“You shouldn't be angling your body like that,” Kagami says softly, catching his look.

“It doesn't hurt much,” Aomine assures him, scooting closer again. Kagami holds up his hand to
stop him.

“You need to take better care of yourself.”

“Why? You thinking you won't be around to hel--” Aomine quickly stops himself, immediately
wanting to slap himself in the face. Be nice you fucking dick. He stammers, tripping over his own
words as he tries to save himself. “I mean you're pretty beat up too-- not like beat up but y’know--
like beat up on the inside-- and I thought you were hurt earlier bu- you-- I mean--”

“It's fine,” Kagami interjects, an indescribable expression on his face. “I know what you meant.”

“No, wait,” he urges worriedly. ‘Say something nice god damnit.’

“That's not what I meant Kagami,” Aomine says, intertwining his fingers with his. “Shit. I gotta
learn to talk better.”

Kagami stares wordlessly at him for a bit, scrutinizing him before opening his mouth to speak
again. “You talk fine. Don't worry about it.”

“How can I not,” Aomine grumbles. “I keep fucking up.”

“Would you stop worrying?” Kagami says. “You haven't fucked up.”

“Stop worrying?” Aomine snaps. “You think you have cause to tell me that when you're the one
laying in a hospital bed right now?”

“That was-”

“Was nothing? You think that excuse is gonna work now?” He sighs heavily, removing his free
hand from Kagami’s to rub at his temples. “Did you mean it?”

Kagami looks at him for clarification.

“Did you mean it when you said you couldn't do it anymore?”

He doesn't answer. Instead, the boy lets the sound of rain and thunder respond instead. Aomine
sees his eyes start to glisten, so he leans in to wipe them.

“Kagami,” Aomine starts, lowering his voice. “It's okay to think that way sometimes.”

Kagami looks at him, an expression that was almost child-like; filled with innocence and worry. It
was as if he were saying, ‘Is it really okay?’

“You were dealing with a lot of shit by yourself, it's no wonder you cracked,” Aomine scoffed, rubbing at the boy’s eyes. “But I'm here now, so share your pain with me, yeah?”

Kagami remains silent, just stares at him as tears continue to pool endlessly in his eyes, and Aomine can tell he's trying his hardest to keep it in.

“That's only if you want to,” Aomine continues. “I can't help you if you don't let me in-” he taps lightly on Kagami’s forehead. “-here.”

“But I can't anymore,” Kagami rasps out.

“Then I'll carry us both until you decide to fight again,” Aomine says, giving his smaller shoulders a squeeze. “But you have to let me there for you. Do that and I'll take care of the rest. Okay?”

It seems like hours that pass by. The redhead just lays there, sniffing silently as Aomine continues to wipe at the loose tears that escape. Finally, Kagami nods slowly, his lips mouth the word, “okay,” and Aomine smiles at him, leaning in to capture him on the lips.

It was a celebratory first kiss that was soft and brief enough, Kagami didn't have time to react; The kiss was the total opposite of what he'd imagine their first kiss to be. Aomine had always pictured it to be fierce and passionate, reminiscent of their own personalities mashed into one heated moment. Fortunately, he didn't find himself disliking this version-- at all.

“I love you Taiga,” he says, lacing his fingers in the redhead’s cold calloused hands.

He doesn't say it back, but Aomine doesn't mind. Because Kagami closes the distance once more, and this time, it's exactly like how he'd imagine it to be.

“Why can't I go in?” Aomine pouts. He's standing awkwardly in front of a locked office door, the teeny nurse beside him again shaking like a scared puppy.

“W-well, it's supposed to be a private session,” she says.

“Yeah, so?” He replies rudely. “What the hell are they doing to him in there?”

“Just t-talking about personal matters,” she says.

“There’s no way an old geezer is getting to hear about Kagami’s life before I do.”

“I'm s-sorry,” she whispers. Aomine rolls his eyes. She must have been related to Ryo in some way. He was calling bullshit if she weren't.

“They sure are taking their sweet time,” he growls.

“I-its only been 10 minutes sir,” she says.

“Hey! Hurry up in there!” Aomine shouts loudly into the door. The nurse next to him flails her arms around in panic.
“S-s-sir! Please! I'll have to ask you to leave if you continue to disrupt them!”

“Then let me in!”

“That would be against patient confidentiality,” she says.

“I don't give a damn,” he curses. He jiggles the door handle wildly and then the door opens a crack. One menacing, wrinkled eye stares at him.

“You're the young man who has been creating such a ruckus outside my office?”

Aomine gulps, but he doesn't falter, he gives a commanding stare back.

“Let me be frank. The more you continue to disrupt the session, the longer it'll take. Unless you want us to be here for the rest of the evening, I suggest you take a seat and wait patiently.”

The man shuts the door loudly in his face and promptly locks it, leaving Aomine standing there bewildered at what just happened.

“Told you,” the teeny nurse mumbles.

“Tch, whatever,” he clicks his tongue in annoyance, shuffling over to the lounge chairs and seating himself.

He does the adult thing and waits for Kagami to finish. His protective nature continues to take hold of him and he tries to bury the thought of what could be happening inside that office. Aomine almost wants to knock again when the sound of a lock clicks and the door opens, and out walks Kagami. He gets up to greet the boy.

“Taiga, what happened in there?”

“Nothin’. Just talked,” he says wrapping his arms lightly around his frame.

“Talked about what?”

“Feelings and shit,” he murmurs tiredly into his neck.

“Oh,” Aomine says, a bit disappointed. He was hoping Kagami would tell him his feelings first.

Kagami, seemingly sensing his thoughts, snuggled deeper into his shoulder. “Don't look so constipated, they didn't ask me anything yet. Just wanted to know if I was planning on…y'know.”

Aomine wraps his left arm around him, stroking at the small hairs at his neck. He also wondered if the redhead still wanted to go through with his-- plan. “So..are you?”

He doesn't say anything, just mumbles an incoherent, “Don't wanna feel like this anymore,” and detaches himself, rubbing at his red eyes. “They're making me go on meds.”

“Isn't that...good?” Aomine asks, tilting his head to the side. He's not educated much on medicine, definitely not the ones that play a part on relieving emotional pain rather than physical.

“No,” he pouts. “I don't wanna be on meds.”

“Why not? If it'll make you feel better-”

“Because then it won't be me,” he says. “It's like the meds control my emotions.”
“Taiga, I don't know much about meds but I'm sure they don't change a person that much,” he says, watching as the grown teenager kicks feebly at the ground, looking ridiculously adorable in his giant hospital gown.

“C'mere,” he grabs the redhead’s wrist and pulls him into another embrace, giving him a quick kiss next to his eye. “You'll be okay. If meds don't work, we can try something else.”

Kagami sighs. “You promise?”

Aomine chuckles at the childish display coming from the other male. “Yeah, I promise.”

True to their word, Kagami would take his first dose of antidepressants a couple days later.

Aomine watches nervously as his mom hands him the pill. The redhead looks at it sourly before swallowing it, earning a light pat on his head from Aomine’s mom as she praises him.

“Your body will need time to get used to this so you'll experience some side effects.”

“What side effects?” Kagami says.

“Well, side effects will vary from person to person. So if you think something is off just let me know, okay?”

“Okay,” he says, snuggling back into his blankets.

“And I'll be back with some tea for you later,” she says chuckling. “Seems like you lost your voice.”

“Thank you,” Kagami says sheepishly. Sinking deeper into his bed.

Aomine’s mom gives them both a pinch on the cheeks before she leaves.

“Your mom is sweet,” the male says, looking at him blankly. “Makes me wonder what happened to you.”

“Hey!” Aomine growls, playfully bonking him on the head with his fist.

Kagami laughs awkwardly, his hands wrap around Aomine’s wrist to unfold his fist, and he starts to fiddle with his fingers.

“Must be nice,” Kagami says, a tinge of sadness in his voice. He knows the redhead is trying to mask his emotions again. A habit that seemed hard for him to break, but the look of longing showed clearly in his eyes.

That was when he suddenly remembered Kagami had mentioned his mother wasn't around.

“Taiga, you said your mother left?”

Kagami looks at him with wide eyes, the grip around his hand tenses slightly, almost like he didn't want to answer. But his face softens quickly and he relaxes, going back to rubbing his thumbs into the palm of Aomine’s hand.
“Yeah,” he says, plainly.

Aomine mentally breathes out a sigh of relief knowing that the redhead was willing to open up just a little bit to him. So he decides to push a little more. “Where’d she go?”


He wanted to punch himself.

“Shit, I’m sorry. I didn't know,” he says, removing his hand from Kagami’s grasp to stroke his head and cheeks. The only way he knew how to relax him.

“Why're you apologizing?” Kagami says, frowning.

“I don't want to bring up anything you probably don't want to think about,” he says.

“It's...okay,” he takes a deep breath. “I have to talk about it eventually.”

Eventually?

Aomine gives him a puzzled look. “Wait. Does this have anything to do with your trip to America?”

Kagami nods slowly.

Did his mother pass away recently? Is that why he's been hurting?

“I'm listening, Taiga,” he ruffles his hair reassuringly.

“You'll think differently of me,” he murmurs, bringing his blanket up to hide the lower half of his face.

“Taiga, trust me. There's nothing in the world that could make me love you any less.”

Kagami gives him a reluctant look, or rather, a fearful look. Aomine gives him an encouraging nod, urging him to speak. He massages his scalp some more, hoping to ease any anxiety he might be feeling.

“Okay,” he says softly. “I--”

Suddenly there's a knock at the door, quieting Kagami. Without waiting for any further approval, the door opens. He first expects his mother to be there, but instead it's two men and a woman he doesn't recognize.

One of the men looked-- almost like an older version of Kagami. Or rather, close to it. His red hair seemed to be graying and he was shorter. The female and male behind him looked like both the male and female version of themselves. Their similarities translated well into siblings. The dark haired male was what caught Aomine off at first, he had a smug grin the moment he walked in.

“Taiga,” the oldest man said, ignoring Aomine’s presence in the room.

Aomine looks at Kagami for some type of clarification, for maybe a response back, but the redhead just sits there. His face almost like a deer in headlights and god he's never seen him so pale.

He removes his hand from Kagami’s head to nudge him gently, hoping to maybe jolt him out of it.
When he does, Kagami’s head snaps toward him in a state of panic, his body trembling slightly underneath him and nothing is louder in that moment than the unsaid words that screamed ‘Help me.’

So without thinking, Aomine does exactly that.

Chapter End Notes

Chai, Ichiro, and Kagami’s dad comes back next chapter!

Also, I have no idea how many chapters this fic will be. I didn't expect to be writing so much lmao. Nonetheless, I really do enjoy writing for you guys so thank you to those who keep reading and motivating me! I really do appreciate it! See you next chapter!
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Longer chapter to make up for the wait! One more exam to go and then I'm free!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Who the fuck are you?”

Aomine stands up from his seat and takes the few steps to greet them, blocking their line of sight to prevent them from seeing Kagami. He puffs out his chest and straightens up, knowing he didn't look all that intimidating with his right arm in a cast. Luckily, he was able to emit a menacing aura when he needed to.

The oldest man’s eyebrows knitts together, his frown lines deepening as he stared up at Aomine in question. “I'm Taiga’s father, Kagami Arata. You are?”

“Aomine Daiki,” he answers, narrowing his eyes. He wasn't sure why Kagami had objected to seeing his father, but he didn't feel the need to question it. The redhead had looked desperate; and judging from the other two that had walked in with blatant smugs on their faces, he immediately knew they meant trouble.

“I think you should leave,” Aomine says.

“Whoa whoa whoa,” the dark haired male says, stepping out from behind Arata, his hands held up in a surrendering motion. “The hospital called us, what makes you think you can kick us out?”

“I don't give a damn who called you. Tai-- Kagami doesn't wanna see you,” Aomine growls.

“Look, we all came because we’re worried. How cold-hearted do you have to be to keep us from seeing our son?” The female says, her hands clasp around Kagami’s father tightly.

A faint shimmer in his periphery catches his eyes, and he quickly notices that she’s wearing a ring on her finger. ‘Married? But wait a minute, Taiga just said his mother passed away. A stepmother?’

He buried the thought. Now wasn't the time to dwell on it. “He obviously doesn't want to see you,” Aomine doesn't budge from his spot. “Try again later.”

“This is absolutely ridiculous,” Kagami’s father says. “Taiga! Tell this buffoon to move!”

Aomine turns around to peer at Kagami. The redhead had his head downwards, refusing to acknowledge the scene in front of him.

“See? He doesn't want you here. Now get lost,” He says, gesturing toward the door.

“Taiga!” Kagami’s father shouts. “You're being completely unreasonable! We flew all this way to visit and this is how you treat us?!”

Kagami remains silent.
“Taiga! Answer me right now!”

“Honey, don't even bother. It's obvious he's being ungrateful like always. Let's just go. We can come back later,” the female coos, rubbing her husband’s arm soothingly.

“No! I came all this way to see my son! Taiga, we have to talk!”

“Fuck off! I told you he doesn't want to see you!” Aomine snaps.

“You can't keep me from seeing my own son,” the older man shouts. “I'm calling securit-”

Suddenly a loud, mocking laughter erupts from the dark haired male. “Damn, I can't believe you've gotten so damn weak, you had to get someone like him to cover your ass,” the other male shouts toward Kagami. “What a pus-”

Without allowing him to speak another word, Aomine uses his good arm to yank the male’s collar, roughly pulling him close; their noses a mere inch apart. “You call him weak one more fucking time and I’ll--”

“Daiki!” From the doorway he hears his mother’s voice screaming his name. Then out of nowhere, her hands are on his own, prying them loose from the other male’s shirt. “Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry for my son’s behavior, I don't know what came over him!”

“This is your son?” Kagami’s father asks, his voice bounces off the walls. “Control him! I had no idea my son has been hanging around such...a wild animal.”

“Yes, he's my son but-- he's not usually like this- I apologize again!” He watches in horror as his mother bows her head frantically at the guests. She quickly looks at the dark haired male and smooths out his shirt. “Are you alright? Daiki didn't cause you any harm?”

“Nah, I’m fine. But we’d really appreciate him if you kept him away while we’re here,” he says, grinning slyly at Aomine.

“Of course! Daiki, you heard him,” she says, trying to usher him out the door.

“No! Mom! Wait-- Taiga, he doesn't--”

“Daiki, you caused enough trouble! Just leave for now alright?” She says.

“Mom, you're not listening to me! Let--hey!” He cries in protest as she grabs tightly at his ear and pulls him outside the room, closing the door behind them, leaving Kagami alone with his family.

“No! Taiga--”

“Enough,” his mother says sternly. “I walk in on you about to harm a visitor and you expect me to listen to you?”

“Tch, don't listen to me then! Listen to Taiga,” Aomine begs. “You should've seen him! Mom, he doesn't want to see them!”

His mother frowns slightly. “What?”

“They were ganging up on him,” he growls. “You have to let me back in there. I told Taiga I would take care of things, I--”

“No,” his mother says.
He stares at her in awe. “What?”

“I can't let you back in there,” she shakes her head. “But I'll go back in there and try to get rid of them.”

“How?”

“I don't know! I'll make something up,” she says. “God, I feel terrible.”

“Well hurry up then!” Aomine huffs frustratedly. “Who knows what they could've said to him in the amount of time we’ve been gone.”

“Alright, alright!” She says, disappearing into Kagami’s room.

Aomine is unable to hear their conversation inside, so he waits impatiently on one of the benches in the hall. Tapping his feet restlessly and checking the clock, he tries hard not to think too much about what was going on in there, but rather, how to help Kagami when he got out.

His mind tries desperately to piece together bits of information he collected.

The woman was no doubt, married to Kagami’s father, which made the other male—Kagami’s uncle, assuming they were siblings. Or maybe, a son from another father? Another brother perhaps?

What made their relationship so sour? Why was Kagami..afraid? Normally, the redhead would be quick to defend himself. Yet he just sat there and just took it. Almost as if he felt like he deserved it.

About ten minutes past by and finally the door clicks open. Kagami’s father and his wife walks out hand in hand, an angry expression on their face as they walk with purpose down the hall.

His mother, clearly distressed, walks out of the room. The smug guy follows behind her, shrugging. “Sorry it had to be like this.”

The dark haired male catches Aomine’s eye and winks at him, before heading in the direction of Kagami’s father.

“Mom?” Aomine stands up hurriedly to greet her. “What happened?”

“Arata-san is speaking to my boss right now,” she mutters, rubbing her temples.

“What the hell? Why?”

“He wants to change Kagami-kun’s nurse and relocate him to a different room.”

“That means?”

She huffs at him. “It means I won't be in charge of Kagami-kun anymore. It also means you won't be able to visit him whenever you please-- or at all if his father wishes.”

Aomine stares at her wide eyed. “You're saying, I can't see Taiga? Can't your boss do something?!”

“Unfortunately, if it's a request with cause then I can't do anything about it.”

“What cause?! You haven't done anything!”
“No, I haven't, but _you_ almost punched Ichiro-san!”

“I was protecting him!”

“You couldn't have done so in a _civil_ manner?”

Aomine groans loudly, biting his lip in panic. He was at a loss. He had absolutely no idea how to fix this.

“Does Taiga know?”

“Yes, he does,” she says softly. “He was there when his father announced it.”

“How is he?”

“He didn’t speak much,” she glances at his room worriedly. “Before I left, he said he wanted some alone time.”

“Well can I see--”

Before he's able to finish his sentence, he hears loud footsteps coming down the hall. An older nurse and the petite nurse were alongside Kagami’s parents. The wife smirks at him deviously as they walk past. His mother and him watch in suspense as they open the door. He hears one of the nurses speak in a sharp, strict tone.

“Kagami-san, we’re relocating you now. Come with us.”

“So soon?” He hears his mother whisper to herself.

One by one, they emerge through the door. Kagami walks out last, shuffling out slowly with his hands tightly wound around his hospital gown, his eyes never leaving the ground.

Aomine rushes over quickly when an arm blocks him, and he snaps his head up to see that Ichiro bastard grinning at him widely. “Oh, also we don't want him visiting. He's pretty aggressive.”

“Wha-? You _can’t_ do that!” Aomine growls, roughly pushing the arm away. Ichiro makes a show of wincing, stumbling back before regaining his balance.

“See?”

The older nurses nod in agreement. “That can be arranged.”

Aomine’s mother shakes her head. “No, I can assure you my son isn't hostile. He's been with Kagami-kun everyday!”

She looks at the petite nurse for backup. “Please! Tell them Lisa!”

Lisa looks up at her and then to Ichiro, who flashes her a blinding smile. She blushes and looks down, shifting on her feet nervously. “H-he is quite r-rude to me sometimes.”

“C’mon!” Aomine groans. “This is bullshit! You can't do this to him! He _needs_ me!”

“Mental therapy and family support is all he needs for now,” the older nurse says matter-of-factly. “Now that his family is here, you don't need to hang around the hospital any longer. You were discharged days ago.”
“I didn't ask for your god damn opinion!” Aomine snaps. He takes a few steps toward Kagami before he’s blocked off by Ichiro and his father. “Fucking move!”

“Control your son!” Kagami’s father demands.

“Shut up!” Aomine snarls, craning his head to get a glimpse of Kagami, who’s hidden well behind Ichiro. “Taiga-- Taiga you have to tell them to let me be there for you.”

“Taiga isn't in his right mind as of now,” Ichiro says, the sly grin still on his face. “He's not capable of making rational decisions. Isn't that why he kept you around all this time?”

“Why you-- I’ll fucking kill you!” Aomine grabs the collar of his shirt again. This time forcefully shoving him to a nearby wall as screams around him erupt in terror, calling attention to other. Hands are grabbing wildly at his shoulder but he’s too livid to care or to notice as he pries himself away rather easily, letting his temperament control himself, ignoring all logic.

His blurry focus was on the man before him, frozen from shock and trapped between the wall and Aomine. He raises his fist, and with no wasted movement, he releases; expending all his strength into his fingers, feeling a satisfying (but painful) thwack against his fist.

The body in front of him tumbles to the ground and then he realizes something. Rather than seeing black, he sees--

“Taiga!” Aomine yells. The redhead crumples in pain on the floor, his hands grabbing at his head and Aomine kneels down before him, his hands hovering above him not knowing what to do. “Fuck! Taiga, I'm so sorry, I thought I--”

Kagami waves at him dismissively. “S’o--k, just… tried t’..stop..y..ou, but.. came..too.. late.”

Aomine attempts to hold him but strong arms grab him first, hoisting him up quickly as Aomine struggles wildly against them. “Let me go! Taiga-!”

“Get him out! Now!” they shout.

And then they drag him. Pulling him away from the scene, from his mom who watched in horror at him being taken away, from Ichiro and his sister who smirked at him from afar, from Kagami who still laid helplessly on the ground as nurses huddled around him.

And he screams at them to let him go, he has to help Kagami, because he made a promise. A very important promise. He promised him he would take care of things, he promised him he would carry his weight, he promised he would be there.

But they ignore his protests, continuously dragging him against his will until he’s brought to the entrance doors and then thrown out roughly.

He scrambles back to the door in order to catch a final glimpse of Kagami, but the door closes.

“Dai-chan, please open the door,” she says, knocks follow afterward, persistent and so god damn annoying. Unfortunately, this has been the routine for days now.

He wishes everyone would just leave him alone.
“Aominecchi, It's been over a week now,” Kise says. “Everyone is worried.”

He curls tighter in his blankets, yearning to fill in the emptiness beside him.

“At-chan…” she calls again, her voice steady, but soft.

He can't bare to face her now. Not her, not Kise, not Kuroko, not anyone.

“Aominecchi, please open the door!” Kise whines, jiggling the door handle.

Aomine remains stubbornly still. He didn't have the will to protest. Like the other days, they'll leave eventually.

And they do.

Finally finding solace in the silence, he wills himself to sleep again. The throbbing pain in his left hand doesn't allow him to escape from his present thoughts, painfully reminding him of his punishment.

He wondered if it was his punishment as much as it were Kagami’s. After all, Kagami had taken most of the beating. Literally.

He buries his head deeper into the pillows, gritting his teeth as he thinks back to the day Kagami finally allowed him to take a step closer, to close the distance just a little more; how Aomine had told him he would carry the weight for him, and how now, he knew all the weight had been dumped back on the poor redhead to deal with on his own.

He couldn't bare it.

Roughly tossing the blanket aside, he kicks at magazines littered on the floor, knocks down knick knacks, and figures on his shelf in aggravation at his own failure, his limbs meeting any nearby object that fell victim to his outburst.

“Damn it. Fucking damn it,” he chokes out, slumping down to curl himself in a ball, wiping angrily at the wetness collecting in his eyes.

He was afraid. Afraid the redhead wasn't taking care of himself, afraid his family was harassing him, afraid he would do something impulsive.

What scared him was, he knew the Kagami now was totally capable of it.

Aomine sighed heavily, lifting his head up to scan the dark room, now scattered with his belongings. He spots his cell phone, parts of it chipped and cracked from the car accident before, but he didn't care much for it. He picks it up and eyes the phone strap Kagami gave him, smiling slightly at the little charm. When suddenly--something clicks.

If Kagami was released from the hospital now, surely he would have his phone with him. Unless his step mom had taken it.

However, if he were right, there could be a chance the redhead had texted him. If not, Aomine could try and text him in hopes of getting a response. There wasn't much of a chance, but he’d rather try than sit and mope.

Deeming his cell phone unusable, he puts it to the side for a moment and pulls out his laptop from underneath his bed. Luckily, all his messages and contacts were synced in, so figuring out
Kagami’s number would be easy.

Turning it on, he inserts his password and quickly opens the messaging app. There were messages from before the car accident, so he sits and waits impatiently as his laptop takes time to sync and load the recent messages.

And then it happens. Kagami’s name at the very top in his recent messages. The number on the side indicating a multiple messages from him over a span of a week now. He quickly looks at the date received and finds that Kagami’s most recent message was sent just yesterday, and he inhales sharply. He takes a few seconds to mentally prepare himself before double clicking.

Hey.

Idk if ur phone is still ok or not but I thought I'd send somethin anyways. I hope you're healing up well.

----

Btw, I am ok. I'm guessin u prob feel bad about punching me so just wanted 2 tell u.

---

Hey Aomine.

I wanted to apologize for what happened. It's my fault you got kicked out. I shouldn't have asked you to do that. I'm really sorry.

---

It was rly selfish of me. I can't stop thinking about it. I get if ur still mad. I'm sorry.

---

I don't like the meds. They make me feel sick. I don't want to take them anymore.

---

Therapy isn't working either. Idk what to do. The doctor keeps telling me to talk about my feelings but I'm trying. I think the nurses are getting impatient with me.

---

He's leaving me here 2 go back 2 America 4 work. Ichiro & Chai are staying to watch me.

---

He left. Ichiro & Chai won't leave me alone.

---

The docs are letting me go home 2day. Ichiro & Chai are staying with me. Oi, Aomine, when are u getting ur phone fixed?

***fixed.

---
They keep saying something is wrong with me. Is there something wrong with me?
---
Do I drag ppl down?
---
The only time they let me leave my room is if I need 2 take a shit or go 2 therapy.
---
I miss you.
---
Aomine,
I don't know if I can do this anymore. There's no one here.
---
Aomine,
I need help. I feel like I'm going crazy. I'm trying to stay strong but I can't handle it.
---
I'm really sorry.

Aomine sits for a moment, baffled at what he just read. And then it hits him. Kagami was going to
do something incredibly stupid. He looks at the time stamp again, murmuring curses as he realizes
again that the last couple messages were sent yesterday.

He scrambles up, unlocking and rushing out the door like a maniac when he spots Satsuki and Kise
walking back through his front door, most likely to try and get him to eat dinner.

Their eyes widen at the sight of him, disheveled and panicked, and they run quickly toward him.

“Satsuki! Taiga--he’s gonna-,” he gasps. “He could've-!”

“Wait, Aominecchi! Calm down,” Kise says, rubbing his back. “What's going on?”

Aomine then realizes another thing. If the redhead reached out to him, that meant there was a
possibility he could’ve had contact with the others. However, over a week had already passed. If
there were any form of communication with Kagami, he was sure they would've told him.

“Messages! He sent me messages, and-- I think he might kill himself,” he stammers. The other two
stare at him with concerned faces. Satsuki quickly whips out her cellphone and dials a number,
looking at him with a serious expression.

“Show us the messages,” she says, bringing the phone to her ears.

Aomine leads them to his room and shows them his laptop. Their faces darkening as they scroll
down. Shortly after, Satsuki leaves the room as she speaks to someone on the phone.
Kise pulls out his phone and hands it to him. “Try calling him. While you do that, I'll try texting him on your laptop.”

Aomine nods, grabbing his phone as Kise starts typing furiously on his laptop.

Immediately, his phone goes straight to voicemail, leaving him speechless and on full-on panic mode.

“Did he respond?” Aomine asks, hurriedly.

“No! I just sent the message!”

“Shit, this is taking fucking forever,” Aomine says, grabbing a nearby jacket and heading out the door.

“Wait! Aominecchi! Where are you--”

“To his place!”

“Dai-chan! Wait!--”

“I don't fucking care. Come with me or don't, I need to see him!” he barks, sprinting out the door.

Unused to the amount of energy he was expending, he feels his lungs burning and his ribcage throbbing, but he ignores it, just keeps pushing forward as fast as his long limbs can take him. He hears Kise trying to keep up with him from behind.

“Aominecchi! Wait!!”

He cursed loudly and halts, skidding to a stop. “My boyfriend could be dead and you want me to wait?” He growls.

Kise pants loudly, finally catching up to him. “The train is faster!”

“You think I have time to wait around for a god damn train?!”

“Well do you think you can outrun a train?!” Kise jabs.

He grunts in frustration and runs toward the train station. With a stroke of luck, it was already boarding and they climb on, frantically pushing past others who murmur in annoyance.

“Momocchi just texted,” Kise says. “She says she just called the police. They'll arrive in about 10 to 15 minutes.”

He taps his foot impatiently. “At this rate, we’ll get there faster.”

Moments later the they arrive, and they get off, running in the direction of Kagami’s apartment complex and up the stairs. Finally making their way in front of Kagami’s door.

“Kise, you knock. If they see me they won't open the door,” he says.

Kise nods and steps in front of him, knocking on the door loudly.

It's silent.

“Keep knocking!” Aomine hisses.
Kise knocks some more, nonstop for about another ten seconds before the door swings open, and they're met with Ichiro’s scowling face.

Shoving Kise out the way, he unthinkingly throws his fist in Ichiro’s direction, and this time, it hits him square across the jaw, throwing him backwards. Stumbling on his feet, Ichiro about falls over before Aomine grabs him roughly by the shoulder and throws him on the floor.

“Where the fuck is he?” He seethes.

Ichiro coughs and laughs forcefully. “Seems like you already know where. That kid hasn't left his room in a couple days now.”

Aomine inhales sharply. Knowing that if something happened, these fuckers wouldn't have known. Aomine shoves him back on the ground before he gets up and runs in the direction of Kagami’s room.

He opens the door and finds that it swings open easily and he immediately steps in. His irises darting back and forth quickly to find what he's looking for.

And then he sees him.

 Barely noticeable. Red hair peeked out from beneath his covers, surrounded by empty glasses of water.

He rushes over to him quickly and removes the covers, when a putrid stench hits his nose immediately- sour and acidic. Kagami was curled up in the center, his shirt and blankets stained in bile alike. He pulls Kagami into his chest, cradling him, but his body just falls limp in his arms, and Aomine’s heart stops.

“Nononono,” he chants frantically. He gently shakes the boy, but his body remains still. Footsteps behind him imply that Kise is there, and he turns around to see him and Ichiro standing there, their faces mirrored in shock.

“Kise, what the fuck do I do, he's not moving,” he croaks, shaking Kagami again, this time harder.

“Taiga, c’mon. Wake up. I’m begging you.”

He presses kisses onto his forehead, his nose, his lips, hoping to transfer some life back into him, hoping to get a reaction, a movement, anything out of him, but it's pointless; Kagami lays perfectly still and unmoving in his arms.

“Don't do this to me,” he rasps out, tears streaming down his face. “Fuck, I’m--”

Burying his head into the crook of Kagami’s neck, he wraps his arms around him tightly. His body shakes with violent sobs, and Kise joins him shortly after, crying and wailing as Ichiro stammers in shock about how he didn't know, it wasn't his fault, he didn't do anything.

Then suddenly, the body underneath him moves. He snaps his head back up, eyeing Kagami carefully. When he swears he felt something, it happens again. Kagami’s chest heaves in a heavy breath, slow and steady, as if he were sighing. His eyebrows scrunched up in pain and a soft groan is heard from his lips.

“Taiga?!” Aomine's voice cracks in a low whisper, his hand go to hold the boy's face.

Bleary red eyes blink. Once. Twice. And then they're opened; unfocused and empty but opened. Kagami looks at him tiredly, his mouth parted slightly.
“Dai…?”

Before he's able to finish, Aomine pulls him in for another loving embrace, placing multiple wet kisses down his face and neck.

“Jesus Christ, don't scare me like that Taiga,” he says, still choking over his sobs. “Fuck, I thought I lost you.”

Kagami laughs weakly, muttering a barely audible, “I was just sleeping dumbass.”

“Kagamicchi is okay!” Kise exclaims, crying tears of both relief and happiness, he waddles over to them both, smothering them in a tight hug. “I'm so glad!”

“Oi, Kise! You're crushing him!”

Kagami squirms in his arms, another groan emitting from his lips, signaling Aomine. In response, he pushes Kise away, as he cries in protest.

“That's enough,” he growls. Looking back down at Kagami, he knits his brow together in worry. “Where are you hurting?”

The redhead brings his hand over his stomach.

“You-- did you overdose?”

Kagami shakes his head.

“Don't lie to me Taiga,” Aomine says sternly. “I saw your messages.”

The male’s eyes widens a bit in understanding, and then his expression softens.’I didn't overdose on anything.”

“But--”

“Daiki!”

The voice surprises him and he turns around to see his mother there at the doorway, her face contorted into a mixture of frenzy and worry. A couple police officers and a paramedic were approaching from behind who politely urge her to step aside.

They kneel down in front of them, his mother hovering closely behind.

“We got a call for a suicide attempt?” The older police officer asks. “You're Kagami Taiga?”

“Look, I just wanna say that none of this is my fault!” Ichiro cries loudly.

The other officer gives him a look and stands up, arms crossing over his chest. “You're his guardian?”

“No-- well yeah--kinda? I mean I had to stay here cause his dad is back in America, but my sister-”

“Just answer the question. Are you or are you not this boy’s guardian?”

“Uhm, yes sir, I am,” Ichiro says sheepishly.
“Alright, let’s walk out there and have a talk. I need to ask a few questions,” the officer says, walking out the room.

Ichiro mumbles a curse and shuffles after him.

Meanwhile the older officer turns his attention back on Kagami, smiling warmly. “Alright kiddo. We’re taking you to the hospital first. You don’t look too good. Can you get up?”

Kagami nods slightly. “I think so.”

They help him up slowly, leading him out the door and toward the building’s exit. Kise and Aomine’s mother follow them closely, his mother shouting encouraging words from behind. As they make their way out the door, they run into Chai, who’s holding multiple shopping bags. When she sees them, she gasps dramatically.

“Oh! Taiga! What in the world happened to you?”

“And you are?” The paramedic asks.

“He’s my stepson,” she says, her tone showcasing a bit of annoyance. She steps forward with her arms outreached toward Kagami, and he immediately staggers backwards, startling both Aomine and the paramedic.

“Fuck off you hag,” Aomine hisses, stepping in front of Kagami.

“You're just gonna let him talk to me like this?” She cries, directing her sharp gaze to the paramedic. “What's the meaning of this? You can't just take my son!”

From behind, the older officer walks up behind them. He takes a moment to observe the situation and then intervenes.

“Okay, yeah, control yourself,” the office says, gesturing toward Aomine. He signals the paramedics to continue leading Kagami to the ambulance, his mother follows after them, and Kise stays back with Aomine.

“This young man received a message that indicated your son was going to attempt suicide. We arrived to investigate it,” he cleared his throat. “It's unclear whether or not he has done anything. But from our understanding, he was found covered in bile.”

Chai, yet again, makes a show of gasping dramatically, earning a groan from Aomine.

“I had no idea this was happening!”

The police officer eyes her shopping bags warily. “Clearly.”

“He seemed fine to me! Look, he's been having trouble with his mental health lately and I tried to be there. He just refused to listen!”

“I've taken a look at the scene and talked to your brother. It is to my knowledge you were tasked with the job to monitor your son. You deliberately isolated him, did not feed him, and it looks like you were aware of his condition. There's dried bile everywhere. You allowed him to live in those conditions for almost two weeks now.”

“Look, I told you, I tried. He refused to eat and the medications he's prescribed are what's killing him more than anything,” she scoffs. “My brother and I did what we could.”
“Bullshit,” Aomine barks. “You assholes demoralized him! I've got the messages to prove it!”

“We did nothing but be honest with him!” She snaps back. “I'm not the one that gave him a concussion!”

“What the hell does that have to do with anything?!”

“Because you've got a violent streak just like him! One day you might even end up killing someone just like he did!”

Aomine freezes. “He wha-?”

“Alright alright, we’ll be doing more investigating. In any case, this just sounds like a case of neglect,” the officer says. “In the meantime, let’s get Kagami looked at, okay?”

They both nod, Aomine still in a daze, walks toward the ambulance. Kise grabs his arm and drops his voice to a low whisper.

“Did you know about this?”

“.huh?”

“Kagamicchi killed someone?”

“How the fuck should I know?” He seethes, yanking his arm out from Kise’s grip.

“Do you believe it? They could be lying,” Kise says.

Aomine goes silent. Knowing their personalities, they've already lost credibility. It was highly possible they were lying. However, it would explain a lot if it were true. The mistreatment, Kagami’s depression and sudden disappearance. Oddly enough, it made sense-- and he hoped to God it wouldn't.

“I'll meet you at the hospital,” Kise says, smiling slightly.

Aomine mumbles an okay and scrambles onto the ambulance.

His mother is sitting next to a half asleep Kagami who laid across the stretcher, stroking his hair as the redhead struggles to keep his eyes open.

“Daiki, I need you to stay home.”

“What?!”

“You’re grounded, remember?” She says, raising an eyebrow. “I'll let this time slide, but you can't go without punishment just because Kagami-kun is being taken to the hospital.”

“You're fucking kidding right?”

“Does it look like I am?”

“I've already been stuck in my room for two weeks now!”

“One, you chose to lock yourself in your room,” she says, holding up a finger. “And two, I said you were grounded for a month.”
“Wha- Taiga! Tell my mom you want me to come with you,” he says.

“Mmm,” Kagami groans in response, turning on his side. “I wanna throw up.”

The paramedic walks back in just in time to hand him a small waste bucket. “We’re about ready to head out now.”

His mother turns her head to look at him. “Off.”

“But--”

“Off, Daiki.”

Aomine clicks his tongue in annoyance, but complies. He walks over to Kagami who's now sitting, hunched over the bucket he's hugging around his chest, and kneels down so he meets his eyes.

He says lowly, “I'll see you in a bit, okay?”

Ruby eyes meet deep blue, searching for truth in his words. For a short moment, Aomine senses fear in the other male--fear of being left alone again. As quickly as it appears, it vanishes, and Kagami nods slowly.

Aomine smiles fondly at him and ruffles his hair. “Good.”

With a little peace of mind, he hops off. The paramedics shut the doors and not long after, drives off. He looks around to see that the police officers and Chai were nowhere to be found.

“Aominecchi? You're not going?” Kise calls from behind. He turns around to see him jogging up to him.

“Mom wanted me to stay home,” he grumbles. “Even though I practically saved his ass.”

“You also got yourself kicked out of the hospital,” he says. “They probably don't want you back in there anytime soon anyways.”

“Shut up okay?! Those bastards deserve a beating of a lifetime,” he growls, feeling anger rising within his chest again. “And I'm not finished with them either.”

“Look, I understand you're angry that they treated Kagamicchi this way, but don't you think getting too involved would make the problem worse?” Kise asks warily.

“If we hadn't found the messages, Taiga could've died,” Aomine says, trying to maintain his composure. “He can't defend himself against them because they did something to him, so I'll do it.”

“Maybe they're holding something over him,” Kise says, his eyes widening.

“Huh?”

“Maybe they're holding something against him and that's why Kagamicchi can't do anything!” Kise proclaims. “Nothing silences a person like guilt. Maybe Kagamicchi feels like he owes them?”

“So what are you saying?” Aomine says, narrowing his eyes.

“What if his stepmom was telling the truth? What if Kagamicchi really did kill someone?”

Aomine quiets for a moment, but quickly speaks up to mask the uncertainty and doubt. “That's
ridiculous. You think that idiot is smart enough to get away with murder?"

“Not unless it was an accident,” Kise says.

“So what you're saying is, Taiga went to America, accidentally killed a man, and then his shitty
family helped cover his tracks?”

“That would explain the depression and guilt when he returned, wouldn't it? Not to mention, he
stayed there longer than intended and he cut off contact.”

A period of silence washes over them as Aomine ponders the thought, but he brushes it off quickly.
“Well if you think it's true, why don't you go ask them?”

“It was just an idea!” Kise says. “It's probably not even true! But we both know Kagamicchi isn't
the type of person to let other people treat him like that. It was the most plausible reason!”

“You sound like an idiot,” Aomine mutters, walking in the direction of the train station. He's a bit
irritated when he hears Kise’s footsteps echoing behind him.

“You have a better explanation?”

“Yeah. Taiga is suffering from depression or whatever and those assholes are being dicks to him.”

“That's not a bad explanation either,” Kise mutters. “But there are holes in that theory.”

“Like what?”

“It doesn't explain why Kagamicchi let them walk all over him.”

“Is it really necessary to have a reason for that? Taiga needed help and they couldn't help him. End
of story.”

“It also doesn't explain why he was depressed in the first place!”

Aomine feigns ignorance. He did remember Kagami mentioning his mother back at the hospital a
couple weeks ago. He did assume maybe the redhead lost his mother just recently and was
grieving. However, he never had a chance to confirm his suspicions, and he definitely didn't want
to jump to any conclusions. Keeping his mouth shut was the only option for now.

“Let's talk to everyone else and get their opinion!” Kise says.

“We’re not going around telling people that Taiga killed someone.”

“Then let's talk to Kurokocchi! No one knows Kagamicchi better than he does!”

else!”

“Alright, alright!” Kise says. “I'll text him right now!”

They board the train like normal, riding in silence. Aomine couldn't help but go deep in thought,
mulling over Kise’s theory. As stupid as it sounded, he knew it would explain a lot of Kagami’s
current behaviors. Whatever had happened was heavy enough to twist Kagami into the person he
was today-- Insecure, fragile, and empty.

It was hard to imagine that same male running freely around a court, laughing and taunting, facing
opponents of all types. The Kagami now would surely break down in that environment.

Back home, they're greeted by Satsuki who waited patiently for their return. Upon their arrival, she had cried and squeezed them tightly, babbling on about how worried she was, how she was angry that no one bothered to text and keep her updated.

Aomine patted her head and hugged her back, grateful that she bothered to call the police in the first place. They sat around the dining table, catching her up on what had happened soon after.

“Kagamin is okay?!”

“He didn't look too good, but yeah he's alive,” Aomine says.

“He gave us a heart attack, we really thought he was dead! You should've seen Aominecchi, he was bawling like a little baby!”

“Shut up! You were crying too!”

“Not as much as you!”

“Are you serious right now?!”

Satsuki laughs, patting them both on the shoulder. “I'm just glad everything is okay now.”

Kise’s phone buzzes loudly in his pocket and he takes it out. “Kurokocchi texted me back!”

“Tetsu-kun? What did he say?”

“I told him earlier that Kagamicchi was admitted into the hospital again and asked him if he was free to talk sometime soon,” Kise says, typing into his phone again. “Looks like he's with Kagamicchi now and he'll be free to talk tomorrow!”

“He's with Taiga?” Aomine asks, frowning. “What the fuck?”

“Well I figured Kagamicchi would feel better if he were there. Since y’know, you can't be there,” Kise coughs awkwardly.

“Tch, damn that Tetsu.”

“Suddenly the jealous type I see,” Satsuki teases, propping her chin on her hands.

“I'm not jealous!”

“Sure you aren't,” she says rolling her eyes. “So what are you talking to Tetsu-kun about?”

“Theories!” Kise says. “Aominecchi wants it to be top secret though.”

“Hey! Don’t just expose me like that!”

“What theories?” Satsuki says, perking up. “Dai-chan, you didn't want to tell me?”

Aomine just sinks into his chair in an attempt to hide himself.

“It's fine telling her, right? I mean she was the one that called the cops in the first place.”

“Do whatever you want,” he grumbles.
Kise visibly beams at that and turns to Satsuki happily. “You're welcome to join us tomorrow! But Aominecchi wants you to keep quiet about it.”

“Easy! So what's this about theories?”

“I'll explain tomorrow,” Kise says. “It's getting pretty late now, so I should head on home.”

Satsuki’s expression drops, her lower lip sticks out in a pout. “Okay.”

“I’ll see you guys tomorrow?”

“Unfortunately,” Aomine mutters, earning a smack upside the head from Satsuki.

“Yes, we'll see you tomorrow,” she says, smiling angelically.

Kise waves goodbye and departs, leaving Aomine and Satsuki alone. He lets out a heavy sigh and lays his head face-down on the table.

Warms, dainty hands rub circles into his back.

“Satsuki,” He mutters into the table.

“Hm?”

“Am I doing the right thing?”

“What do you mean?” She says.

He sighs, turning his head to look up at her. “Kise says I might make the problem worse by getting too involved.”

“Well how involved did you want to get?”

“I wanna talk to em.”

“And say?”

“I dunno. Whatever I need to say to get them to leave Taiga alone.”

“In that case, yes I think you're going too far.”

“How? I’m helping him!”

“By what- eliminating everything evil that touches Kagamin?”

“I have to protect him!”

“You're supposed to bring back his old self, not fight his battles!”

“So you just want me leave him to fend for himself?” Aomine spats, glaring coldly at her.

“No, I’m saying you need to share your strengths, not be his strength!”

“What's wrong with being his strength during times like this? People who are supposed to be loving and nurturing him are ruining him and you want me to sit around and wait for him to gather up the courage to fight?!” He barks, slamming his fist on the table.
“Dai-chan, you're not *listening* to me!” She says, slapping him across the face, hard.

“Ow! What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

She stares down at him, tears welling in her eyes that threaten to fall down, but she maintains her composure.

“You're so occupied with wanting to be his hero that you're not looking at the big picture,” Satsuki’s says. “Let's say you are his strength and you've vanquished all evil--Then something happens to you. What do you think would happen to Kagamin?”

Aomine looks down, pondering the thought. His ego screams, ‘nothing would happen to me,’ but realistically, anything was possible-- And he knew if he was Kagami’s only lifeline, he would inevitably crumble alongside him. He didn't want that to happen.

“He would-- be sad I guess.”

“Yes, and this whole fiasco would start all over again. And when that happens, it'll be *your* fault.”

Aomine sighs, rubbing at the throbbing pain on his cheek. “I get it. Bring him back to his former self, but how the hell am I supposed to do that? He can't play basketball.”

Satsuki smiles slightly and sits back down. “Well for starters, it seems like Kagamin is lacking confidence in himself. So maybe remind him about his good points once in awhile?”

“You mean like compliment him?”

“That should be easy for you right? Since you're so enamored by him anyways.”

“Tch. He'd think there was something wrong with me if I started saying things like that out of the blue.”

Satsuki giggles, possibly imagining a flustered Aomine tripping over his words. “I'm sure Kagamin would appreciate the effort.”

“Then… I'll try.”

She grins triumphantly, rubbing at his reddened cheek. “You both are idiots, honestly. Always causing trouble.”

Aomine hums in thought, muttering, “Well he's worth the trouble.”

“I didn't think you'd find anything else you loved more than basketball.”

“You saying I would've been lonely?”

“You had the potential, yeah,” she says laughing at the scowl he returned. “I'm going to head back too, but I'll come back bright and early tomorrow!”

He makes a noise in understanding, waving her off.

Satsuki nags him about his eating habits before she leaves. Since old habits die hard, he walks back to his room, thinking that the earlier he slept, the earlier he'll be able to see Kagami.

He spots the laptop lying on the floor and he turns it back on, opening the messages from him Kagami. There were messages that Kise had sent earlier, an enormous spam of “Don’t do it!!!!!
Kagamicchi's lined the chat. But at that moment, a notification pops up, indicating a new message from Kagami.

He quickly scrolls to the bottom, heart pounding at the thought of being able to speak with him while he's grounded.

Once he reaches the most recent messages, he inhales sharply. In big bold letters, read:

**Let’s talk.**

-Ichiro

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! Thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

Pretty relaxed (mainly fluff) to calm the heart of the last few chapters phew. Probably will pick up again next chapter! Enjoy, it's another long one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Achoo!”

A shiver coursed through his body as he sniffed his way to Maji. The weather was beginning to get cooler, often raining most days that induced sleep in the taller male. It certainly didn't help that he was bedridden due to a cold for the past few days. It was his fault for neglecting the most basic of human needs within the past couple weeks he spent cooped up in his room. Besides sleep-- he's gotten plenty of that.

“Dai-chan, where's your jacket?” Satsuki asks, looking at him worriedly.

He sniffs again. “I'm already wearing a jacket.”

“Not your school jacket, the one that makes you look like a marshmallow,” she says.

“Oh,” he sneezes loudly again, rubbing his nose. “Couldn't find it.”

Satsuki lets out a sigh. “Do you want me to call Tetsu-kun? Maybe you should go back home and rest. It's already pretty late.”

Aomine groans, straightening his posture to signify that he's well enough to continue. “I'm fine. We already canceled once, we're not doing it again.”

Satsuki eyes him warily then gives him a reluctant nod. “Alright. Let's make this quick then.”

There's a warning rumble of thunder before it slowly starts to rain, urging the two to make haste to Maji.

Once they arrive, Aomine basks in the warmth (and smell) of the fast food joint. Strangely enough, it felt sort of homey. He had missed the smell of burgers-- it reminded him of a certain someone. If and when he was reunited with the redhead again, this would be the first place he’d want to go.

He's greeted by the sight of Kise and Kuroko waiting in a booth in the corner of the restaurant, far enough from the other patrons to prevent anyone from eavesdropping. He trots over and sits himself down, and immediately slumps down in his seat.

“Hey,” he says, nonchalantly.

“Aominecchi, you still look terrible,” Kise says.

“Shut up.”

“So rude! I’m not allowed to be worried?!”
“Tch, fucking gross,” Aomine makes a disgusted face, turning away slightly.

“Good afternoon, Aomine-kun,” Kuroko says, a slight smile on his face. “I'll have to agree with Kise-kun, you don't look too well.”

“It’s fine, I already took meds so it'll pass,” he shrugs.

Satsuki skips toward them carrying a tray of food in her arms. She hands Aomine a burger and sits down, smiling widely at Kuroko.

“Tetsu-kun! I'm glad you could make it!”

He returns her smile and nods. “It's no problem.”

“Did you visit Kagamin in the hospital again today?”

Kuroko shakes his head. “I was planning on visiting again today.”

Aomine leans forward automatically, his mouth forming words before he's able to comprehend what he's saying. “How's Taiga?”

“Your mother told me he was a bit dehydrated and malnourished. It seems like he's also experiencing some bad side effects from the medication he's on,” Kuroko says, a flicker of worry in the usual blank irises. “Nurses seem strict on his visiting hours. He's asleep when I'm there and when he's awake he's speaking privately with his doctors. But I'm sure he'll be fine.”

“You sure? You don't look too confident,” Aomine says, lowly.

“Yes, he'll be okay. It's just a bit alarming to see his physique change so much in such a little amount of time,” Kuroko adds, the expression on his face noticeably falling.

“Weight is something he can put back on easily,” Aomine unwraps his burger, taking a hefty bite and chewing. “Considering the amount of food he eats normally, I'd say weight is the least of his worries.”

Kuroko stares with calculating eyes, and then smiles. “Well if you're not too worried about it, I guess I shouldn't be either.”

Aomine nods, hoping he really was masking the fact that he actually was worried. Maybe the most worried out of everyone.

“Maybe I can cook him something when he's released!” Satsuki chirps brightly.

“Then he'll really die.”

Satsuki smacks him upside the head, causing a choking fit from the tanned male. “You want me to die?!?”

“That was very uncalled for!” She huffs, collecting herself. She clears her throat and leans onto her elbows, a look of interest on her face. “So what are we talking about?”

Kuroko looks at Kise for clarification, who then looks at Aomine.

“What?” Aomine mutters.

“You don't want to tell them?”
“You assembled this meeting,” Aomine says, taking another mouthful of burger. “You start it.”

“Okay!” Kise says. “We came up-”

“You came up with a theory,” Aomine interjects.

“Whatever,” Kise rolls his eyes. “We came up with a theory about Kagamicchi!”

“Theory about what?” Kuroko asks, quirking an eyebrow.

“About why he's so depressed,” Kise explains. “And about why he’s so afraid of his family.”

“Oh, this is pretty interesting,” Satsuki mutters. “How'd this all start?”

“Well we ran into Kagamicchi’s stepmom on the way out and she briefly mentioned about him killing someone.”

Kuroko and Satsuki frowns. They look at each other, then look at Kise, then at Aomine.

“Did she really say that Aomine-kun?” Kuroko inquires.

Aomine shrugs. “Pretty much, yeah. ‘Said that I'd end up killing someone one day like Taiga did.’”

“That seems...far fetched,” Satsuki says. “What if she was just angry and made up a lie to throw you off?”

“But think about it, it would explain a lot of things right?” Kise urges. “I mean the disappearance, the sudden depression, and the fact that someone can silence Kagamicchi of all people? Doesn't that raise any red flags?”

There's a moment of tense silence between them. Then Kuroko clears his throat.

“I understand your viewpoint but.. Kagami-kun could just be facing a lot of verbal and emotional abuse at home,” Kuroko starts, crossing his arms over his chest. “Just because he appears tough on the outside doesn't mean he's the same on the inside. Family can weaken a person.”

“I'll have to agree with Tetsu-kun,” Satsuki says. “Kagamin may look menacing on the court but he's way too kind. It wouldn't surprise me if he were to act differently around his family.”

“Then why did his stepmom say that? She can make up lies but why that lie?” Kise says. “Why choose something as extreme as killing if it didn't mean anything?”

“Cover up a bad action with something worse?” Satsuki adds, more of a question than a comment. “Maybe she was trying to avert your attention to something else so you won't look at her.”

Kise sighs exasperatedly. “I dunno, I still feel like something's off.”

Kuroko and Satsuki look at Aomine, an expectant look on their faces.

“So? What do you think Dai-chan? You've been awfully quiet.”

Aomine stares at his half eaten burger, carefully choosing the right choice of words. He didn't want to add fuel to the fire, or rather, he didn't want to say anything that might rile Kise up.

“I think...it has to do with his mother,” Aomine mutters.
“Kagamin’s mother?”

He nods.

“Hmm,” Satsuki hums thoughtfully. “It's not a bad guess. When Kagamin was having a breakdown, he did mention missing ‘her.’”

“Oh, I forgot about that!” Kise exclaims. “You think he…”

“He did not kill his own mother! What the fuck is wrong with you?” Aomine barks.

“It was just a theory!” Kise pouts, slumping in his seat in defeat.

“Don’t get me wrong, the theory makes sense if the allegations against him were true,” Kuroko says. “However, I don't think Kagami-kun is capable of killing someone. He may have a short temper but he's never one to resort to such measures.”

“I guess that's true,” Kise says, defeatedly.

“Also, it seems a bit unfair to him to sit around and make up theories when we could just ask him directly,” Kuroko adds. He turns to look at Aomine. “If not us, I'm sure he’ll at least tell you.”

Aomine sighs. “Whatever those fuckers did to him probably set us back, I'm not sure he’ll tell me anytime soon.”

“As long as he talks about it eventually,” Kuroko smiles. “Oh and I forgot to mention-- It seems like Alex-san is coming to Japan within the next week or so, and I was told by Murasakibara-san that he and Himuro-san are coming to visit.”

“Great,” Aomine mutters. The last time he had encountered Kagami’s so called “brother” was at his birthday party, and it didn't seem like they got off on the best of terms.

“I'm sure it'll be fine. It might cheer Kagamicchi up to see his second family!” Kise chimes in.

“His master is more like his second mother, isn't she?” Satsuki says, smiling. “I mean she did sort of raise him.”

Kuroko chuckles. “In a way, yes. Although, she certainly has habits that aren't necessarily what you call….maternal.”

“Americans sure are different,” Kise says, casually stealing the last bits of Aomine’s burger.

“What gives!!”

“You weren't eating it!” Kise says, making a show of stuffing the last bite into his mouth. “Such a waste.”

“I hope you get sick and die,” Aomine growls, coughing loudly into his sleeve.

“Only idiots catch colds.”

“Wanna say that again?!”

“Only idio--”

“Oh my gosh!” Satsuki exclaims, grabbing Aomine’s arm suddenly, tugging at his sleeve roughly.
“Satsu-”

“Dai-chan, is that who I think it is?” She says, her voice suddenly in a low whisper as her eyes follow someone outside the restaurant, making their way in.

Aomine looks in her direction with narrow eyes, navy irises that tail the shadow who moves slowly toward the entrance. It isn't until the dimly lit lights at the doorway reveal who the stranger is.

Kagami was shuffling awkwardly through the doorway, hands clutching at wrinkled dollar bills, and was that- was that his marshmallow jacket he was wearing?

Before he's able to think, Aomine springs up in his seat, instantly gravitating toward Kagami who doesn't notice him until Aomine shouts his name, loud and clear.

And when he does, red meets blue. There's a brief look of surprise from the male before it's replaced by a clean look of relief.

Kagami’s hands separate, his arms relax and he opens them up slightly, welcoming Aomine’s arms around his as they're reunited again.

Aomine holds him close and holds him incredibly tight, burying his face in the crook of Kagami’s neck, breathing in his scent. His hand automatically goes up to brush through his red strands, now cut in a shorter length and damp from the rain.

He takes a few moments to compose himself before speaking, afraid his voice would betray him.

“Taiga, what the hell are you doing here?” He says, ignoring the whispers and giggles coming from the other customers.

“What do you think?” Kagami mutters into his shoulder, sighing contently at Aomine’s warmth. “I go to Maji all the time.”

“Not what I meant,” Aomine says, pulling away slightly, his arms still wrapped around Kagami’s middle.

Kagami looked better, not as deathly pale as he'd found him a few days prior, but still exhausted. His eyes were also noticeably swollen and red-- he resembled more of like a panda than a tiger.

“Shouldn't you still be in the hospital? How're you feeling?” Aomine continues. “Why do you have my jacket? And why're you by yourself?”

“I was discharged, I'm fine, your mom lent it to me, and I'm not alone,” Kagami states. “Your mom is outside.”

“You sure you're okay?” Aomine asks, leaning in. “You still look--”

“Tired. I know, I know,” Kagami finishes. “But I've been wanting to get out and get some fresh air. It took me some time to convince your mom.”

Aomine snorts, rolling his eyes playfully. “You thought coming inside a greasy burger joint was gonna satisfy your need for fresh air?”

“Oh obviously I came for the food,” Kagami says, bumping his forehead against Aomine’s shoulder.

Aomine smiles widely. He never thought hearing the redhead was willing to eat again would bring him such joy. But at the same time, the sudden shift in the male was worrisome. It had him
wondering what was going on in his head.

“Wanna eat together?” Aomine asks, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

“Your mom wanted me to grab food and leave,” Kagami gestures outside. “But I guess since you're here, I can stay.”

Aomine nods. “Stay here. I'll talk to my mom.”

He directs him to the back corner of the restaurant where Satsuki, Kuroko, and Kise sat. They waved their arms fervently at Kagami, who stares at them in surprise, then heads in their direction.

At the same time, Aomine heads outside the restaurant, shielding his head from the light trickle of rain and looks left and right.

It doesn't take long to spot her, sitting in her black car, she spots him just as easily, and rolls down her window.

“Daiki! You were here? I thought you were still sick at home!”

“I didn't feel like laying around anymore,” he says, leaning his head through the opened window.

“You both are very similar,” she says, laughing. “I take it you've met Kagami-kun?”

“I did. He’s with Tetsu and the others right now.”

“That’s good! I guess since you're here, he can stay with you,” she smiles warmly at him. “Cheer him up a bit. When you're done, bring him home.”

Aomine frowns at that. “Wha- He has to go back to that place?”

“Oh, no,” she says, waving her hand. “I meant bring him home with you.”

“He's staying at our house?”

“Nothing is decided yet. We’ll talk when you get back home,” she starts her car again. “But for today, yes. He’s staying with us.”

There's a slight flutter in his chest at the thought of Kagami staying the night. It wasn't exactly under the best circumstance, but he'll take it.

“Sounds good,” he says, trying to sound casual.

“Oh, and one more thing,” she starts, leaning over. “No- uh, no type of…affection alright? You're still sick and I don't want him vomiting again.”

“Mom!”

“I'm just saying,” she says, stifling her laughter at Aomine’s flustered appearance. “Don't share your food either…And don't stay out too long! You both need to rest!”

“Okay, okay! I’m leaving now,” he grumbles, lowering his head to pull out of his mother’s car. “See you at home.”

“See you in a bit honey,” she says, giving him another warm smile.
He watches as she gives him a final wave, and then drives off.

Walking back into the restaurant, he’s met by the sight of Kise and Momoi fussing over Kagami, drawing attention of the other patrons.

“We can buy you your food, just wait here!” Kise chimes, guiding the redhead to their booth.

“No, really. It's fine, I can--”

“How many do you usually buy? Like thirty?”

“I can't eat that much!”

“Just let us treat you to something!” Satsuki urges. “It's the very least we can do for you.”

“I said it's fine, I'm fine,” Kagami says, offering an unconvincing smile. He holds up the crumpled dollar bills for them to see. “Besides, I have money.”

Kise and Satsuki give him a wary look, their mouths parted slightly ready to barrage the male with their concerns, but before they have a chance, Aomine step in quickly.

“You guys are incredibly noisy, you know that?” He growls. “If he wants to pay for his own meal, why not let him?”

“Aominecchi! It's not even a big de-ah!” He yelps as Kuroko drags him away by the ear.

“I think we should leave now. We’ll be sure to visit soon.”

“Wait, no! I wanna talk to Kagamicchi some mo-owowow!”

As they leave Maji, Aomine sighs in relief. Kise was undoubtedly, a good friend, but even he was too overbearing sometimes.

“Good riddance,” he mutters. “Satsuki, do you think that you uh-could let us be alone?”

He looks down at Satsuki, who stares at him with calculating eyes. She almost looks hurt-- pouting because she wanted to see Kagami almost as much as he did. But then she smiles and pats him on the shoulder.

“Okay, but don't stay out too late.” She turns to Kagami and pats his head. “Kagamin, take care alright? I'll see you later.”

“Yeah,” he says, nodding.

When she's gone, Aomine sits down across from him, slumping down in his seat.

“How're your ribs?” Kagami scoots closer toward the table, leaning over slightly.

“Fine, it's pretty much healed but I gotta be careful,” he says, rubbing at the area slightly.

“And your arm?”

Aomine holds up his right arm for Kagami to see, displaying the short cast still wrapped around his arm. “Getting this removed sometime this week.”

“Ah, that's good,” Kagami says, breathing a sigh of relief.
“Where did you get the money?” Aomine nods at the money bunched up in Kagami’s hands.

“Your mom wouldn't let me leave unless she came with me and paid for the meal,” he replies shyly. “I feel bad for taking it.”

“Don't be. She would've paid for it whether you wanted it or not.”

“Yeah, but--”

“No buts, just go order your burger,” he says.

Kagami gives him a look, but nods obediently, scurrying off to get in line.

Aomine watches over him carefully, noticing a few differences in the way the male interacts with his surroundings. They were subtle enough to go unnoticed by those who weren't paying proper attention, but they seemed to deter him from doing things he would normally do.

For instance, Kagami seemed to fiddle a lot more with his fingers, pulling and wrapping them around each other nervously. When it was his turn to order, his head would be dropped slightly, shoulders tensed up, and he seemed to navigate around others awkwardly-- almost like he was afraid. This was probably what Satsuki meant by Kagami's lower self confidence.

Kagami soon returns to the table holding a tray that Aomine was so accustomed to seeing a mountain of burgers on. The tray he's holding now looks jarringly empty.

“Just one burger?” Aomine asks.

“And fries,” Kagami holds the small bag out to him.

“Yeah, I see that.”

Kagami places the bag of fries back on his tray neatly, then stares down at his food, his hands folded in his lap. Aomine didn't need to see to know he was fumbling with them.

“Aren't you gonna eat?” Aomine raises an eyebrow. “What're you waiting for?”

The redhead looks back up at him for a moment, then pushes the tray forward a bit. “Want some?”

“I already ate,” he says. “Just eat.”

Kagami looks back down at his burger again, his face morphed into thought. “Are you sure this is really okay?”


He still doesn't touch his food. The redhead just stares at his burger, almost like he was offended. Aomine frowns at him, wondering why he's stressing so much over a freakin burger because surely his self confidence couldn't be that bad.

Then he realizes that maybe, just maybe Kagami felt like he was inconveniencing his mother, maybe him as well, that maybe he felt incredibly selfish for demanding something as simple as food.

Aomine stands up from his chair and seats himself next to Kagami, wrapping his arm around his waist, and giving his middle a squeeze.
“It's okay,” he says. “Go ahead and eat. I want you to.”

Kagami grabs his burger and unwraps it, careful not to tear the wrapping, then takes a bite. He chews it slowly, then swallows.

It isn't long before he gets back into his usual pace, eating quicker, alternating between bites of his fries and his burger.

“Want seconds?” Aomine says, wiping at the mess around his face.

“Is it?”

“Yes, it's okay,” He says. “I'll buy you all the burgers you want.”

Kagami gives him a weird look that quickly dissipates into a small smile. “I think I could eat a couple more.”

“Be right back.”

“Satisfied?”

Kagami hums, trudging alongside him slowly on the sidewalk. Much to Aomine's relief, the male’s gait seemed a lot less awkward around him, but he appeared awfully concentrated on something.

“You sure you're full?

Kagami nods, his eyes focusing on the path ahead.

“Taiga, tell me what you're thinking about with words.”

Kagami fiddles with the zipper on his coat a bit, then sighs. “I don't wanna go back.”

“Go back where?”

“My apartment,” he mutters.

Aomine stares at him quizzically. Did his mother not tell him? Judging by Kagami’s low expression and paler than normal appearance, he assumed she didn't.

“You have to go back?”

“I guess. I don't have money to rent a room anywhere and I don't want to burden Kuroko by staying at his house.”

‘Idiot, what about me?’ Aomine thinks, bitter that the redhead only mentioned his former shadow.

“What about my place?”

“No,” Kagami says defiantly.

“What? Why the hell not?”
“Because you and your mom already helped me enough.”

“That's a stupid reason,” Aomine crosses his arms over his chest. “What's wrong with having people help you?”

“I don't have anything to give back,” Kagami says.

“Knowing my mom, she doesn't want anything in return, and neither do I.”

“You think my conscience is all cleared just because you said that?” Kagami retorts.

“No, but I was hoping you'd consider mine,” Aomine says. “You really think I'll have a clear conscience letting you back in that place? How about my mother?”

Kagami looks down.

“You assume you're being considerate by distancing yourself from those who are close to you. In case you haven't noticed, we're all trying to keep them away from you. You think going back there saves you from being an inconvenience?” Aomine snaps.

“I know going back there solves nothing, but Aomine--I don't have anything left to give you, or your mother, or Kuroko, or anyone else,” Kagami says.

“Why're you so hung over what you can give? Taiga, we don't want anything from you-- I don't want anything from you.”

“You don't understand,” he mutters. “I don't have anything. I can't play basketball with you, I can't cook for you, I can't be around you without feeling like I'm taking advantage of you, hell, I can't even love you properly, Aomine. At this rate, I'll just drag you and everyone else down.”

Aomine freezes. The fog clouding his mind has cleared up now that he finally understands why Kagami hasn't been saying those three important words to him.

Aomine sighs, all the anger in his body replaced with more understanding as another puzzle piece fell into place. He knew the redhead would stay at his house regardless, but he wanted Kagami to allow himself to make that choice himself.

He closes the distance between the two and drops his head on Kagami’s frail shoulders, nuzzling his head.

“Look,” Aomine starts, wrapping his arms around the male. “Basketball will always be there. Don't worry about that. We have all the time left in the world to play.”

He places a kiss on the boy’s nose.

“And about your cooking. It's true that your cooking is fucking amazing but I've lived most of my life without it. I can survive a little longer.”

He places another kiss on his cheek.

“Don't worry about me. Allowing me to love you already makes me happy. I already know your feelings and I'm a pretty patient guy.”

Finally, a quick kiss on the lips.

“Lastly, I don't need anything from you. You're enough. Taiga, you're more than enough. So stop
worrying about being a burden and just be selfish for once.”

Kagami stares wide-eyed at him. His mouth gaped open in surprise. Then as the weight of Aomine’s words hit him, he buries his face into Aomine’s neck.

“Fuck. You're so embarrassing.”

“You asked for it,” Aomine smirks into his hair, tightening his grip around him. “So be honest with me. What do you really wanna do?”

Kagami mutters something incoherently.

“Say again?”

“..ay..i.th.....ou.”

“Speak louder dumbass, I can't hear you.”

“I said I wanna stay with you,” Kagami grumbles.

Aomine chuckles, pulling away, letting his hand slip into Kagami’s own. “Glad to hear it. Let’s get you home then, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

They soon arrive at his place. A rather medium-sized house that matched with the other’s in the neighborhood. White exterior with brown frames with a balcony, it was rather simplistic looking on the outside, but it had a comforting presence about it.

Aomine ushered Kagami inside, kicking off his shoes at the entrance (besides Kagami who neatly placed his on the rack.)

He sneezed loudly before declaring, “I’m home!”

“Sorry for intruding,” Kagami says sheepishly, awkwardly looking around. He removes the marshmallow jacket and hangs it on the coat rack beside them.

Loud footsteps approach them both from the living room. His father greeted them with his usual stern expression, however his eyebrows turned up slightly, offering a kinder look when he noticed Kagami.

“Wellcome home, Daiki,” he says, turning his gaze to Kagami, he smiles. “You must be Kagami Taiga. I’m Aomine Hiroto. I’ve heard a lot of things about you. Please, just make yourself at home.”

“Thank you,” Kagami says, offering a slight smile.

Hiroto nods and gestures for them both to follow. He glances at Aomine briefly. “Your mother is still setting up upstairs but she should be done soon.”

Aomine huffed knowing that he and Kagami would have to sleep separately. Yes, he's fully aware
that sleeping together would cause suspicions to arise from his father, but still-- he wasn't sure if Kagami would be okay sleeping by himself. Also, he really missed feeling the redhead’s body curled up against his own.

“Oh, Kagami-kun, I'm aware you don't have any of your belongings with you. I was able to find some of my old clothes for you to wear. I figured it would be better than wearing Daiki’s dirty laundry. I placed them in the guest room,” his father says.

“Wh-- Thank you,” Kagami says softly. “I'm sorry for the trouble.”

“It's not a problem at all,” Hiroto gives him a comforting pat on the shoulder. “If you need anything else, just let me know.”

A sequence of heavy thuds come from the floor above them, clanks and rustling sounds echoes down the stairway and before long, Aomine’s mother comes shuffling down. Her arms were wrapped around bedsheets and pillows, her figure was disappearing underneath the mass of blankets, and before Aomine was able to do anything, a flash of red rushes quickly to his mother’s side.

Kagami grabs the mountain out of her hands, a small gasp of surprise slips out. Aomine quickly steps in to grab the sheets out of Kagami’s arm, revealing to his mother the man behind the pile of whites.

“Oh my! Kagami-kun, I didn't realize you were already here!” She says, smiling widely. “Welcome home!”

“O-oh, uh-- Thank you,” Kagami stutters.

“Your bedroom is all set up now! Fresh sheets and lots of blankets! Go and take a look!” She turns to Aomine and gestures upstairs. “Go on and show him Daiki.”

Aomine nods and nudges Kagami upstairs while his parents finish their business downstairs.

The upstairs hallway was rather spacious. A separate hallway lead to a single door at the end that belonged to his parents. Down the connecting hallway stood three separate rooms. The bathroom, Aomine’s room, and the guest bedroom.

“Here's the guest bedroom,” Aomine says, opening the door.

It wasn’t a large room. It was large enough to fit a full size bed with a couple other pieces of furniture. However, they took up most of the space. The bed was made neatly with fluffy pillows assembled professionally with three blankets of different sizes draped over his bed. Kagami’s clothes were stacked on the dresser placed in the corner of the room and his nightstand had magazines and books fanned out. The overall appearance felt warm and welcoming. His mother really had a talent for things like these.

“Wow,” Kagami breathes, his voice barely a whisper. He stood awkwardly at the door, his hands fiddling once again, reluctant to step in. “This is...a lot for a guest. I get a whole bedroom?”

“Go on in,” Aomine says, holding onto Kagami’s shoulders, gently pushing him inside the room.

Kagami walks around the room slowly, turning his head to every corner of the room, taking in the space.

“It's not as luxurious as your apartment, but it's home,” Aomine says, watching Kagami explore.
Kagami stills, a somber look of longing in his eyes. He eventually nods, a small “yeah” is heard from him.

Aomine understands the sentiment. Home is a flexible word. It could mean anything to any number of people. Home to the redhead meant an empty apartment, maybe his home in America, or even his family, all of which, brought back negative feelings to the boy.

But Aomine was determined to make this home mean something positive to him.

“A futon would've been enough for me,” Kagami says, finally. He was sitting on the mattress, his hands fiddling busily with the blankets.

“You take what you get with no further complaints or comments,” Aomine retorts, ruffling the redhead’s hair affectionately. “Wanna shower first?”

“You don't wanna go first? It's your house.”

“Guest is first,” Aomine smiles, grabbing a clean t-shirt and pajama pants for the male off the stack of clothes, and handing it to him. “Go shower.”

“Why'd you ask if I had no choice in the first place?”

“I wanted to appear hospitable.”

“Asshole,” Kagami mutters, hugging the clothes close to his chest. “I'll go shower then.”

Aomine’s mother walks in just in time to show Kagami the bathroom, leaving him some clean towels and new underwear that she had bought earlier (much to Kagami and Aomine’s embarrassment,) and showed him which toothbrush was his.

Moments later, he hears the sound of water running indicating that the redhead was showering. He had the urge to barge in to make sure he was safe and okay, but obviously doing so would elicit unwanted consequences from all parties, so he wanders off into his room to distract himself.

He makes an attempt to tidy things up a bit. His belongings were still sprawled out messily on the floor, crumpled up tissues of snot were overflowing out of his trash bin, gravure magazines littered everywhere, and his bed sheets were misaligned and untidy.

Aomine quickly straightens out his bedsheets and tries to stuff the tissues back into the trash bin. He picks up the items and magazines on the floor and places them not-so-neatly on his shelf. Once he's satisfied with his room’s appearance, he sits down on the floor, sighing loudly. His limbs were beginning to feel achy from sickness again and his brain throbbed madly in his head. Yearning for more of a distraction, he pulls out his laptop again and opens it, finding a new message from Ichiro on Kagami’s phone.

Ignoring me, huh? Wherever you are, Taiga is there with you. If you won't come to me, I’ll come to you.

-Ichiro

Aomine clicks his tongue. His fingers hover above the keyboard, ready to type when someone knocks at his door. He mutters a curse, then closes the laptop quickly and slides it under his bed.

“Come in!”
He expects it to be Kagami at first, but it's his mother. She walks in and sits down beside him, dropping her head to rest on his bed.

“T'm pooped out,” she says.

“You worked hard today,” Aomine says.

“I work hard everyday,” she snorts. “I still have to work double shift for the next couple days. Thankfully, I have you to watch over Kagami-kun now.”

“Yeah,” Aomine says. “How was he? I mean-- in the hospital.”

His mother sighs in response, silently thinking of a response. She sits up straight and faces him, finally speaking. “We couldn't get anything out of him. Other than that, he cooperated when we gave him different medication and he's been speaking to his therapist. Not as much as we'd like him too but he's verbal when he's asked, aside from not revealing why he's depressed.”

She smiles at him warmly. “He asked for you a lot though.”

“He did?”

“Yup,” she says. “You both are really cute.”

“Mom, we're not cute!”

“Sorry,” she chuckles, giving him a fond smile. “It makes me happy to see you care so much about someone.”

Aomine gives her a careful look. “Even if he's a guy?”

“Honey, as long as that person loves you as much as you love them, I'm a happy mom,” she says, pinching his cheek. “I can't say your father has the same outlook as me, so let's just keep this a secret for now.”

Aomine smiles- a genuine smile at her, something he hasn't been able to do in awhile. “Thank you, mom. You're the best.”

“I know,” she grins, messing up his hair playfully.

“By the way,” Aomine starts. “I thought you said Taiga would only be staying with us for one day. You set up a whole room.”

“I did say that,” she nods. “But I got a call from officer Tanizaki on the way back, the officer that helped us the other day. He said it would be best to keep him away from his apartment while they continued investigating.”

“So how long is he staying?”

“A while,” she says. “I'm going to Seirin at the end of the week to speak with Kagami-kun’s teachers. Hopefully we can get him back in school soon.”

Aomine hums. He hasn't exactly been present at Touou either. He figured if he went, he would have ended up skipping anyways. It certainly would ease his mind if Kagami and him attended the same school.

“In the meantime, just give him a sense of purpose.”
“How do I do that?”

“Y’know, give him things to do, distract him, take him places. Point is, he should be looking forward to doing something everyday,” she says. “That'll put him on the right track. Can you do that?”

Aomine nods. “Yeah. I'll do my best.”

“Great! Anyways, Kagami-kun should be finished showering soon so I’ll leave you both alone. Goodnight, Daiki. I love you.”

“Goodnight mom. Love you too.”

She gives him another pinch on his cheeks and leaves, keeping his door open a crack.

Aomine ponders taking out the laptop again, words on the tip of his tongue ready to spew out, but then, he decides against it. Ichiro had no way of finding his location. If responding gave Ichiro just a tiny bit of opportunity to draw Aomine and Kagami out, he wouldn't take that risk.

There's a faint knock at his door, so quiet it almost gets lost in the sound of the rain now pouring heavily outside.

“Taiga?”

The door creaks open slightly, the redhead’s face peeking through the crack, his ruby eyes staring at him waiting for permission to enter.

Aomine waves him in, patting the floor next to him, signaling the redhead to sit, and he does. He takes a good look at the make, not bothering to hide his stare. Kagami’s hair is still damp, most of his bangs were swept back and out of his face, his gray t-shirt clung loosely at his chest and shoulders, and Aomine sees that Kagami rolled up the leg of his pants for some odd reason. All were surprisingly cute.

“Good shower?” Aomine asks, wiping at a few droplets escaping from his hair. He was able to smell the redhead’s scent from where he sat. Even though Kagami had used his shampoo and body wash (which were cinnamon scented), he wondered how the hell Kagami still managed to smell like citrus and apples.

“I feel clean,” the redhead says. “I don't remember the last time I actually scrubbed myself.”

“That long?”

“Yeah, it feels refreshing,” Kagami says, sighing.

He looks around Aomine’s room briefly, then looks back at him. “Nice room.”

“Nothin’ special.”

Kagami hums and stands up, taking a slow lap around Aomine’s room with his hands folded behind his back, staring at the basketball related displays on his bookshelf. The action made Aomine both nervous and excited.

“It's surprisingly you,” Kagami says, looking down at him.

“Hm?”
Kagami gestures toward Aomine's small collection of NBA figures. "This,"-he holds up the stack of gravure magazines- "and this."

"You can look through them if you want."

"No thanks," he says, wrinkling his nose. "I can't believe you leave them out in the open like that."

"No one goes in here much anyway," Aomine says. "Why? You hide yours?"

"I don't have any."

"Bullshit. All guys have at least one."

Kagami kicks him lightly. "Don't assume everyone is like you, Aho."

"Well maybe you're just an outlier," Aomine says.

There's a brief moment of silence before Kagami speaks up again.

".....Am not..."

"Different is good," Aomine states, grabbing Kagami's hand. "Makes you cute."

"Cute?" Kagami frowns at him, pouting rather (ironically) cutely. "I'm not cute!"

"Then...handsome."

"I'm not handsome either," Kagami grumbles.

"Attractive."

"Huh? I'm n-"

"Irresistible, sexy, drop-dead gorgeous."

"Wha- what's with you?" Kagami sits down in front of Aomine, his face flushed. "You're acting really weird."

"I'm complimenting you," Aomine says. "I can't?"

"Complimen- why?"

"Do I need a reason?" He huffs.

"You don't seem like the type of guy to compliment someone for no reason."

"Okay, now that's just offensive," Aomine says, crossing his arms over his chest.

Kagami’s expression visibly falls, his eyebrows arched in a worried expression almost instantly. "Sorry, I'm just not used to you being so nice."

Aomine scoots close, then pinches Kagami’s nose. "Well you better get used to it idiot. I'm gonna have to say a lot of embarrassing things from now on and it's all your fault."

Kagami swats his hand away. "My fault?"

"Damn right. Take responsibility."
The redhead stares back with a hardened expression. “How do I do that? I told you I don't have anything to gi--”

“Tell me one good thing you like about yourself everyday.”

“What?”

“You heard me. All you have to do is tell me one thing you like about yourself,” Aomine says.

“Uh...okay?”

“Good, so tell me something you like about yourself.”

Kagami shifts uncomfortably and looks down. His leg bouncing anxiously in thought. “I guess.. I'm good at basketball?”

“You gotta say it with confidence, Taiga,” Aomine challenges. “Look me in the eye and say it again.”

Kagami looks at him with a weird expression, but meets his eye, repeating with a rather blunt tone. “I'm good at basketball.”

Aomine grins widely, leaning in to pull Kagami in a tight embrace. “Not just ‘good,’ you're the best.”

Kagami chuckles lightly, a sound so delicate and rich, he instantly feels cured from his illness.

“Cheesy,” the redhead says.

Eventually Kagami’s arms wrap lazily around Aomine’s middle and they stay like that for awhile. Intertwined in each other’s embrace, feeling the other’s chest rise and fall against theirs in almost perfect synchronicity, and listening to the gentle rhythm of their breaths. It had been awhile since they last had a peaceful moment like this..

The mixture of Kagami’s warmth and the pitter-patter of rain was close to lulling him to sleep. Dropping his head on Kagami’s shoulder, he yawns loudly, snuggling deeper.

“Go sleep,” Kagami says.

“Gotta shower,” Aomine mutters.

“Then what are you waiting for?” He says, pulling away, earning a groan of disapproval from Aomine.

“I'm lazy and sleepy.”

“Then you can be lazy and sleepy by yourself,” he says, standing up. “But I'm going to bed now.”

“Wait a sec,” Aomine grabs his hand quickly. “Will you be okay on your own?”

Kagami looks at him questionably, then his mouth parts slightly when he realizes what Aomine is referring to.

“.yeah.”

“Remember Taiga, it's okay to be selfish and ask for something.”
“I’ll be fine, I think,” Kagami says. “I sleep by myself all the time.”

“Yeah, but you didn't have a choice then. You have a choice now. Just keep that in mind,” he says, squeezing Kagami’s hand reassuringly.

Kagami offers him a last tired smile and slips through the door. Aomine stays rooted in his spot, listening to Kagami’s quiet footsteps and then finally, the sound of his bedroom door closing softly.

Forcing himself onto achy limbs, he grabs whatever clean (or dirty) clothes he finds and shuffles toward the bathroom.

He doesn't many any effort to maneuver around quietly. He opens and closes the door loudly, turning on the shower and brushing his teeth while he waits for the water to get warm.

When it does, he steps in, shuddering when the sudden hot water hits his back. He stands there and soaks himself in the water, closing his eyes and letting his mind rid itself of worries and thoughts.

Kagami was surely changing bit by bit in front of his eyes. If he wasn't changing, he was getting comfortable. He knew the redhead treaded on thin ice. The possibility of another breakdown weighed on Aomine’s mind almost constantly. Fortunately, they were able to make some progress today. The only real threat now was Ichiro.

He finishes cleaning himself up and shuts off the water. After drying his hair and putting on mostly clean pajamas, he heads to his room again and flops down in his bed and curls up, trying desperately to warm himself up.

As he lays there, he wonders for a moment if Kagami is sleeping, if he's crying alone, or if he's really okay.

A couple hours tick by and he can't sleep. His body is heavy with fatigue but his mind won't allow him the chance.

Frustrated with his state, he about opts to go for a midnight walk when his door suddenly creaks opened and closed again. Aomine cranes his neck to see a large shadowy figure shuffling toward him, then stopping in front of him.

His hand tugs on Aomine’s sleeve repeatedly, his voice soft in a low whisper. “Daiki…”

Without needing any further explanation, Aomine scoots to the outside of the bed, pulling Kagami to the wall-side. “C’mere.”

The redhead, all bundled up in blankets, crawls into bed and unwraps himself, covering both him and Aomine in the various layers of blankets.

Aomine snakes his arm underneath Kagami and pulls him close, placing his head underneath his chin and wrapping his other arm around Kagami.

Almost instantly, Kagami’s body heat spreads through him, his scent numbs him, and he finally feels relieved having the redhead now beside him, safe and warm.

It isn't too long until he feels himself drifting.

“Good night, Taiga,” he murmurs, kissing his forehead sleepily. “Love you.”
He feels Kagami burrow himself deeper into his arms, hiding his face into Aomine’s chest. “Good night, Daiki.”

Like he expected, Kagami doesn’t return those three words. Instead, he swears he feels a pair of lips on his collarbone, but as quick as the sensation comes, it disappears.

Chapter End Notes

The purpose of telling one good thing you like about yourself a day helps boost self esteem! So if anyone you know is struggling with self confidence, share what you like about them, and have them share something they like about themselves!

I'm also working on another fic which will be shorter than this one! That fic will have angst that mainly focuses around Aomine. He's a cop in this one and Kagami works at a bakery :oD He's also mute heh. I'll be posting that one soon!

As always, thank you for reading and commenting! I really do appreciate hearing your thoughts!
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

I lied, drama starts up again next chapter! This is probably more like a transition chapter :oD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Aomine feels when he wakes up is the familial warmth beside him. He cracks a blurry eye open and groans loudly, wrapping the body next to him tighter, pulling him close. He lets his hands sneak underneath Kagami’s shirt, splaying them on his back.

The male beside him stirs from the sudden cool touch but adjusts quickly, snuggling close and draping an arm lazily across Aomine’s side, sighing contently at the feel of Aomine’s long fingers brushing lightly against his skin.

Over the course of the night, Kagami hadn’t slept well, which was expected. A couple times Aomine would wake up to the sound of sniffing and soft whimpers. Each time Aomine would massage his scalp, lightly whispering to the male reassuring words to lull him into sweeter dreams. He wasn’t sure if Kagami heard him, but the squeeze around his waist and the quieting silence told him he did.

Aomine looks down to see Kagami’s sleeping face, peaceful, and free of any nightmares. He rubs Kagami’s temple softly, drawing circles there, then slowly moves his fingers down the sides of his face, lightly ghosting his long black lashes. He then moves his thumb down the straight bridge of his nose and over his lips. He couldn’t resist.

He leans down, peppering a barrage of kisses on the boy’s face. The redhead groans and scrunches up his nose, hiding his face in the crack where Aomine’s side meets the bed.

“Taiga,” Aomine calls softly.

Kagami groans again, trying to dive deeper into the bed.

“Idiot, how can you breathe like that?”

“Mmm,” Kagami hums.

“Taiga, c’mon.”

“Mm,” Kagami answers again, his voice muffled and nasally.

“Aren’t you supposed to be a morning bird?” Aomine chuckles, carding affectionately at the dark strands behind the boy’s ears.

“Mmm.”

“Don’t ‘mmmm’ me,” he echoes sarcastically.

“Too early,” the redhead’s voice rumbles faintly in his chest, too soft to be heard despite the
drilling silence in his room.

“It's almost 12pm. We overslept, idiot,” Aomine says.

“Wanna sleep more…”

“You've been sleeping a shit ton already,” Aomine mutters. “I thought you said you wanted fresh air.”

“From the hospital,” Kagami points out.

“Whatever,” Aomine says, prying the boy away from his body. “I wanna take you out today.”

Kagami blinks up at him through his lashes, his curious pupils that have since lost their vibrant ruby color was slowly, but surely, returning in a rather dullish-transparent shade. Even so, Aomine found them strikingly beautiful.

“Out?” He inquires. “I can't play--”

“Not to play,” Aomine smiles. “I meant on a date.”

“Where?”

Aomine shrugs. “Maybe go shopping for shoes or something. Or do sappy shit, like taking a walk in the park.”

“Oh,” Kagami replies, rather unenthusiastically.

Aomine frowns at the expression and squeezes the man tighter in his arms. “Don't wanna?”

“I dunno,” Kagami mutters.

“Huh? You don't know?” He repeats slowly, shrugging out from underneath Kagami to sit up. “It's a yes or no question, Taiga.”

“I don't know,” Kagami says again, his tone dipping slightly in frustration.

“You wanted to go out yesterday. You even went by yourself! How is today a problem?”

“That was different,” The redhead says. “I was just getting food and the hospital air was suffocating me.”

“So going out with me is a problem?”

“No! I just-- don't feel comfortable.”

Aomine sighs, rubbing the nape of his neck. He didn't want to make any assumptions out of anger. He knew the redhead had a slight chance of declining his offer from the start, judging by how awkward and out of place the redhead appeared to be around others at Maji. He didn't expect the pang of rejection to sting this bad.

“Taiga,” Aomine starts. “Is it other people you're uncomfortable with?”

Kagami stares at him in shock, seemingly surprised that he was able to pinpoint the redhead’s thoughts so quickly, and then he nods.
“Why?”
“I feel like they're...judging me.”
“Judging you? About what?”
Kagami huffs indignantly, refusing to answer. Aomine realizes then that the answer he's looking for must be related to whatever the male is hiding from him-- so he decides not to probe any further.
“Fine, but you can't avoid people forever,” Aomine says. “Let's compromise.”
“Compromise?”
“Yeah. I still wanna take you on a date.”
“We can't have a date at home?”
“Not today, no,” Aomine says. “I can take you somewhere with less people.”
“...”
“We won't be out long either. An hour at most.”
Kagami stares wordlessly at Aomine, a challenging look planted sternly on his face.
“If you decide it's too much for you, I'll take you home,” Aomine adds, taking Kagami’s hand in his and giving it a reassuring squeeze.
“You will?”
“Yeah.”
The redhead smiles slightly at him, then nods. “Ok. I'll go on your little date.”
“Our date,” Aomine corrects. “Dating is a consensual relationship. Besides, our last date didn't end well for the both of us. I want a do-over first date.”
Kagami’s mouth gapes open slightly, staring blankly at Aomine for a bit before saying, “I didn't think you were the type to worry about that kinda stuff.”
Aomine shrugs in response. Yeah, he was a bit of a romantic, but he'd rather die than admit it.
“Anyways, that time didn't really count as a date. You said so yourself,” Kagami adds.
“I did?”
“Yeah. You said it was a hangout-- for your birthday, I mean.”
Aomine hums thoughtfully, remembering the deal the two had made during that time. Kagami was right, their relationship wasn’t technically official. It had started in such an unconventional way.
He had regretted that, honestly. Before this had all started, he had at least hoped he would've been able to court Kagami normally (or the other way around.) Their relationship had no real marked beginning and that was something Aomine wanted to give him.
“Then I guess today is our first date,” the tanned male says, giving a gentle rub on the male’s
cheek with his thumb.

“Guess so.”


“Aomine,” Kagami’s gruff voice calls behind him. “There’s a shit ton of people here.”

The redhead’s voice withstood an even tone, however, it was obvious that the male was trying his best to mask his discomfort. As they’re walking down the bustling streets of Tokyo, he felt the boy’s hand tremble faintly in his, his palms clammy and slightly sweaty. Their fingers were interlocked rather clumsily as Aomine tries his best to ignore both the grimaces and smiles from those who spot them.

“Hang tight, Taiga,” Aomine reassures him, urging Kagami to walk at his side. “And stay close.”

Their conversation had ended there, letting only the overlapping chatter of the city’s inhabitants to fill in the empty space around them. Kagami still remains deathly silent, his gait was clumsy and in some ways-- unilinear. Aomine couldn't understand for the life of him why the male had seemed so uneasy. Doubts about taking Kagami out had started to take shape in the back of his mind, but he tries to suppress it. After all, it was his mother who advised him to give Kagami distractions.

They walk for several more blocks, getting close to their destination. Aomine ended up taking multiple wrong turns, blabbering to himself when he realizes that Kagami is probably going to continue to ignore him, but eventually, they arrive-- about twenty minutes later than the estimated arrival time.

“We’re here,” Aomine says nonchalantly, as if getting there wasn’t a hassle in the slightest.

Kagami gives him a, ‘Where the hell are we?’ expression. The boy's face is covered in a sheen of sweat and his breathing was a bit ragged. Aomine feels a pang of guilt in his chest for making him walk all that distance despite knowing his current condition, and Kagami had complied without another complaint.

Aomine curls the hem of his sleeves over his palm and wipes at the redhead’s face. “Sorry about that. You should’ve said something if you were tired you idiot.”

Kagami scrunches up his face and wrinkles his nose adoringly at the sudden action. Oddly enough, Kagami stays perfectly still, allowing Aomine to wipe away the sweat that had accumulated on his forehead. “M’fine. Just thirsty.”

“Yeah but still-- I’m sorry.”

“I'm fine. I can handle walking, at the very least.”

Aomine smiles, ruffling his hair affectionately. “Well, let's go in?”

Kagami nods, albeit a bit reluctantly, but follows swiftly after.
Just like Aomine so happily planned, the place was empty. There were cute tables lined up along the floor, multiple baskets and of course, the group of curious cats coming to greet them at the door.

“Wha--” Kagami starts, watching as their little feline friends rub their heads on their legs, saying hello.

“Hey there,” Aomine chuckles, bending down to greet them in return. He cranes his neck up to see Kagami still standing there with a dumbfounded look on his face.

“Taiga?” He inquires. “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of cats too.”

Kagami shakes out of his stupor and smiles, finally bending down beside Aomine to scratch lovingly behind a tabby’s ears. “No.”

A sudden creaking noise can be heard from the doors at the back, startling a few of the cats as a middle-aged man walks out from the corner. When the stranger catches sight of them, he gives a heartwarming welcome.

“Which one is Aomine Daiki?”

Aomine raises his hand and nods, standing up to give the man a firm handshake.

“A pleasure. I had heard you were dropping by today,” the man smiles. “Call me Tanaka. I’m the owner.”

“Nice to meet you,” Aomine says.

“So that makes you Kagami Taiga,” Tanaka says, beaming down at the redhead who nods, despite being busy trying to pry a cat off his shoe.

The man laughs, “Sorry about that, that little one is always gnawing on everything.”

“It’s fine,” Kagami smiles sheepishly, cradling the animal in his arms.

“Well, I'll be at the counter,” Tanaka says, gesturing toward the back of the shop. “We offer lots of drinks and desserts, so feel free to holler when you need something.”

“Thanks,” Aomine says, suddenly remembering that they had skipped lunch. “Uh, we both haven't eaten yet.”

“I'll be on it right away!” Tanaka grabs a small notepad and pencil from a nearby counter and looks toward Aomine again. “Any requests?”

The tanned male looks at Kagami for an answer, but he only gets a shake of his head in return.

“You got any cheeseburgers?” Aomine asks, earning a slight laugh from the man.

“We don't, but we do offer sandwiches.”

“I'll take some sandwiches then.”

“Alright! And how about drinks?”

“Just water is fine,” Aomine replies.
Tanaka scribbles it quickly in his notepad and bows. “It'll be out shortly. In the meantime, please make yourselves at home.”

With that, the owner rushes behind closed doors, finally leaving the two alone.

“Cat cafe, huh?” Kagami says softly, his voice weighing with wonder and curiosity. “This is your idea of a date?”

“You don't like it?”

“No, I just wasn't expecting it,” Kagami says. “These places are usually packed. How did you--”

“I called a very influential person to help me,” Aomine exclaims proudly.

“Akashi?”

“Who else?” Aomine chuckles. “The shop is ours until you wanna leave. I figured you could relax here.”

He grabs Kagami’s elbow and guides him toward a low table, propping the redhead on one of the cushions and taking a seat beside him.

Almost like the other felines around them, Kagami snuggles close into his side, allowing Aomine to wrap his arm around him comfortably. Needless to say, the various other cats didn't want to go unnoticed, and they sprawled out over Kagami’s legs.

“They like you,” Aomine says.

Kagami hums, petting the pile of cats that lay across his body. “Probably hungry.”

“How come they're not laying on my lap then?”

“Cause you smell.”

“Like hell I do,” Aomine huffs, discreetly taking a quick whiff of his arm. “I showered yesterday.”

“I'm kidding, you smell fine,” Kagami says, rubbing at a sleeping cat’s paw. “It's probably because you're emitting some type of scary aura.”

“Me?”

“Yeah,” Kagami says.

“Are you sure we’re talking about the right guy here?”

Kagami nods.

“You think I'm scary?”

Kagami laughs softly, shaking his head. “No, Ahomine. You’re not scary to me, but I heard animals were pretty sensitive to that kinda stuff.”

“I'll have you know, I'm fucking great with animals. Take Nigou for example, he loves me.”

The redhead rolls his eyes. “Nigou loves everybody.”

“Ok, well if we’re going by the whole aura logic, maybe the cats are sensing something wrong
with your emotions."

“What's wrong with my emotions?”

“I mean… you're going through a rough time right? Maybe they can, y'know, sense it?”

Kagami blinks at him then looks back down at the cats purring on his lap. “Are you saying these cats are trying to console me?”

“Could be,” Aomine says.

The male falls silent at that, staring intently at the furballs with a rather hardened expression. “Even animals pity me, huh?”

“I wouldn't call it pity,” Aomine says, planting a kiss on the side of his head. “More like… they wanna make you smile.”

“That's stupid,” Kagami mutters. “These cats don't know me.”

“But you like them?”

“Yeah,” Kagami smiles warmly, picking one up to snuggle against his chest. “They're cute, I guess.”

“You smiled,” he points out, squeezing the male's side. “Not so stupid is it?”

True to his stubborn nature, Kagami lets his grin fall, making a show of frowning childishly instead.

“If you make that face, I'll feel bad,” Aomine says.

“Not my problem.”

“What a brat.”

Kagami laughs airily, huddling closer into Aomine's side, handing off the cat he was holding onto Aomine's stomach. He picks up a white cat from the pile off his lap and holds it toward his chest.

“Now we both have cats,” he says.

“How generous of you to share your cats,” Aomine snickers. “Cat lady.”

“Hey, I'm not a cat lady!”

“Well you're hoarding all of them.”

“Not my fault they like me more,” Kagami huffs.

Aomine laughs, petting the curled up kitten on his stomach. “I can't really blame them.”

They sit there for a brief moment, savoring the warmth of one another when Aomine feels a pair of unblinking eyes at him. He glances toward Kagami to find the male staring at him with an unreadable expression, then he shakes his head. “You've got such a weird image of me Aomine.”

“How so?”

“You think I'm great,” he says.
“Cause you are.”

Kagami sighs, slumping down in his seat, stirring some cats awake. “Please, you're only saying that cause you like me.”

“Well I started liking you because you're so great.”

“And when was that?”

“Hm? Is that something important you wanna know?” Aomine asks.

Kagami nods. “When did I start becoming ‘great’ in your eyes? Was it basketball?”

Aomine takes a moment to remember and consider his reply. When exactly did he start seeing the redhead in a different light? Sure, he was always amazed by Kagami’s prowess as a basketball player, during his win against Touou and even more so during their game against Jabberwock. Kagami had saved him and brought him back his love for basketball. But would that make him drawn to his actions or Kagami himself? And why had he only started thinking about this stuff now?

While he spent time mulling over his thoughts, he realized that time had escaped him all too quickly. The owner had returned with their food, and placed it neatly on their table before directing them to the washroom to clean their hands. When they had returned, there was an unspoken tension in the air.

“Hey,” Kagami says, finally breaking the silence. “It's no big deal. You don't have to answer if you don't know. Let's just eat.”

“No, wait,” Aomine says, thinking. “I mean, yes, eat, Taiga but-- I want to answer you.”

Kagami looks at him bewildered, and then nods, grabbing his sandwich and taking a hefty bite out it.

“Uh,” Aomine starts, clearing his throat. “To be honest, I'm not really sure when it started. It just kinda… happened?”

Kagami nods again, urging him to continue.

“It was probably after Vorpal swords. I found myself thinking about you.. a lot. And then we started hanging out more often.”

For some reason, he couldn't keep himself from talking. The words were spilling out with ease, relieving all the tension in his body.

“I liked playing basketball with you, but I also liked chillin’ with you. When you would make me lunch and we’d just sit there and talk. I liked that-- having you there, I mean. You somehow made the simple things really special.”

Kagami coughs slightly, earning a chuckle from Aomine, and he hands him a napkin. “Believe it or not, I had to ask Tetsu for help.”

“You did?”

“Yeah. That bastard wouldn't help much though. Made me do all the tough shit myself,” Aomine says. “I was pretty dead set on keeping it a secret but, after you left for America…”
The redhead leans in, his eyes wide with suspense.

“After you left and kinda disappeared, I told myself I wouldn't uh….I wouldn't let you out of my sight if you came back.”

“No wonder you were so clingy,” Kagami says, laughing sheepishly.

“I was not clingy!”

“You were practically squishing me on the bus ride home.”

“I was worried,” Aomine sighs. “I still am.”

“There's no reason to be,” Kagami says softly, placing his sandwich down. “I'm okay, Aomine.”

“You always say that,” Aomine mutters. “I never know what you're really thinking.”

“Aomine--”

“Every single time I see you, I feel like you're gonna disappear,” he says, his voice wavering. “When you got back from America, when you tried taking those damn pills, when I heard your voice when I was in a coma, when you cried, and when I found you a couple days ago thinking you were dea-- Taiga, I'm worried.”

“I know.”

Aomine stilled. But does he? Does Kagami really know? Kagami had always been a solid presence in his life. As long as they had basketball, he knew the male would always be there. Now the male’s presence was like a Spector, fleeting and uncertain, teetering between the lines of here and gone.

‘I'll protect you, I'll be here for you, I love you,’ They had all been variations of, ‘Please just stay.’ Since the very beginning, Aomine had said and done everything he could to keep him from leaving. But was his love alone really enough for Kagami to want to stay?

“I don't want you to go,” he pleads.

“I won't,” Kagami says, fiddling with his hands. “I’m taking medicine now and I'm getting therapy and I’m accepting help-- I’m sorry, Daiki. I’m trying. I really am.”

“Then… I guess I'll forgive you.”

With wet eyes, Kagami smiles at him. A pure, soft smile that could've killed him right then and there. He wasn't planning on spilling out his emotions like this, he had no idea how the other male would have reacted, but now, he didn't regret it. The man had wrapped his arms around his middle, tenderly kissing the base of Aomine’s neck before burying his head there, softly murmuring apologies and promises.

“I won't go,” he repeats, over and over, until it becomes a melody in his ears.

And Aomine keeps him there, holding the figure in his strong arms, feeling wetness lingering on his shoulder. He can't help but cry with him, but this time, they were different kind of tears.
“So it seems like he’ll be starting school again on Monday,” his mother mutters in between bites of her breakfast.

“You spoke to-?”

“You, I did,” she says. “I had a meeting with them yesterday afternoon.”

“That soon? Shouldn’t he rest some more?” Aomine leans forward, trying to mask the worry in his voice.

“It’s been a week since he’s stayed with us Daiki. Not to mention, he’s only attended school for a week since summer break ended. The earlier he goes, the better,” she huffs. “You too. You’re gonna end up repeating a year if you don’t get caught up.”

“But then we’ll be separated,” he whines. “Can’t Taiga transfer to Touou? Or I can transfer t--”

“No, Daiki. Do you even know what you’re asking?”

“No.”

Aomine slumps down in his seat, groaning loudly. “What if something happens? What if those bastards come to Seirin and harass him?”

“I understand the risks but you can’t possibly be there for him 24/7. It’s school, Daiki. The staff there would never allow something to happen to their students.”

Before Aomine can say anything else, the sound of approaching footsteps startle him. He turns around to see Kagami, his hair dripping wet suggesting he had just finished showering. Even in situations like these, he never lets a moment of admiration pass. The sight of the redhead in his pajamas did funny things to his heart.

“Ah! Kagami-kun! Come sit and eat with us, we were just talking about you.”

Kagami looks at Aomine for a second, then shuffles over, taking the seat beside him.

“Sleep well, dear?”

Kagami nods and smiles awkwardly, clearly nervous about what seemed to be the topic of conversation.

“Ah, before I start, let’s get you some food,” Aomine’s mother grabs a plate and scoops up a pile of pancakes and places it in front of him. Kagami utters a soft ‘thank you for the meal’ and digs in, looking both anxious and attentive.

“Allright, so I spoke with your counselors and we both agreed that you would go back to school on Monday,” she says.

“Oh,” Kagami says, putting down his fork. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Aomine echoes. “That’s it? Taiga, if there’s anything you wanna say--”

The male shrugs, seemingly unfazed by everything. “I have to go back eventually, and I don’t
wanna fail and repeat a year.”

“That's the spirit!” Aomine’s mother says, patting Kagami’s hand earning a scowl from Aomine.

“Seriously?” Aomine grumbles, crossing his arms. “Something could happen and I won't be there.”

“Kuroko will be there,” the redhead says. “And the rest of my team.”

Aomine rolls his eyes. “Tetsu wouldn't hurt a fly.”

“Doesn't mean he can't protect me,” Kagami adds, shoving more pancakes into his mouth.

“If you haven't noticed, most of our problems are solved on the court. This is way out of his element. I fail to see how he could defend you without getting socked in the face.”

Kagami frowns at him with puffed cheeks. “Then I can handle it myself.”

‘Can you?’ Aomine wants to say. Instead, he grits his teeth, not wanting to say anything out of anguish. “Taiga--”

“You worry too much, Daiki,” Kagami says, offering a reassuring smile. “I said I'd be okay, right?”

Aomine sighs, trying to relieve the tension in his muscles. He hated how weak Kagami’s smile made him. “Y-yeah...yeah, you did say that. So you better keep that promise.”

“You guys are just too cute,” Aomine’s mother says, her head propped up on her hands, watching them in awe. “Who knew my son could be such a softie.”

“Mom!”

“Has he always treated you with such care?” she sings, directing her gaze to Kagami who chuckles at her question.

He turns around to stare at Aomine with calculating eyes, and then back at her. “He was a bit different when we met.”

“Ahh, well…” Kagami scratches at his nose. “He definitely left an impression on me.”

“Don't you dare tell her the story,” Aomine hisses, nudging Kagami’s elbow.

“Hey! I was talking to Kagami-kun!” she pouts, leaning toward the redhead once more. “Tell me! Was it love at first sight? Or gradual? My son has known you for quite some time but he never tells me anything!”

“Ahh, well…” Kagami scratches at his nose. “He definitely left an impression on me.”

“Oh? How so?”

“Basketball,” The redhead says, smiling. “He was pretty cool.”

“Well, Daiki does have a habit of showing off,” she says. “Tell me more! Did you guys talk?”

Kagami gives Aomine another look. “A little.”

“I was a jerk to him, mom,” Aomine grumbles.

“Not a surprise,” she says. “What exactly did he say to you?”
Kagami leans back in his chair, closing his eyes as if he was trying to picture the moment. “Your light is too dim. Something like that.”

“How dramatic,” his mother sighs. “Couldn't you have been kinder, Daiki?”

“Tch,” Aomine clicks his tongue in annoyance, pouting and turning his head away childishly. “I still got him in the end, why's it matter how it started?”

Ignoring Aomine’s remark, his mother turns to Kagami and whispers indiscreetly, “Kagami-kun, it’s okay to raise your standards a little bit. You're a wonderful man.”

“Hey! Don't go putting ideas into his head!” Aomine hisses, grabbing hold of Kagami’s arm.

“I’m kidding! C’mon, I'm your mother. You're a catch, Daiki,” she coos.

“Well thanks for your support,” Aomine scoffs, glimpsing at Kagami who seemed to be enjoying the banter between him and his mom. But something caught his eye. There was that faint look on his face again-- that look of longing.

While Aomine knew the male was getting more comfortable and expressive, he couldn't help but feel guilt for showing off something that Kagami never really had.

Clearing his throat, he taps on the table nervously. “So uh, anything else you wanna tell us, mom?”

“Ah! I almost forgot!” she proclaims, turning to Kagami. “Your teacher...Alex, was it? She gave me a call.”

“How'd she get your number?” Aomine inquires.

“Seems like she called the hospital and they gave it to her,” she answers, taking a sip of her coffee. “Anyways, she asked about you and wanted me to tell you that she’s delaying her flight here.”

Kagami’s expression visibly falls, but he quickly adjusts it, feigning a smile. “I see. That's ok. She's probably busy with work.”

“It seems like she found out some things and wanted to stay there a bit longer before coming here,” Aomine’s mother says, reaching over to give Kagami’s hand a squeeze. “Don't look too sad. She said it'll take another week at most. She's very worried about you.”

“Wait, what things? What did she find out?” Aomine interjects, frowning slightly.

“I'm not sure. She said she would explain when she got here,” his mother shrugs and shakes her head. “Whatever it is, I’m sure it must be important to both Kagami-kun and her-- Ah! I'm running late!”

She glances at the clock before quickly shuffling on her feet, walking briskly to the sink to empty her dirty dishes. She grabs her jacket and bags and walks over to them both, giving Aomine a kiss on top of his head and pinching Kagami’s cheek.

“It was nice talking to you both,” she says, grinning widely. “Behave and have a good day.”

They both wave goodbye to her and watches as she leaves safely, then he turns to him, gazing at the back of Kagami’s head. Taking the opportunity (as he often does) he engraves Kagami’s silhouette into his mind. His eyes trace over the nape of his neck, still damp from his hair to the
sharp shoulder blades of his back.

He leans over to place an experimental kiss on the back of his neck then slumps back in his seat when he doesn't get a reaction. He's sure by the way Kagami is deprived of movement that he's deep in thought.

“Taiga,” he calls, smiling when the boy turns around at the sound of his name. “You okay?”

“Mmm.”

Aomine rolls his eyes at his response stands up, holding out his arms. Almost obediently, Kagami follows him, walking into his arms.

“Cuddle bug,” Aomine laughs, wrapping his arms around him.

“You more than me.”

“I won't deny that,” he says, crouching down to pick Kagami up, slinging the boy over his shoulder with a little more ease than he had hoped.

Aomine frowns, testing the weight on his shoulder. “You need to eat more.”

“I’m eating a normal amount!” Kagami huffs, wiggling his butt in his face.

“Eat your normal amount,” Aomine says, walking up the stairs.

The boy stayed perfectly still, or still enough for Aomine to carry him safely up the stairs without both of them tumbling backwards. He was surprised that the redhead hadn't put up a fight, or demanded to be put down.

“I can't possibly eat that much,” Kagami mutters when Aomine makes his way down the hall. “Besides, that amount of food is expensive.”

Once in his (their) bedroom, Aomine carefully lays the boy down, and looks at him. “You're concerned about money?”

“And time...and effort,” Kagami adds. “It was fine eating that much before because my dad sent me money and I could cook for myself. Now I'm living under someone else's salary and your mom and dad cook for me.”

Aomine nods in understanding, leaning down to cup his hands around the male’s face, stroking the boy’s cheeks. “I get it.”

“Good.”

“But I still want you to eat more, you're eating less than me.”

The male groans, gripping firmly at Aomine’s wrists. “You eat a lot, Daiki. You eat almost as much as me.”

“You don't have to eat how much I eat, just eat more than you do now. I want you to put some weight back on,” Aomine says, squeezing playfully at Kagami’s stomach. “Needs some more flab.”

“I was never flabby,” Kagami laughs, swatting away at Aomine’s hand to pull the taller male into bed with him. Once Aomine snuggles in, Kagami looks at him expectantly. “So what's the plan?”
“Cuddle and enjoy the rest of our free weekend,” Aomine says, huddling closer to the male. “Unless you wanna do anything else?”

Kagami smiles and shakes his head. “I've been wanting to do this for awhile.”

Aomine nods and draws him in closer, closer, until he was sure Kagami could hear his heart beating. The scent from his freshly washed hair making him almost dizzy with--

*Not now,* Aomine thinks. Until Kagami was ready, until he himself was ready, he would wait patiently for the day Kagami would give himself to him fully.

---

That night, Aomine meets with the same woman in his dream again. From far away, it was easy to make out her long, red hair that laid neatly against her back, and her eyes that sparkled with a wandering glimmer of curiosity that burned intensely amidst the storm in her eyes.

This was it. This was the person who gave Kagami his eyes.

Finding that he can walk, he takes a few tentative steps before approaching her, taking in the similar feature he's seen on Kagami. She still donned a youthful appearance, perhaps indicating that her time had stopped. She had a straight nose and full pink lips, a sharp jawline and surprisingly, forked eyebrows to frame her face. However, rather than odd, it seemed to fit her.

The woman smiles at him again, just like she had done the last time they met in a dream. However, this time, he hopes he can speak with her.

“It's been awhile,” Aomine says.

“You concept of time must be different than mines,” she laughs, her voice echoing through the empty white space melodically.

Aomine smiles, noticing how both she and Kagami had a habit of scrunching up their eyebrows when they laughed. He nods before speaking, “Well, I was just wondering if we could talk.”

The woman grins. “I’d love to. It seems you already have an idea of who I am.”

“Not so hard to guess,” Aomine says. “You have his smile...and his eyebrows.”

“No, he has *my* smile and eyebrows,” she corrects, waving her finger at him. “To think that after all these years, that boy still picks up my habits.”

“You watch over him?”

“I never leave his side,” she says, putting her hands on her hips.

Aomine nods, expecting that answer from her. “Then you know about…”

She smiles solemnly, nodding. “Of course.”

“Then do you know why?”

“That seems to be something that should come from him, not me,” she says.
He frowns, sighing in disappointment. Even a spirit in his dream wouldn't tell him. “But why?”

“Taiga needs to move on, on his own,” she answers. “And he will tell you, eventually. Just trust in his judgement.”

Aomine groans. Eventually. That seems to be the word thrown around a lot lately. But if he couldn't get an explanation regarding that, then he might as well ask her other questions.

“Then-” he starts again, clenching his fists.”-Taiga, he misses you a lot. I can tell when he doesn't think I'm watching. But he stares off a lot and he has that look in his eyes..”

She nods, urging him to continue.

“You're speaking to me now. So why weren't you there for him? When he was suicidal, when he wanted you, and when he was being neglected. Why didn't you help him?”

The woman smiles warmly at him, patting him on the shoulder causing Aomine to look at her in bewilderment.

“Taiga, is what you call, a baby,” she says, chuckling. “He's been blocking me out. I'm there, but I can't be there because he won't let me in.”

“So..”

“He thinks I'm mad at him,” she continues. “He wants me back, but at the cost of himself. He’s not in the right of mind to consider what I think, so he doesn't let me be there.”

“Then I can tell him!” Aomine exclaims. If he could tell Kagami that his mother wasn't actually upset then maybe, just maybe, he would be at ease. Instead, the woman shakes her head.

“There's a risk he might want to come to me after hearing that,” she says. “He needs to move on. I can't move on unless he does.”

“Then what do I do? I just keep quiet? Even after meeting you?”

She laughs again, ruffling his hair. “Do what you always do, Aomine Daiki. Just be there for my son and he will undoubtedly change.”

“You really think I can do it? He won't even say that he loves me.”

“Not everything has to be said verbally,” she shakes her head. “But if it's any consolation, you're the reason why he's still here.”

“Really?”

“I wouldn't lie about that,” the woman says. “To him, you're like an angel.”

“Seriously? An angel?”

“Why not? Even I can see that you're a good man,” she says. “My son is very lucky to have you. And I'm happy knowing Taiga has someone that cares for him so much. After all of this is over, I think I can rest without any worries.”

Aomine smiles, watching as blissful tears stream down her face, knowing deep inside him that she herself wasn't ready to let him go. After all, she had always been there for him, watching him grow throughout the years. He grabs her delicate hands and meets her gaze.
“I’ll take care of Taiga,” he says, squeezing her hands. “Everything that I've done and everything I have yet to do-- it’s all for his happiness. Rest assured, he will be well taken care of.”

She looks at him in surprise, her fiery gaze holding his before she laughs through her tears. “That makes me really happy. I'll be watching over you both. Aomine Daiki, it was a pleasure meeting you.”

“Wait, before you go-- your name!”

“Ah, my name? I'm--”

Chapter End Notes

Kagami is all good now! And by that I mean, he's getting a lot more confident with himself ^^ Thank you for reading! See you next chapter!
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait once again! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He had maybe fallen asleep at least three times after the alarm clock had sounded-- groaning, whining, and cursing at the hands that tried desperately to haul him off the bed.

“Wake up damnit,” the hoarse voice calls from behind.

Aomine mutters incomprehensibly and dives deeper into his covers, savoring the warmth and smell the redhead left behind.

Interestingly enough, the male had no problem waking up to the alarm and had shut it off after about three rings, the male hopped over Aomine’s dead body and had gotten washed up and ready in the next few minutes. And for some reason, the thought of Kagami being remotely excited for school had irked him. He had never been this enthused when he was being woken up for a date.

“Daiki, get up,” Kagami says, his voice still gruff from sleep. “You're gonna be late.”

Aomine groans loudly again, encasing himself in a blanket burrito-- safe, secure, and protected.

Kagami plants multiple kicks on his side, then moves his feet onto his shoulder, wiggling his toes annoyingly in front of his face.

“Cut it out,” Aomine grumbles, swatting at Kagami’s foot.

“It's been almost fifteen minutes since the alarm rang,” Kagami nags, giving him a few more kicks to the side. “Are you always this stubborn on school days?”

“No.”

“Then get the hell up already!”

Aomine smirks and rolls over, groggily muttering and puckering his lips, “Kiss me.”

“Hah?”

“Kiss me and I'll get up,” he repeats.

“What are you? Sleeping beauty?” Kagami sighs.

Aomine laughs, and shimmies his arms out of the blankets, holding them open. “I'm flattered.”

The redhead shakes his head, muttering soft protests as he brings himself closer, closer, closer until Aomine is able to wrap his arms around his body, before Kagami leans in, planting his lips on his.

Kissing was something that wasn't done as often as it should in their relationship. It was usually meant for moments when weakness and insecurity were shown in Kagami; when words were not
nearly as sufficient enough. These were moments Aomine held the most dear.

He would die to cuddle with him in bed for longer.

Kagami breaks their kiss moments later, giving Aomine’s arm a light pat. “Okay, get up.”

“Another,” Aomine whines, squeezing the male tighter in his arms.

He expected Kagami to object again, to drag him out of his burrito, or give him a few more kicks, but what he didn’t foresee was how quickly those pair of lips returned on his, a little bit more forceful and needy than the last.

Aomine knew this meant Kagami needed it more than he did.

However, this time, the kiss was shorter.

Letting his eyes wander over the male’s face, he could sense a bit of anxiety. It was a pretty obvious display in any case. Kagami made it a habit to chew on his bottom lip when he’s thinking too hard. “Taiga, you alright?”

Kagami nods, laughing sheepishly. “This is gonna sound really lame...but I'm a little nervous.”

Sitting up on the edge of his bed, Aomine throws the blanket behind him, and looks up at the male. “It's not lame.”

“Yeah, well,” Kagami shrugs, kicking at the ground. “It sounds lame, being nervous for school.”

“Not really. To tell you the truth, I'm a little nervous too,” Aomine adds, coaxing the boy to sit beside him. “But you told me things would be okay. So I believe it.”

“Not everything that is said necessarily comes true.”

Aomine couldn't deny it. At all. But regardless, his role was to add some form of security for the male, and if he had to spit out a few white lies, so be it.

“You'll be fine,” he says. “You have the whole Seirin team there with you. They won't let anything happen to you.”

“What if something happens? We both don't have our cell anymore and I don't want to bother Kuroko all the time to text Momoi.”

“Idiot, if anyone would be bothering Tetsu, it's me,” Aomine points to himself. “I already made plans to spam him with messages. Besides, he's your best friend, he wouldn't mind.”

Kagami huffs in frustration, shaking his head. “You don't know that. I don't wanna be a nuisance to him or Momoi.”

“Taiga, remember what I told you? It's fine to be selfish,” Aomine advises earnestly.

“What about all my classmates? I've been gone for so long,” he continues, fiddling with his fingers. “What if they start talking shit about me?”

“What? They won't. And if they did, who cares?”

The male frowns, knitting his eyebrows together and gives him a hard stare. “I care.”
“Since when did you care what other people thought about you?”

“Since her party--” He starts, then upon realizing something, he quickly cuts off mid sentence.

“Who's party?” Aomine questions, leaning in.

“No one. Just forget it.”

Aomine sighs, knowing full well that that bit of information was somehow connected to the root of all of this. However, he knew now that it wasn't a good idea to continuing prying.

Clearing his throat, Aomine ponders about what to say, deciding on a safer route. “If anyone talks shit about you, they'll answer to me. So don't worry.”

“Then what if he shows up? Or Chai? What if my fathe--”

“They won't,” Aomine says. “I'll be the first person you see when you get out of school. I'll pick you up.”

“You swear?”

Aomine nods, swinging his arm around his shoulders and giving him a quick peck on the cheek. “I'll be there. You have my word.”

His words seem to calm the redhead down slightly, evident by the small smile that slowly forms in his expression.

“Feel better?”

“Kinda,” Kagami breathes out. “I just wanna get this over with.”

“The first day is always the hardest,” Aomine nods, squeezing his shoulder. “But you can handle yourself.”

“Sure I can. I'm a fucking mess, Daiki,” he mutters, laughing coldly.

He was stumped again. Aomine despised how useless he felt, knowing that Kagami had probably kept all of this bottled up inside him, and yet now that it was out in the open, he still couldn't help him.

If only he didn't have to leave his side.

Wait a minute--

Briskly standing up, Aomine walks over to his dresser and fumbles around, tossing his clothes on the floor.

“Where the fuck did I put that thing,” he mutters to himself.

Closing his dresser angrily, he takes short strides toward his nightstand and opens the drawer.

Bingo.

Unclipping the cell phone strap from his battered cell, he walks over to Kagami and holds out his empty palm, wiggling his fingers.
With a confused expression, Kagami holds out his hand, and Aomine takes it gently, placing the object in his palm and wrapping his fingers closed.

“Keep this with you,” Aomine says, smiling. “It's kept me hopeful throughout all that's happened. I'm sure it'll do the same for you.”

The redhead blinks at Aomine for a moment and then holds his fist close to his chest, opening his palm to reveal the souvenir he had given Aomine when he had returned from America.

“You...still have this?”

“Of course,” Aomine chuckles. “It gave me some peace of mind. So think of it as a good luck charm.”

Kagami stares at it in silence, lightly tracing the details of the charm with his fingertips. Finally he looks up, smiling fondly at him. “Thank you, Daiki.”

“Nothing to it. I wish I could've gotten you something cooler though,” Aomine says, reaching over to touch the necklace around Kagami’s neck.

“I think this is pretty cool,” Kagami says, holding the charm for Aomine to see. “I mean I picked it out, it's a black cat. It's literally you.”

“You saying I'm cool?”

Kagami chuckles, lightly punching Aomine’s abdomen. “As if. And hurry up. We’re already late, asshole.”

“Ah, one more kiss--”

It was hard watching Kagami turn the opposite direction with Kuroko. His former shadow was kind enough to offer to accompany the redhead to school. It was a good idea, no doubt, but somehow watching his boyfriend walk off with his best friend left a bit of a sour taste in his mouth. Maybe he should've asked Kagami for a little good luck charm himself.

Sighing to himself, he turns on his heel and marches unceremoniously toward Touou, kicking at rocks and cursing at stray classmates who catch sight of him, speaking amongst themselves. He could hear them loud and clear.

“Hey, isn't that Aomine Daiki?”

“You're right, I haven't seen him since before summer break. He's been gone so long.”

“I heard he got into an accident.”

“Fight with a guy?”

“You think he's in some gang? He sure looks scarier.”

“Oh my gosh, he's looking this way--”
He clicks his tongue in annoyance and turns away, hoping to god that Kagami was having better luck with his classmates. Although, the Kagami now seemed a lot less menacing than the Kagami he’s used to. He hoped his tamer appearance would negate any harsh rumors surrounding his disappearance. In any case, the redhead has always been more popular with the girls. He wouldn’t be surprised if they were all fussing over him now.

Before he knew it, he had stopped in front of Satsuki, who had been waiting for him at the entrance.

“Glad you could make it, Dai-chan!,” she says, looking around at all the curious and disappointing expressions he seemed to be attracting. “Sorry I wasn't able to walk with you.”

“I had no choice but to come,” he mutters, rolling his eyes. “And it's fine.”

“You sure? I thought you'd want to spend time with Kagamin so I left earlier…,” she trails off, then bouncing on her toes. “I'll walk with you tomorrow though!”

“Satsuki, don't worry about it,” he assures her, waving her off nonchalantly. “This kind of response was predictable. Better to be ignored than approached.”

Satsuki looks at him in bewilderment, then taps her chin thoughtfully. “Hmm? You wouldn't have said that before dating Kagamin.”

“Huh?”

“Well,” she laughs, twirling on her heel and walking towards the school building. “Before you would've loved being surrounded by big-breasted beauties.”

“Hey! That's not true!” Aomine bites back, jogging to catch up to her. “You can have a boyfriend and still like big boobs.”

“So if a group of girls were to fuss over you now, you would let them?”

“Well….no.”

“Exactly.”

After a mind-numbing session of his morning classes, Aomine hikes up to his usual spot on the rooftop in hopes of soothing his aching brain. His classmates had become more of a nuisance than he had anticipated; some of them being brave enough to approach him openly to ask him about his sudden absence, while others were stupid enough to gossip not-so-discreetly around him.

It was all just too tiring.

He does his classic Aomine stretch before sprawling out on the ground, attempting to let the memory of Kagami's lips against his calm him down. Yet for some reason, he couldn't. There was this unsettling feeling churning in the pit of his stomach, tugging at him unshakenly for days. While he did make massive progressions with Kagami and his mental health, there was a threat still lingering in the air.

Aomine groans, thinking of the last message Ichiro had left him some time ago.
‘If you won't come to me, I'll come to you,’ The message had read.

‘Come to me?’ Aomine ponders the thought. There wasn't a chance the male would dare show his face around his home, let alone his school. It wouldn't make sense for him to know his whereabouts anyways.

As for showing up at Seirin, well, he didn't want to think about it.

Rolling over on his side, he tries his best to block out the anxiety washing over him, praying that he could have some type of closure from Ichiro and Chai so he and Kagami could be left in peace.

How the hell was he supposed to get that when he's been told not meddle?

As he's left with his own warring thoughts, the loud creak of the metal door opens widely, and he knows exactly who it is before she speaks.

“Dai-chan!” Satsuki says, a little too chirpy. “You just got back and you're already lazing around? What happened to getting your makeup work done?”

“Later.”

“You're not gonna graduate if you keep this up y’know.”

“Stop nagging me already,” he mumbles, sitting up to face her with crossed arms. “Not like I'll do a good job if I get it done now.”

Satsuki raises an eyebrow, sticking out her hip in question. “Oh? You still being moody?”

“What's it to you?”

“Well of course I care,” she says, kneeling down to take a seat next to him. “Are you still missing Kagamin?”

Aomine shrugs. “It's hard being away from him after we've been together for awhile….but, that's not really the problem.”

“What's the problem?”

“The assholes that fucked him up,” he says curtly, grimacing at the sound of that.

Satsuki frowns and leans in close, her voice brought down to a low whisper. “Are they bothering him again?”

“Not at the moment but,” Aomine rubs at the nape of his neck. “I got this uneasy feeling-- Like they're plotting something.”

“You sure it's not cause you're paranoid something's gonna happen to Kagamin?”

Aomine offers a simple shrug in response.

“Dai-chan,” Satsuki says, rubbing his shoulder. “You will be fine. Kagamin will be fine. Everything will be okay.”

“That's such a generic response,” Aomine mutters, rolling his eyes.

“Well, let's say they do plot something, you've got me, your family and the rest of our friends to
back you and Kagamin up!”

“I... guess.”

“Why the hesitation?” Satsuki inquires, resting her chin on her hand. “Have more faith in us! We definitely won't let anything happen to either of you.”

Aomine runs his fingers through his locks, letting out a sigh more indicative of relief. “Thanks.”

“No problem!” She sings, rummaging through her coat pocket for her phone. “I think this'll cheer you up.”

Satsuki taps a couple times on her phone screen, and holds it out in front of Aomine’s face, revealing a photo of Kagami sitting at his desk with his head resting on his hand and his other hand playing with the charm Aomine had given him on his desk.

He had to thank Kuroko for that one. Just the sight of Kagami melted him into a pile of gross love-stricken pile of goo.

“Oh my,” Satsuki coos, her free hand held over her mouth while she blushed slightly. “What a soft expression on you Dai-chan, my heart almost skipped a beat.”

“Oh, shut up,” Aomine coughs, turning around quickly to hide his warming face.

Satsuki laughs, patting him on the back. “It's supposed to be a compliment.”

“Whatever,” Aomine groans, heaving himself up off the ground and throws his jacket over his shoulder.

“Wait, break isn't over yet Dai-chan, where are you going?”

Aomine looks down at her, then sighs, holding out his hand. “Lend me your notes. I'm gonna start on some homework.”

The tanned male glances up at the clock and taps his desk impatiently. There was only an hour left before class ends, and he had told himself he would leave fifteen minutes before class was finished, however, he was seriously itching to see Kagami right now.

‘Don't give in, don't give in, Kagami’s fine,’ he told himself repeatedly. Yet that thought never stayed buried in his mind.

Two minutes roll by quickly and Aomine finds himself raising his hand.

“Aomine-kun? Did you have a question on the lecture?” His teacher asks, adjusting her glasses and raising a sharp eyebrow.

“Uhh, yeah. May I be excused? I feel like shit,” he blurts out.

His teacher doesn't seem at all convinced, as she leans on her leg and shakes her head. “You sound fine. You've missed this much school and you already want to skip?”
His classmates turn around to give him more intrigued stares, quiet whispers being to float about but Aomine doesn't waver.

“I'm serious, my ribs are giving me trouble,” he says, squeezing his shirt.

Judging by his teacher's expression, he knew that she was aware of his broken ribs from before. He hoped to God she wouldn't question his recovery time and allowed him to go home. Luckily, she doesn't argue any further, and sighs defeatedly.

“Fine, but next time I'll be notifying your parents.”

“Uh huh,” Aomine nods, quickly grabbing his bag and shuffling (slowly) out of the classroom. He picks up the pace when he's clear from his teacher’s view and jogs toward the building’s exit, happily humming to himself as he makes his way past the double doors until--

A wide familiar smile greets him at the school’s entrance.

Aomine’s heart threatens to jump out of his chest. Daunting, teasing, and sure as hell, cocky. Aomine’s hands instinctively balls up, but he reminds himself of their current location. How in the hell?

The man before him catches sight of Aomine’s defensive stance and throws his hands up in an attempt to appear peaceful.

But that sly, snake-like smile couldn't have fooled him.

“You bastard,” Aomine growls through his teeth.

“Huh? Getting straight to business are we?”

“What the hell are you doing here? How'd you find me?”

Ichiro smirks, shrugging his shoulders and replying sarcastically, “You mean tracking down a tanned guy with blue hair is supposed to be a challenge?”

Aomine clicks his tongue in annoyance and walks by him. As much as he wanted to get back at him, he knew this wouldn't be the place for it. “Get lost or I'll call the police on you again.”

“Since when were you the type of person to rely on law enforcement?” Ichiro asks, obviously trying to reel him in. “I didn't think you were coward. Besides, I’m not causing a scene. What are they gonna arrest me for?”

“Trespassing.”

“Last I checked, this was a public school.”

“Then fuck off. I don't wanna talk to you.”

“But I came all this way--”

“You think I give a damn?” Aomine retorts, adjusting his bag over his shoulder and speed walking away, muttering to himself restraints that'll keep him under control.

“Oh, I wouldn't walk away,” Ichiro warns.

Aomine turns around and watches as Ichiro pulls out his--no, Kagami’s cell phone, and wiggles it
in front of him.

“That’s supposed to scare me?” Aomine asks, trying his hardest not to swipe it out of the male’s hand.

“It might,” he says, a low snicker emitting from the man’s chest. “Like I said, it wasn’t hard locating you—or the rest of your rainbow-haired gang for that matter.”

Aomine turns around, his eyebrows coming together in a cold stare, waiting to see where Ichiro would take this.

“Obviously that includes Taiga and well—you made quite an enemy of my sister and I. We don’t do well with humiliation,” Ichiro laughs coldly. “We made some really nice friends. Connection is everything.”

“What are you trying to say?” Aomine growls.

“What I’m saying is, my friends can get to Taiga before you’re even halfway there.”

Aomine’s eyes grow wide in panic, feeling the pressure backing him into a corner further and further. He was alone with Ichiro, he had no cell phone, and he couldn't run with a threat hanging over Kagami’s head. Sure, Ichiro could’ve been lying to manipulate him, but he couldn't risk it, he couldn't risk Kagami’s safety.

“What do you want?”

Pocketing his cell phone, Ichiro smiles at him. “Just wanna talk.”

“That’s it?”

Ichiro slings his arm around Aomine’s shoulder. “Hey, we haven't seen each other in awhile. Best to take our time chatting, yeah?”

“Get off me!” Aomine barks, roughly shoving the male off him, making a show of dusting himself off.

“Oh? You can touch me but I can’t touch you?”

Aomine looks at him in disgust and nearly gags. “When have I ever touched you?!”

“Hm, that must’ve came out wrong,” Ichiro laughs again. He taps on his cheek, where Aomine can see the remnants of discoloration.

Oh.

“You deserved it,” Aomine hisses. “You deserve a hell of a lot worse.”

“You’re telling that to the wrong guy here,” Ichiro sighs, giving Aomine a sad expression. “You should really be saying that to—”

“Shut the fuck up,” he says.

“You’re not even listening,” Ichiro complains dramatically. “You keep painting me as a bad guy.”

“Because you are.”

“Oh? The only reason why you say that is because you're kept in the dark. I’m guessing that
redhead never told you.”

“That’s none of your business.”

“He made it my business when he ruined my sister’s birthday and our family.”

Aomine rolled his eyes, cursing his horrible luck that he had to be stuck trying to socialize with Ichiro of all people. “So? You ruined Taiga’s family the moment your sister walked into his life.”

“See that’s the thing,” Ichiro smiles grimly, waving his hand to gesture Aomine to follow to a nearby bench. “Taiga’s family was already broken when she walked in. He just didn’t know about it.”

Aomine sits down on the farthest end of the bench, bracing himself for what he felt was coming. He knew that Ichiro was trying to explain what Kagami couldn’t and Aomine hated being in a position where he had to hear it out of someone else’s mouth—Ichiro’s mouth.

“I don’t...wanna hear it from you,” Aomine says, the words deep in the back of his throat. Such a tone would’ve been menacing if he were dealing with a normal human being, however, Ichiro sat there unfazed and utterly amused.

“You don’t want to but you kinda have to,” Ichiro says, patting the pocket that held Kagami’s phone. “Besides, that idiot won’t be telling you anything for awhile. I thought I’d speed up the process.”

“But still, I--”

“Then keep your damn mouth shut. That redhead doesn’t have to know we talked.” Ichiro snarls, a hint of frustration in his voice. “You don’t gotta be a coward y’know.”

“Shut up! I’m not a coward!” Aomine snaps, facing his body toward Ichiro in an almost threatening manner. “What good will it do for me to sit here listening to all the bullshit coming out of your mouth?! It’s not like I’ll believe you.”

Ichiro laughs and mimics Aomine’s movement, facing him and leaning close. “I may be a lot of things but a liar isn’t one of them.”

“Like hell you’re not.”

“Believe what you will but I guarantee you the redhead won’t be denying any of this stuff,” the man states, getting comfortable on the bench. “Well? Shall we start?”

The only response Aomine was willing to give was a side glance. He didn’t know whether or not Ichiro’s words would be as truthful as he says, but even if that was the case, he was feeling plenty guilty for even listening to the man talk.

“Anyways, like I said, Taiga’s family was already shit,” Ichiro says, picking at his ear. “Ever heard about his mom?”

Aomine’s ears perked up. Kagami has brought up his mother’s death before, yes, but nothing more than a mere mention. On top of that, he felt a strange sense of deja vu. Likes he’s dreamt of those red locks before.

“Sorta,” Aomine replied plainly, attempting to appear disinterested.
“You know she's dead right?”

“Yeah.”

“Know how?”

Aomine turns to him and shakes his head, earning a teasing smile from the man before him.

“There's a story to that,” Ichiro says, playfully using his fingers to resemble a person. He wiggles his middle and pointer finger, giving his person legs. “Featuring little Kagami Taiga.”

Aomine swallows hard.

“How old was he?” Ichiro wonders out loud, tapping his chin with his spare hand. “I think maybe around six or seven. Seems like an age where you should know better huh?”

Ichiro looks at him expectantly, waiting for him to answer.


Ichiro laughs dryly. “So you think some kids know better and some kids don't? Are you labeling their intelligence?”

“No, I--”

“Well anyways,” the male starts again, waddling his finger person towards the edge of the bench. “Little Taiga was outside with his mom when he thought that playing in the middle of the street was a smart idea. His mom told him not to, she begged him to come back where it was safe--”

Ichiro makes a pouty face and sighs heavily, as if he was there to witness the incident himself. “He didn't listen though. He ignored her and continued playing selfishly-- Thick-headed since youth. You seem to know where this story leads. Take a guess. What do you think happens next?”

Aomine glared at him and looked back down at Ichiro's finger person. He didn't want to admit it. That maybe Kagami's childish mistake followed him unknowingly for years to come. “He got hit?”

“They got hit,” Ichiro corrected, making a fist with his bare hand and playfully running it into his finger person. “She didn't survive. All because Taiga wouldn't listen.”

“He was a kid,” Aomine refutes.

“Yes, by your standards, one of the unfortunate kids that didn't know any better. In other words, he was too stupid and selfish to know.”

“That's not what I--”

“That is what you said,” Ichiro says. “And I'm not done with the story yet. Don't ya wanna know what happened when he came back to America?”

“No, I'm done with this,” Aomine mutters, standing up halfway before he noticed that Ichiro had his phone out, his thumb sitting on top of the call button.

“Leaving?” Ichiro asks.

Biting his tongue, Aomine sits down quietly.
“So where was I?” The man contemplates. “Ah yes. After the incident, Taiga got amnesia. I found that very fitting. Luckily for him, the only pain he received from his mother’s death was a lie that made him believe his mother was still alive—but well, he was told his mother left him and his father.”

Aomine didn't want to be kept here any longer. He hated the fact that he wasn't able to find out about what happened through Kagami's own volition, he hated that the puzzle pieces were coming together so perfectly. Kise’s theory and Chai’s comment about Kagami-- they were all true in a sense.

“Funny huh? How he lived the rest of his life cursing and hating his mother, all the while his father mourned alone, secretly despising his son for taking her away due to a decision he could've made that would've prevented all of this instead.”

Ichiro leaned his head against the bench, turning to give Aomine a smirk. “So you see, his family has always been broken, and he made it that way. From what I've told you so far, you can kinda assume what took place in America.”

‘He found out,’ Aomine thought. His mouth and throat felt dry, and his hands were starting to feel clammy. He wasn't sure he wanted to hear the rest.

“It was on my sister’s birthday-- ah, it was actually his birthday too. We had a party and invited a ton of people,” Ichiro says. “He went ballistic obviously, finding his mother’s altar like that. He attacked his father before attacking me.”

‘Finding his mother’s altar…..’ Aomine repeats the words in his head. In other words-- In the end, nobody had told him.

“Taiga found out like that?!?” Aomine bursts out, his fists clenched tightly as he stands up immediately, trying to control his ragged breathing.

“Huh? Yeah. He walked into a room he wasn't supposed to walk into and found it.”

“You're telling me-- his dick of a dad didn't tell him?!”

“Of course not! Not yet at least-- he was planning to but Taiga had to go and fuck everything up!” Ichiro says.

“Taiga--”

“None of this would've happened if Taiga didn't get his mother killed in the first place!”

Aomine quiets, trying to fight the hazy feeling clouding his head. He knew that, god damn it, he fucking knew that. But he couldn't help the vexation bubbling in his chest. It pained him imagining Kagami finding out, the hurt and betrayal written clearly on his face, the ridicule he received from everyone--fuck, the fact that he never had the proper time to grieve for his mother.

“You think it's fucked up? Lemme tell you something--” Ichiro stands up, jabbing a finger in Aomine’s chest. “Waltzing around throwing a ball through hoops, merrily enjoying high school life while those around you are still hurting is fucked up. Let's not forget who started all of this.”

Aomine couldn't bear it anymore. The ringing in his eyes, the loud thud of his heart beating erratically in his chest, begging for a release of anger. Oh god, the memory of his car accident flooded his mind. He now understood why Kagami had been so distraught, so guilt-ridden, and had broken down in front of him. He couldn't bear it. He couldn't bear the thought of knowing that
Ichiro had a point. It all started somewhere, and he hated knowing it started with Kagami’s mistake.

“Had enough?” Ichiro says. “I’m pretty much done anyways.”

“Now what?” Aomine says, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Pardon?”

“Now what?” He repeats. “After telling me all this, what do you expect me to do?”

“Make your own judgement,” Ichiro responds, grinning widely. “You judged with your feelings before so judge with your head. Now that you know what happened, you can tell me who’s the villain.”

Aomine narrows his eyes, gripping his bag tightly. The other male takes his silence as agreement, and opens his mouth to retort when he hears a low voice. “You...painted an innocent child who needed nothing more than the truth as a murderer.”

Ichiro flinches, not expecting Aomine to still take that redhead’s side. “I told you, this all started with Taiga when he got his mother--”

“She was already dead at that point! She's been dead! Why do you need to keep that stupid excuse going?!”

“Like I sa--”

“No! Shut the hell up. You and his father are at fault for dragging Taiga’s mistake this far into his life. He didn't get any time, any closure, he didn't get his father’s attention, he didn't get anything,” Aomine seethes, jabbing the male’s chest hard enough to send him staggering backwards back onto the bench. “If you think Taiga is so pathetic, maybe you should take a closer look at the man who ran away from his own child because he was too much of a pussy to tell the truth. He stole so much more from Taiga’s childhood than Taiga ever stole from either one of you.”

Ichiro stares up at him in awe then his face quickly morphs into mocked amusement. “So that's what you think, huh? I guess we’ll settle this one way or another...eventually.”

“No thanks,” Aomine says. “I've had enough of this shit.”

“It's bound to happen,” Ichiro shrugs, fumbling to get himself up. “Before then, I guess this'll have to do.”

Ichiro smiles again, holding his fists up quickly and ducks toward Aomine’s side in one swift movement.

The next thing he feels is a hard fist connecting to his jaw.

He had been on autopilot the whole way there, his mind was muddled and tangled in a heap of different emotions and realizations. He debated whether or not he wanted to tell Kagami what he had heard. He knew the male was struggling, and as much as Aomine had tried to be there this whole time, there was no way for him to really be there. After all, Kagami had been dealing with
guilt and devastation all by himself. Hell, he practically lost two parents in one day-- would telling him really be a smart choice?

Aomine stood outside the gates of Seirin, wondering when Kagami would show up and if he would be ready to see him. Stray students walk in and out of the entrance, giving him glances. His left cheek throbbed achingly, counting the seconds that passed by, but Kagami never showed up.

He didn't have his phone and Satsuki was supposed to be in charge of relaying his messages to Kuroko. He wonders if ditching school early without telling her was a smart choice.

Sighing heavily, he adjusts his bag on his shoulder and walks through the gates, making his way to the one place he knew his former shadow and boyfriend would be-- the gym.

Fortunately, it didn't take him long to find it. The heavy squeaks and the thud of the basketballs bouncing off the floor led him there with ease. Aomine takes a quick peek inside to make sure the redhead was in there. Sure enough, he finds him there, sitting on the bench watching the other players while Riko seemed to be trying to speak to him.

“Aomine-kun?”

The sudden voice made Aomine’s heart jump out of his chest and the taller male spun quickly to face the perpetrator behind him.

“Tetsu?! Don't jump out at me like that!”

“I called you normally,” Kuroko says, frowning when he notices his cheek. “Aomine-kun, what happened to you?”

“Ah, this?” Aomine points at the wound in question. “Don't worry about it. Some idiot elbowed me.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, really.”

“How'd that happen?” Kuroko asks, calculating eyes bouncing from his growing bruise to his eyes. “You're not that reckless.”

“Uh.. I was sitting at my desk and this guy whacked me in my face,” he lies, sounding as plain as possible. “Was an accident though.”

“Oh, I see,” Kuroko responds quietly. “Well I sent Momoi-san a text earlier. Judging from the fact that you walked here, she seemed to have told you.”

“What'd the text say?”

“So she didn't tell you?”

Aomine shakes his head and glances toward the gym again, watching Kagami’s teammate interacting with him.

“Kagami-kun didn't seem to have much trouble today,” Kuroko says, smiling slightly. “Coach wanted Kagami-kun to attend practice though.”

“Already?”
“She didn’t want him to feel like he’s not part of the team anymore.”

“He’s just sitting there,” Aomine mutters lowly. He wasn’t expecting Kagami to be playing normally, but well, the sight of Kagami being a spectator hurt him slightly.

Kuroko nods and glances inside the gym. “Yes, Coach didn’t want to force him. Although, Kagami-kun seemed concentrated watching the practice drills.”

“Was he?”

“Mmhmm, I'm sure Kagami-kun will get into it soon.”

“As long as he's not having a hard time,” Aomine says, a slight smile forming on his face. “Can I take him home now?”

“Of course, he's been waiting for you,” his former shadow smiles.

Aomine nods and turns to walk in, when Kuroko grabs onto his arm.

“Aomine-kun, wait,” he says, his light eyes darken and narrows, giving him a stone cold gaze that sent shivers down his spine. “Kagami-kun may believe your story but I don't. Be careful.”

He swallows hard and nods again, sliding the gym door and walking inside.

Riko and Hyuuga notice him first and waves him over. The action catches the redhead’s attention and he turns around, smiling in relief at the sight of him.

Before he knew it, the surge of emotions overwhelms him, and he couldn't help but tear up a bit at the sight of him.

Kagami stands up and walks over toward him, his smile slowly fading into a slight frown when he sees the purple and bluish hues coloring his cheek.

“Daiki,” he says, his hand coming up to hover over his cheek. “Your face is messed up. What the hell happened?”

“Was nothin’,” he manages to say.

“Nothing?”

“I'll tell you later,” Aomine brushes off the topic quickly, grabbing hold of the male’s hand. “Ready to go?”

Kagami nods and turns around to say his goodbyes, then picks up his bag. “Ready.”

Aomine leads them both out of the school’s vicinity, his hand gripping the other’s tightly and desperately. For now, he would keep it a secret.

“Are you gonna tell me?” Kagami asks, staring hard at the injury on his face.

“It's a pain explaining it.”

“You said you would tell me.”

“You're gonna make me talk with an injured jaw?”
“Oh...sorry,” Kagami says softly, a hint of rejection in his face that made him look more like a kicked puppy. “Didn't mean to.”

Aomine sighs and stops, turning to face the man, who now looked at him confused.

“Some...asshole elbowed me on accident,” he explains, scratching the back of his head. “I’m fine though.”

Kagami watches him in silence, his cute brows coming together in what seemed like concentration, his dark eyes darting between his eyes making him feel weirdly self conscious under his gaze.

“Um….ok,” he says, finally. “I thought you got yourself into some trouble.”

“Nah, it was nothing.”

He feels Kagami’s hand tense up slightly. “Musta hit you pretty hard.”

“His elbow was sharp,” Aomine says, noticing the way Kagami eyed him suspiciously.

‘Shit, does he know I'm lying?’ Aomine panics. ‘Of all the times he chose not to be dense.’

He had to get Kagami’s mind off it.

Before Kagami has another chance to say anything, Aomine starts leading him again. He clears his throat before speaking. “So how was your first day back?”

“My day was normal,” Kagami replies, shrugging his shoulders.

Aomine hums and looks over his shoulder. “Define normal.”

“I was really lost during the lessons,” he sighs. “There's a lot of work.”

“Isn't that obvious? You missed a shit ton of days.”

“So did you.”

“But I'm smarter than you, so I catch up easy.”

“I find that hard to believe. Your grades are probably worse than mine,” The redhead playfully nudges his side, chuckling softly. “And I--uh…”

Aomine stares at him questionably, “You what?”

“It's nothing,” Kagami shakes his head, waving it off.

“It can't be nothing,” he says, giving his best pout. “C’mon, tell me!”

“It's not a good idea.”

“Taaigaa,” Aomine whines, squeezing the male’s hand. “Anything you have to say, I wanna hear.”

“It's not a good idea,” The redhead repeats.

“Taaiga.”

Rolling his eyes and sighing defeatedly, Kagami gives in. “I wanna play.”
“Huh?”

“I wanna play...basketball,” Kagami admits, sheepishly. “I just saw em’ playing today and--it looked fun.”

Upon hearing that, Aomine couldn't help but smile. This was what he considered a milestone, considering Kagami hadn't touched a basketball since their game before he left for America.

“Let's play then.”

“Now?”

“Hell yeah,” he grins, despite the nagging pain spreading throughout his cheek.

“Your face is like a bowling ball and you still wanna play?”

“Wha-- a bowling ball?” He frowns, touching the side of his face, his cheek meeting his hand a lot earlier than he expected. Damn, it really was swollen.

“Yeah, you look gross,” Kagami says, with no ounce of hesitation in his voice. “We can play next time.”

“When's next time?”

“When you're all better.”

“Tch, this is nothing! It won't stop me from beating you,” he challenges, feeling slight gratification when Kagami laughs at that.

“It wouldn't be fair for me to let an injured person play, idiot.”

“I ain't injured,” Aomine bites back, ruffling his hair affectionately and planting a soft kiss on his nose. “But we’ll have it your way.”

Kagami beams at that, smiling triumphantly as he grips Aomine’s hand and walks ahead of him.

“Let's go home and ice that,” he says.

And Aomine follows.

Chapter End Notes

Wonder how Kagami will react if he finds out Aomine knows what happened :o) Tell me your thoughts!

Anywho, I wasn't able to respond to last chapter's comments so I'll try my best to reply to everyone this time! I'd like to reply to last chapter's comments but idk if it's too late for that T__T See you next chapter and thanks for reading!
“Out with it.”

A couple days had passed since the incident, and he had hoped she would've dropped it altogether.

Aomine looks up at his mom, her hands planted authoritatively at her hips.

“What?” He asks, feigning ignorance.

“You know exactly what this is about,” she says, gesturing toward the bruise on his face.

It was inevitable, to say the least. The moment he walked home with his face swollen like a pufferfish, his mother immediately gave him the ‘what in the world did you get yourself into now’ look. She treated his wound rather harshly (he's sure she smacked him on the face with the ice pack on purpose) and gave him a short lecture on being more careful. Of course, this all happened with Kagami hovering over him.

Looking around for any sign of the redhead, he lowers his voice. “I told you it was just an accident.”

“Daiki, you're a horrible liar,” his mother sighed exasperatedly, running her hand through her navy hair. “Kagami-kun is in the shower right now, so now’s your chance speak.”

“Mom,” Aomine groans. “I’m serious, it was just a mistake.”

“Nobody socks you in the face and leaves a lesion that huge by mistake,” she retorts. “Don't forget, I'm a nurse. I see these things all the time.”

Well there was no point fighting a useless battle.

“Ok, ok,” he gives up, scooting over on his bed to allow his mother to sit. “Seems like you already knew what happened anyways.”

“I've got an idea, yeah,” she nods, taking a seat beside him. “So what happened?”

“Ichiro,” Aomine hissed, the back of his throat burning at the mention.

His mother frowns, crossing his arms across her chest, “Don't tell me you met the guy.”

“It's not like I wanted to, that fucker found out where I was.”
“How?”

Aomine scratches the back of his head and shrugs. “Not to brag mom, but I'm pretty famous in the district. I'm pretty sure it wasn't that hard to find me.”

“And you got into a fight with him?” She asks. “Honey, you could've just walked away or called a teacher for help!”

“No, the fighting came later, alright?” Aomine says, trying to keep his mother from raising her voice. “Besides, I couldn't do all that. He got me cornered.”

“You mean Ichiro and his friends ganged up on you?!”

“Shhh! Mom, quiet down!” He whispers sharply. His mother puts her hand over her mouth in surprise. “No, I mean--technically yes, he had friends, but they didn't gang up on me...physically.”

“He told me he and Chai had connections..that if I didn't stay....he'd go after Taiga,” he continues, sucking in a hard breath. “I didn't wanna risk anything, so I had no choice but to stay.”

“He threatened you?” His mother asks softly, her concern obvious through the tone of her voice.

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Do you think it was a credible threat?”

“How should I know, mom?” Aomine huffs indignantly. “I wouldn't be surprised if it was. That man has no sense of boundaries. Hell, he was close to killing Taiga before, I wouldn't be surprised if he'd try again.”

His mother nods, remembering the close call they had not even a couple weeks before. “I suppose you're right.”

She allows Aomine a moment to prevent him from getting too riled up. Then asks, “So what did he want?”

“To talk.”

“That's it?”

“Well--and payback cause I punched him earlier.”

She lets a soft noise of understanding leave her lips. “So that's why you got hit…”

Aomine nods, letting his fingers glide over his bruise, flinching slightly at the memory.

“What did he want to speak to you about?”

“That asshole tried to turn me against Taiga.”

“By?”

Aomine swallows dryly, guilt and anger alike fuming within his chest. “He told me what happened in America.”

“Oh,” his mother says before going quiet. “I won't ask about that.”
“Thanks,” he offers her a half smile. The great thing about his mother was that she knew when to stop prying.

She offers a warm smile in response and knocks their forehead together, rubbing his back in a circular motion.

“You're planning on keeping this from him, aren't you?”

Aomine shrugs, sliding his hand down the (good) side of his face. “There's a reason why Taiga hasn't told me for this long...If I tell him now, it'll probably hurt him.”

He groans, burying his head in his hands. Just thinking about it made his head spin. There was just so much that was happening. So much that could happen depending on the choices Aomine made.

“We made so much progress too,” he mutters disappointingly, his voice breaking slightly. “If I make the wrong choice, Taiga is the one that suffers-- I'm torn, mom. I don't wanna send Taiga in a downward spiral but I don't wanna lie to him either.”

His mother looks at him sadly, brushing his hair behind his ear. “Daiki, I think in all circumstances anyone would be happy to hear the truth. But in Kagami-kun’s case... it's a little hard to say, since his mental health could possibly take another hit.”

“I know,” he says, resting his face in his hands.

“But...if you tell him, you can help him through it again, like you always do,” she advises.

“So you're basically telling me to tear him down and then build it back up again?”

“Well when you put it like that…”

“No thanks, mom,” he scoffs. “I could barely handle watching him break down the first time. There's no way I can do it again.”

“Is it better for him to know now and have you there with him?” She asks. “Or is it better for him to find out one day in the future and lose trust in you?”

“He won't find out,” Aomine states with confidence. “I'll wait until he feels ready to tell me.”

“Daiki..” she starts, but at that moment, the door down the hall creaks open, indicating that the redhead was finished showering. She quickly turns to Aomine and plants a quick kiss on his forehead, muttering a soft, ‘don't make the wrong choice’ before exiting his room.

Aomine doesn't feel any more confident in his decision. He almost contemplates telling the male when Kagami walks in his room. Hair wet and pushed back, showing off those cute eyebrows, and dimmed eyes. The redhead offers Aomine a confused smile as he approaches, cocking his head to the side in question when Aomine takes his turn staring at what he considered the most angelic being on the planet.

‘I can't do it,’ Aomine thinks. He can't hurt him, can't bear to be the one to cause his smile to disappear again. He decided he’d ask Kagami once more to tell him, hoping and praying that when he does, Kagami will be ready to open up to him. If he wasn't--he wouldn't know what to do.

“Daiki?” Kagami’s voice fills the air in melodious warmth.

With a swift movement, Aomine grabs the male’s arm and pulls him down into bed with him. The
redhead gives a resounding -oof as he lands in the mess of pillows and comforters. Aomine guides and positions Kagami’s body into their usual cuddle position before he throws the blankets over them, snuggling close to bury his nose into Kagami’s damp locks.

“You smell really good,” Aomine sniffs, rubbing circles into the male’s hips.

Kagami rolls his eyes. “I just got out of the shower you doof and-- hey! Don’t sniff me like that!”

“Like what? Like this?”

In the next second Aomine rolls on top of him, nuzzling his head into the crook of Kagami’s neck, and starts attacking the poor boy with a mixture of obnoxious sniffing and kisses, holding onto the male’s waist to keep him from wiggling from his grip.

The whole maneuver makes Kagami blubber incomprehensible curses before he breaks out in laughter, swatting and pushing feebly at Aomine, shouting at him to get off.

“Asshole, why’d you do that?” Kagami says, once Aomine stops and allows him to catch his breath. The displeasure in his voice was contradicting the goofy smile plastered on his face.

“I told you,” Aomine hovers over him, raising an eyebrow. “You smell really good.”

“It’s your shampoo, idiot,” he retorts. “You like the way your soap smells.”

Aomine rolls back onto his side of the bed and looks at Kagami, the corners of his lips forming into a smile. “You smell a lot better than the shit I have.”

“Wow, you’re really flirtin’ it up, huh?” The redhead chuckles, turning on his side to face him.

Aomine sneaks his arm underneath him, sliding Kagami closer to him, tucking him safely underneath his chin.

“Let’s play tomorrow after school,” Aomine offers quietly. Letting the scent of his boyfriend wash away his current worries. “One-on-one.”

“What else would it be?” Kagami laughs, nestling his head further into the space below Aomine’s neck, brushing his lips against his collarbones. “Is it really a good idea to be cuddling right now?”

Aomine hums, bringing his hand up to massage Kagami’s scalp, tracing light circles through short tousled strands. “Don’t wanna?”

“Nevermind, I like it,” Kagami sighs contently, melting into Aomine’s touch.

This was a surefire way to ease the man into relaxing.

“So about that game…” Aomine drawls quietly. The male shifts in response, throwing his arm over Aomine’s waist.

“You’re still injured.”

“Bakagami, it’s just a measly bruise,” he snorts.

“Then… I guess we can,” Kagami says, after awhile.

Aomine smiles into his hair, giving the other a grateful kiss on his forehead. “I can’t wait.”
He should've been used to it by now, watching Kagami drown the pill down his throat every morning. The redhead never talks about it, though; he silently takes it with nothing but a displeased expression on his face. And while Aomine noticed an improvement in the male's mood, he wasn't exactly sure if it was due to the antidepressant itself. If that were the case, wouldn't it make his own role kind of useless?

Aomine watches as Kagami shuffles over to the kitchen counter to grab the pills, then pops one in his mouth before swallowing. The male wrinkles his nose at the bitter taste.

“Taiga,” he calls.

Kagami looks at him in question, and starts walking back over to him. “What?”

“Do those work?”

The redhead looks behind him and back at Aomine, then gestures over his shoulder. “You mean the meds?”

“Yeah,” Aomine nods, lazily picking at his ear. “Like do you feel any different?”

Kagami shrugs, taking a seat next to him while taking momentary glances at the clock on the wall. “I dunno. They made me feel sick up until awhile ago.”

“Ah yeah, I remember you mentioning that awhile ago,” Aomine says. “You never talked about it though. I was kinda wondering why.”

“There's really nothing to talk about,” Kagami smiles slightly. “Seemed kinda pointless just complaining for no reason and besides, the side effects are wearing off a bit now.”

“I see...I guess that's good then,” Aomine sighs. “So does it...uh--make you feel happier?”

“Happier, huh?” Kagami laughs, albeit coldly and rubs his hands together. “I wouldn't say happy. Maybe...calmer.”

Aomine couldn't offer an argument on that. He has noticed the redhead was a bit more mellowed out. He didn't sport a short fuse like he used or had many outbursts, however, he certainly was getting back into the groove of bickering back and forth. But that's beside the point, Aomine thinks. He's not happy?

“You can tell?” Aomine inquires, genuinely curious how such a small pill could practically change a person's temperament.

“A bit,” Kagami says. “My thoughts are a little more organized.”

“But you’re not sad, right?” Aomine asks, stupidly.

Kagami doesn't respond, just stares blankly at his Seirin bag lying at his feet, drawing his lips into a thin line.

“I’m having more happy moments if that's what you're asking,” Kagami says after a few more seconds.
“Do I make you happy?”

Kagami’s head snaps up, his mouth parted slightly. “Yeah, of course.”

“Serious?”

“You think I’d waste my time being around someone that didn’t make me happy?”

“So what would you do if I really weren’t here?” Aomine takes Kagami’s hands into his own, rubbing his thumb over the male’s knuckles.

The redhead blinks at the sudden question, then sighs, obviously stumped-- or rather he didn't want to answer it for fear of Aomine’s reaction to his response.

“Daiki,” he mutters. “I don't think I wanna answer that.”

Aomine takes a deep breath in. He somehow expected that answer, but it didn't make it any easier to hear. They definitely have to work on changing that answer.

Kagami frowns, sliding his hands away. “Why're you asking these questions anyway? You made me promise not to leave you. Are you planning on going anywhere?”

“No, never,” Aomine shakes his head. “I just worry sometimes. I want you to be back to normal.”

“Oh...” he trails off, giving an off smile. The redhead leans in slightly, pressing his cool hand against the bruise on Aomine’s cheek. “Don't be a worrywart, I'm fine.”

Aomine breathes a sigh of relief. “So I guess I'm doing my job right so far?”

“You're doing more than enough, Daiki,” Kagami reassures him. “Too much, actually.”

“If you're suggesting I stop, I won't.”

“I didn’t think you would,” Kagami stands up and slings his bag over his shoulder, adjusting the strap. “Good talk?”

Aomine wouldn't call it good, especially since he expected Kagami’s mental health to be in a different place. As much as he liked the fact that Kagami relied on him, it didn't put him at peace knowing that Kagami might jump at the chance to do something incredibly stupid if Aomine somehow disappeared. But there were some bits to be celebrated considering that Kagami has been in a worse place. And well, Aomine liked hearing that he made him happy.

“Was great,” Aomine fakes a smile. “We gotta work on some things, though.”

“You mean I have to work on things,” The redhead says, sliding his feet into his (Aomine’s) shoes. “I'll keep trying, Daiki.”

“As long as you don't stop.”

“Yes sir,” Kagami jokes, bending down to plant a kiss on Aomine’s head then plants another gentle kiss on his injured cheek-- an act he rarely ever initiates unless Aomine asks. “Gotta run now. Have a good day and don't get into any fights.”

“Since when have I got into any--” Aomine starts, but then realizes that Kagami’s already halfway to the door. “Wait! Don't forget we have a basketball date after school!”
“You're not planning on ditching without telling me again, right?”

“You've been saying that for the past three days Satsuki,” Aomine grumbles. “You're not still mad about that are you?”

“What do you think?” She insists, looking down at him with her arms crossed, her finger tapping on her elbow.

“You're pissed.”

“Right on the money,” she smirks. “You're lucky I didn't tell your mom when you did.”

Aomine huffs indignantly. Oh how he hated dealing with a mad Satsuki. “My bad, alright? It was in the middle of class, I couldn't exactly tell you.”

“Well if you knew you were planning on skipping you should've told me!” she shrills, throwing her arms down in defeat.

“Okay! I'm sorry- yikes, it won't happen again,” he says, covering his ears like a child. “I wasn't planning on leaving that early.”

“If you had just waited until I was there with you, none of that,” -Satsuki gestures toward the wound on his face- “would've happened.”

“Tch, like you could've done something about that monkey,” he snorts. “I told you that bastard threatened me.”

“I could've called someone!”

Aomine buries his face in his hands, cursing the fact that he had to deal with another one of Satsuki’s nagging sessions during their lunch break. If he had known she was gonna be so damn passive aggressive about it, he wouldn't have told her what happened. “Ok, next time you can call someone.”

“Too late for that,” she harrumphs, turning on her heel, her long hair smacking him in the face, and stomps away.

Aomine rubs his face and scowls, facing the front where Sakurai looked at him with eyes full of both pity and humor.

“Don't take it personally Aomine-san,” he says. “She was really worried.”

“She always takes things personally.”

“Oh, s-sorry,” Sakurai laughs nervously, then bends down to rummage through his bag and pulls something out. He carefully removes the slip over them and places them on Aomine’s desk.

“What's this?”
The last time I saw Kagami-san was during his birthday party and I wasn’t able to visit either of you in the hospital,” he explains. “As an apology, I wanted to offer you both a get-well soon bento.”

Aomine looks at him in surprise and opens up one of the lids to the bento, revealing a colorful array of rice, meat, and vegetables. “Whoa, this is awesome. Taiga will love this.”

“I-I’m glad,” Sakurai says. “I felt bad for not being more involved.”

“It’s no big deal,” Aomine assures him, placing the lid over the bento and gently sets them down in his bag. The meal would go perfect with their basketball date later. “Thanks, Ryo. I’ll let you know what Taiga says.”

“Thank you so much, Aomine-san,” Sakurai bows his head and quickly spins in his seat to face the front again.

The rest of his classes go by so slowly Aomine was convinced that time somehow stopped. He couldn’t pay attention to the lessons or do his work, and he was way too excited to doze off.

When the final dismissal bell rings, Aomine bounces from his seat and immediately goes to search for Satsuki.

“Hey! Text Tetsu to walk Taiga to the usual court!” He says when Satsuki emerges from view.

“A please would be nice, Dai-chan,” she sighs.

Aomine whispers a please and watches as she types the message and adds cute emojis. He already bolts past her in a flash of blue when she presses the send button.

He jogs down the stairs and out the door, zig-zagging past other students, holding his breath when he runs past the entrance (because he doesn’t want to encounter an unwelcomed visitor,) and heads toward the court.

It takes him some time to run there, especially since he had to dial back on the speed because he remembered a quarter of the way there that he had food in his bag, but he makes it nonetheless.

He spots Kuroko and Kagami in the distance. His former shadow seemed to be practicing his shooting while Kagami sat on the bench, most likely observing. There was also Nigou who sat obediently next to the redhead, seemingly watching over him.

“Yo,” Aomine calls out, catching their attention. Kuroko smiles and picks up the ball from the ground and approaches him, holding it out for Aomine to take.

“Good afternoon, Aomine-kun,” he greets.

“Were you waiting long?”

“Not at all,” Kuroko says, shrugging on his jacket and zipping it up. He looks over toward Nigou and calls him over. Nigou gives one last look to Kagami before trotting over to them both, his tail wagging when Aomine bends down to pat him.

“Thanks for watching Taiga for me,” Aomine smiles, scratching him behind the ear. Nigou barks in response, letting his tongue hang loose.

“I’d also like a thank you,” Kuroko says.
Aomine chuckles, giving him a mocking pat on the head. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” the shorter male says. He picks Nigou up and turns to Kagami. “I'll see you tomorrow Kagami-kun.”

Kagami waves in return, nodding. “See ya, Kuroko.”

Aomine watches Kuroko walk further down the street before he finally turns to Kagami, setting down his bag next to the bench.

“You ready?”

“To win?” Kagami grins, a look of confidence reminiscent of the one he’s used to seeing on the court. “Hell yeah.”

“Oh? You're already so cocky,” Aomine teased, removing his jacket. He knew this game would be nothing like their previous ones, primarily because they both took a break from the sport for awhile. Kagami especially seemed to have lost some muscle, which meant his jumping abilities wouldn't be where it used to be. However, just the thought of Kagami being well enough to even suggest playing again lit his heart with the same excitement he felt the year before.

The redhead stands up and rolls his sleeves up, taking his usual defensive stance in the middle of the court. “We doing best out of three?”

“As always,” Aomine says, tossing the ball back and forth in his hands.

There's a brief moment of silence of concentration before Aomine moves first, effortlessly breaking past Kagami who isn't too far behind him.

He couldn't describe how much he missed it. The sheen of sweat layering their bodies, the quick streaks of red in his peripheral, the slight jabs and taunts that make him wanna show off more. Not to mention, the body contact. It was a lot different compared to cuddling on the bed. It made him feel more alive, more rejuvenated. The redhead’s intensity was what he missed the most.

Kagami was a lot slower than before, which was to be expected. But what never failed to impress Aomine was the male’s unwavering perseverance; it never failed to make him annoyed or turned on. Maybe both. Kagami spent more time trying to prevent Aomine from scoring than trying to score himself. He utilized his whole body to block, and despite the weight loss, he still felt the male’s ever-looking presence wherever he looked.

An hour later, Aomine notices that the male starts staggering on his feet, his breathing becomes more ragged and uneven, and he's sweating profusely, a lot more than Aomine is. The redhead tries to hide it, but Aomine knows better than to keep pushing him.

“Let's stop,” he says in between pants. Bringing his shirt up to wipe at the beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

“What? Already?” Kagami frowns, holding the ball to his chest. “I haven't even won one game yet.”

Aomine smiles slightly, thrilled that Kagami seemed to be enjoying himself. He grabs a towel from his bag and walks over to him, gently wiping his face. Kagami wrinkles his nose at him.

“You played good, Taiga.”
“One more game!”

“You said that a few games ago.”

“Just one more,” he pleads.

Aomine shakes his head, looking down at the male’s legs. “Dude, your legs are shaking.”

“It doesn’t hurt,” Kagami says, quickly.

“As if I’d make you play with your legs all fucked up—again,” he says, remembering their first meeting.

“Daiki, please.”

“No.”

Kagami huffs in frustration, then stomps back toward the court. “Fine, I’ll just play by myself.”

“C’mere you idiot, don’t be a kid,” Aomine scoffs, taking a seat on the bench.

“I’m not being a kid!”

“Sure you aren’t,” he rolls his eyes. Kagami starts bouncing the ball, probably to spite him.

“Taiga, if you come here, I’ll feed you and give you a massage.”

Kagami catches the ball and leers at him. “A massage?”

“Yeah.”

“Head massage?”

“No, leg massage, but I can give you a head massage before you sleep,” Aomine suggests, giving him a shit-eating grin.

The redhead stands there for a moment, pretending to weigh his options, even though Aomine knew the answer was obvious. After an extended silence, as predicted, Kagami saunters over and takes a seat next to him.

The taller ace pulls him close to give him a quick peck on the cheek and tosses his jacket over, telling him to wear it. ‘You’ll catch a cold’ he mutters, and he reaches down to pull out the bento boxes.

“Here,” he hands one to Kagami, along with some utensils and a water bottle.

Kagami takes it with a surprised expression, gazing down at the bento, then back at Aomine.

“When’d you make this?”

“I didn’t,” Aomine says. “Ryo did. He wanted me to tell you to get better soon.”

“He did?” Kagami opens the bento and practically salivates at the sight of the food. “This looks great. Tell him I say thank you.”

“Will do.”

Aomine watches as Kagami heartily gobbles down the food, rice sticking to the sides of his mouth.
and dropping on his lap, and he can't help but chuckle fondly at the male. Kagami gives him a few hard stares in between bites, but continues shoveling food in his mouth.

A lot has happened between their last basketball game and now. They've had many talks with each other, they gave time for their relationship to grow and even cultivated a lot of trust. Maybe by now Kagami would feel ready to tell him, hell, he was close to hearing it back at the hospital before his family showed up.

Aomine finishes his food and places it back into his bag, waiting for the opportunity to bring up the subject when he sees Kagami staring earnestly at a group of people across the street.

When they come closer into view, Aomine sees that it's a family. A mother with kind eyes and laughs lines, a father with a strong but gentle presence, and their toddler son who stood in between them, gripping his parents hands and hopping as he's lightly scolded for only hopping in the puddles. He glances over at Kagami, whose eyes were already on him.

“I'm curious,” he says, using his forearm to wipe at the stray food bits around his mouth, but fails miserably when all he does is smear it around. “What were you like as a kid?”

Aomine grabs some napkins and hands it over to Kagami while he thinks of a response. He opted to talk about his hobby of collecting critters, but the redhead had made fun of it in the past. His parents and Satsuki could probably answer it better than he can.

After some deliberating, he manages to come up with, “Pretty annoying.”

“I can see that,” Kagami laughs, topping his bento and sliding it over to Aomine to put away. “What else?”

“Uhm, I was told I cried easily.”

“Really?” The male says, his mouth gaping wide open until he closes it shut again, his face going deadpan. “Oh, wait. No, I can see that too.”

“Excuse me?”

“You still do,” the redhead points out. “Crying, I mean”

“No I don't!” Aomine denies vehemently. “Name *one* time.”

Kagami raises one eyebrow, smirking. “A couple nights ago when we were watching that movie, but you tried to hide i--”

“Oh, stop right there,” Aomine interjects, waving his hand in front of Kagami’s face. “It's called being sympathetic, alright?”

“More like being a crybaby,” Kagami scoffs.

“Hey! I’m no crybaby. You cried when--” Aomine trails off, deciding that maybe bringing up Kagami’s breakdown wasn’t a really good idea. “--ever you lost....at basketball.”

He hopes Kagami doesn’t notice the hiccup, but judging from the male’s amused expression, he presumes he does. Being the angel he is, Kagami ignores what the male was initially referring to and plays along. “You noticed?”

Aomine grins widely, rolling his eyes when the redhead sniggers to himself. “Scoot closer you
doofus, do you want a massage or not?"

Kagami is practically beside himself with glee and scooches over, swinging his legs over Aomine’s lap, showcasing his (mostly) smooth limbs. Aomine rubs his hand over the male’s leg for a few seconds before he starts gently, but firmly kneading them, trying to loosen the muscles that have gone tight. He starts around the male’s thighs, lingering a little longer than he should before he presses small circles carefully around Kagami’s knees. Kagami involuntarily flinches from the touch and Aomine silently congratulates himself for being right about him being in pain.

After indulging himself in the feel of Kagami’s skin, he casts his gaze over to him, watching as Kagami blinks slowly, enjoying his mini massage session.


“What about me?” Kagami returns, tilting his head slightly.

“What were you like as a kid?”

Kagami quiets for a moment and plays with the hem of his shirt. “Reckless and I guess….stupid.”

“All kids are,” Aomine says.

The redhead laughs dryly at that, his legs squirming uncomfortably on Aomine’s lap.

The air around them becomes tense almost instantaneously. The guilt clung heavily on Aomine’s chest, tugging, twisting, and churning inside as he remembers just how grave the situation really was. Aomine stops massaging and looks at Kagami-- he had to ask him. He had to ask about America.

“Taiga,” he swallows hard. “I--uh..Can we talk?”

“Weren't we already talking?”

“No, I want to discuss something important,” Aomine says.

Kagami gives him a cautious look and nods slowly.

“It's been awhile since I brought it up,” he explains. “But you never told me what happened in America.”

The redhead mouths a silent ‘oh’ and his face immediately drops.

“What happened?” Aomine asks, reaching over to brush Kagami’s bangs out of his face. The male doesn't budge, just remains taciturn, burning holes at the plot of grass growing at the edge of the court.

“Taiga, say something,” he urges.

Kagami only offers a doleful expression before glancing back down. “I...don't know if I want to.”

“Why?”

“Because I just don't want to,” he repeats, his tone flat.

Aomine doesn't understand why the male continued to be so stubborn, but he had to get it out of Kagami one way or another, otherwise he wouldn't know what to do next--
“Is it because you're not ready?” Aomine inquires, squeezing his legs to encourage him.

Kagami was obviously still reluctant to answer, he simply averts his gaze again, gripping at the bench tightly.

“Taiga, you were ready to tell me back at the hospital before--” he doesn't have to continue in order for Kagami to know what he's referring to.

“I know.”

“So why can't you tell me now?”

“I don't know,” is all he says.

Aomine takes a deep breath in, chanting in his mind that he had to be patient with him. “You said you were afraid of me thinking differently of you and I told you there was nothing that could make me love you any less.”

Kagami still doesn't react.

“Taiga, I still stand by what I said back then.”

“I know you do.”

“Then why?” Aomine asks, he couldn't suppress the frustration clearly heard in his voice. He just didn't understand why the male was being so goddamn difficult. This was supposed to be for Kagami, but he couldn't help feeling rejected personally given the amount of time they spent together.

“Please,” Kagami whispers. “I know you’ve been waiting but...I just can’t.”

“You can't expect me to be there for you completely if you don't let me in,” Aomine says.

“I'm not expecting you to do anything.”

Aomine recoils, not expecting that statement to hit him so hard. He can't for the life of him, process what the hell was going through Kagami’s head. They've gone through so much together. Why was he suddenly pushing him away at the mention of America?

“Taiga, I want to be there for you.”

“I know.”

“You're pushing me away.”

“I'm sorry,” Kagami says, and Aomine notices his eyes brimming with tears, but he doesn’t let them fall.

He comes to the conclusion that maybe asking him out of the blue was a bad idea, that maybe he should've just let Kagami enjoy their basketball date, that maybe he shouldn't tell him that he learned what happened in America from Ichiro.

Sliding his arms underneath the redhead’s legs, he pulls him closer and kisses his cheek. Kagami looks at him in surprise.

“You're not mad at me?” He asks, a question so innocent and pure, Aomine feels the anger slowly
subsiding.

“Not mad, just a bit disappointed,” he says. “I shouldn't be forcing you...I don't wanna ruin our date.”

“It's not your fault,” Kagami shakes his head. “I'm not trying to push you away, it's just--”

“Hey, don't worry about it,” Aomine gives him a half smile. “You'll tell me when you're ready, right?”

Kagami nods, earning a grin from Aomine. But in the pit of his stomach, he still feels the guilt, the discontent, and paranoia bubbling inside.

The redhead suggests they go home and they begin packing their items in silence. The air still tense and heavy that he knows it won't be dissipating anytime soon.

For the first time in awhile, Aomine feels insecurity creep up again, his heart sinking as he intertwines his fingers with Kagami, feeling as if the male was slowly fading away again. Like the promise he made to stay was merely a dream.

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It was a weeknight that Kagami finds himself jarring awake at 4am, right on the dot, heart racing, throat constricted and barren, mind conjuring up the worst terrors imaginable.

He's not sure why it becomes a routine now. Maybe it's the fact that it's completely dark out, maybe it's the comforting silence that embraces him just as tightly as Aomine does, or maybe it's the fact that this is usually the time where he finds himself waking up from nightmares that ebb at his sanity, and he's in need of a reminder that protection is closer than he thought.

Kagami wonders why Aomine doesn't wake up, shrugging it off to be the male’s heavy sleeping habits, but he's almost positive the tan male notices by the way he holds him a little tighter, murmurs soothing words and brushing his lips against his forehead before snoring away into whatever dreamland he's in.

Kagami snuggles a bit closer to him, relishing in the male’s body heat and he feels Aomine go through the usual motions. Aomine brings him closer, sleepily tugs the blanket up to hide them both and mutters a soft, “S’ok, Taiga. I’m here.”

The usual softness of his lips never fails to make Kagami’s heart skip a beat when he feels them ghost over his forehead.

Everything about Aomine was just too good for him.

He stares up at the male’s sleeping face. Other than the slight frown on his face, he looked rather peaceful. Kagami reaches up to feel his bangs that have gotten way too long, the ends of his hair were starting to come down into his eyes. He slides the silky locks in between his fingers, then moves on to lightly trace the bruise; the yellowish green discoloration contrasting his skin starkly. After that, he runs his fingers down the edge of his jawline, back up to the bridge of his nose, ending at his lips.
For the past couple days, the atmosphere surrounding them was undeniably rigid, and he knew it was all his fault. The hurt on Aomine’s face was apparent the moment he declined to tell him what had happened during his trip to America.

‘I’ll ruin it,’ Kagami thinks. He didn't know what he would ruin exactly, only that he would. After all, he was the cause of the many ruins he faced now, and he didn't want Aomine anywhere near that.

Craning his neck, he places a tentative kiss on the other male’s bottom lip, then another on his chin, and lastly, on his collarbone.

Nuzzling into Aomine’s chest, he breathes a hefty sigh, and closes his eyes, willing himself to fall back asleep. In order to stop the constant flashbacks of his mother’s death replaying in his mind, he focuses on the rise and fall of Aomine’s chest and the sound of Aomine’s soft snore that quickly became his lullaby.

Like magic, his eyelids become heavier, and while the erratic thump of his didn't cease, he felt himself grow calmer. What finishes the job is Aomine’s sleep talking again, when he stumbles out an ‘I love you,’ and Kagami doesn't say it back.

But he thinks it.

“Kuroko,” Kagami calls, albeit a bit nervously. He hasn't been comfortable asking for a favor in awhile, but he swallows it down. He has to do this.

His shadow looks up at him from the book he's reading and Kagami feels immediate regret for prying his attention off it. He's been walking around with that book since Kagami had attended school again, and he didn't want to be much of a bother. Kuroko, as always, reads his mind easily and gives him an earnest look.

“What is it, Kagami-kun?”

Kagami scratches the back of his head, directing his gaze outside the window. “Uhm. I wanted to ask if you could do me a favor.”


“Ahh, well, it's nothing much, just..” he starts, hoping that it was a reasonable request. “I wanted to ask if you could text Momoi and tell her not to pick me up today.”

“I assume that means you’ll be skipping practice too?”

Kagami nods, hesitantly.

“May I ask why?”

“I got...things to do.”

Kuroko gives him a fond look. “Kagami-kun, I can't agree to this favor unless you elaborate a little more.”
Kagami sighs, he should've known he wouldn't agree so easily. It wasn't worth keeping it a secret, anyways. It was more embarrassing than it was concerning.

“I wanted to buy Aomine a present.”

“For?”

“For being a good...friend and I never got him a present for his birthday.”

Unless he counted the car that almost flattened him.

Kuroko Raises an eyebrow, staring at his light with amusement. “Don’t you mean boyfriend?”

“Whatever,” Kagami mutters under his breath. The label still felt so strange to him despite their constant cuddling and display of affection. And besides, their relationship level just sort of happened.

Aomine never asked him to be his and he never asked Aomine either. It was one of those things that just felt normal.

“It seems a little strange for you to be getting him a present this late.”

“Is it?”

“Yeah.”

That wasn't the whole truth though, and he hoped Kuroko wouldn't ask anymore questions. After all that's happened, Kagami felt like he wanted to express his gratitude in some way. Aomine had always tried to be patient with him, spoiled him lots, and even though he struggled with Kagami’s kept secret, he still tried to keep him close despite Kagami’s efforts to take a step back.

Kagami felt like surprising him for a change.

“Then allow me to accompany you,” Kuroko offers.

“But you'll miss practice.”

“It’ll be alright. I’m sure coach will understand,” he insists, reassuringly. “Besides, I’m sure Aomine-kun would feel more at ease if I were with you.”

“I guess...”

“This is probably not any of my business but— Kagami-kun, do you have money for that?”

Ah, right. He forgot that most things had monetary value.

“Oh, shit,” Kagami curses. He didn't have much on him, having left the bulk of it at his apartment, which he was sure was in the hands of Ichiro and Chai. “I don't have much.”

Kuroko nods, whipping out his phone. “No worries, I'm sure we can find something within your budget.”

“I don't have much,” Kagami says again. He didn't want to name the exact amount, just that it could pay for about 5 cheap phone charms.

“Aomine-kun will appreciate any gift you give him, no matter the value,” his shadow gleams,
tapping a message into his phone. “I’ll let Momoi-san know we’ll be hanging out after school.”

“Thanks, Kuroko,” Kagami feels a slight weight off his chance, thankful that his best friend seemed so accommodating.

He nods, raising his phone to let him read over the message. “I’m sure Aomine-kun will try to bolt over here anyways, so I made sure to tell Momoi-san not to notify him until school is over. By the time he gets here, we’ll be somewhere else.”

“Smart thinking,” Kagami grins. He knows he’ll be causing the other ace to worry, not that he already does that constantly, but he hopes the present will make up for the small amount of time he spends away from him.

The rest of the day goes by rather quickly for him. As reluctant as he initially was to go back to school, he found that it was one of the better ways to give himself something to do.

His classmates were respective of his space, his teammates tried their best to include him, and his partner never left him alone. Not to mention, he was also in possession of a certain lucky charm.

The final bell dismisses them and Kagami approaches Kuroko who waits at the door, an eager look on his face. Nigou’s head pops out from his bag and he looks happily at Kagami.

“Ready?”

Kagami nods and they both head out, taking the familiar road toward the mall strip they frequent during their free time (usually to look at basketball-related goodies). There’s a good amount of people bustling around, window shopping, and just chatting idly with friends.

“Momoi-san just texted,” Kuroko says, beside him. “She says Aomine-kun is already freaking out.”

“No surprise there,” Kagami scoffs, looking around to find something that pops out at him through the windows.

Kuroko and him scan the various stores, waltzing into random shops to find something that fit within his budget.

Clothes were much too expensive, especially now that the cold season was fast approaching. Knick-knacks didn’t hold any significant meaning and were too boring. Anything basketball related seemed like a safe bet, but it was too predictable, not to mention the only thing he could probably afford was socks or a couple wristbands.

“Find anything you like?” His shadow inquires, fiddling with the stuffed animals on the shelf.

Kagami shakes his head. He wasn’t sure why he was being too damn picky. The gift wasn’t meant to be casual, nor was it meant to be overly romantic.

“Don’t think too hard about it, Kagami-kun,” he pats his arm. “Like I said, he will be happy no matter what. If it’s too expensive I can help you out.”

“Oh, you don’t have to…” Kagami starts to say, but Kuroko walks away toward a shelf on the other side of the story. Sighing to himself, he continues to browse the shelves, walking toward the magazine stands. He almost considers just buying a dumb gravure magazine until a female employee, comes over to him, her voice way too perky for someone working a minimum paying job.
“Hi there! Are you having trouble finding anything?” The female chirps. The name tag on her chest read ‘Hana.’

Kagami involuntarily takes a couple steps back, feeling like he’s shrinking in size even though he towers over her pretty easily. He’s not sure why.

“Er..I’m just looking,” he stammers.

The employee looks at him sweetly and nods. “Is there anything I can help you out with?”

He never found himself having trouble with communicating in the past, yet for some odd reason, he felt so inept at it. Kagami just wants to turn around and leave, feeling like he’s bother. Maybe he shouldn’t have brought Kuroko all the way out here, maybe he should’ve just went home with Aomine. But he really wanted to surprise the male.

“Sir?” she calls.

Kagami looks at her and swallows hard. “Present.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m looking for a present for my…”

“Oh!” Hana squeals. “Your girlfriend?”

“Boyfriend,” Kagami corrects, clearing his throat. The female stares at him in surprise for a moment (which felt more like an eternity to him) then smiles widely. “Come with me, I think I might have some options for you.”

Kagami takes a deep breath and follows right behind her. Glad that she didn’t judge him or grab too much attention to him. He notices Kuroko and Nigou watching him carefully from a distance. And he has a passing thought that he’s glad he’s not entirely alone.

She stops in front of the jewelry section and turns around. “Jewelry and accessories seem to be popular gift items lately.”

Kagami takes in the various array of necklaces, watches, bracelets, and rings. All of them ranging from the most simplest designs to the most extravagant. He wasn’t sure if this really was a good option. He’s never seen Aomine donning any piece of jewelry in the time that he’s known him, although that could’ve been because it would interfere with basketball. Not to mention, he didn’t have enough money.

“Watches are typically the gift of choice for men,” she explains, waving him over to where they sat. “See anything you like?”

“Uhm..These are all really nice” he says, a sheepish expression on his face. “But I can't afford any of this.”

She smiles at him again, showing off her pearly whites. “Don’t worry about money, sir. Is there one that catches your eye?”

Kagami casts his gaze back to the watches on their respective stands, the case lighting accentuating the grooves and detailing on them. Most of them were sterling silver, and looked easily breakable, something he knew was probably a bad choice considering Aomine’s recklessness sometimes.
There’s a watch sitting all the way at the edge of the shelf. The strap was a darker, almost black-brown that would contrast nicely with his tan skin. The casing was silver with a simple design that showcased the modern model of the dial. The watch gave off a classy, refined feel.

He liked it.

“This one,” he murmurs, his hand gliding over the glass that protected the watch.

Hana treks behind the counter and opens the glass door, pulling out the watch carefully and places it on the counter.

“Have a closer look,” she instructs.

Kagami picks it up, fingerling the soft leathery material on the bracelet, then goes to feel the buttons on the side of it. A smile forming unconsciously on his lips. “I like it.”

She smiles and takes it from him, removing the stand the watch was attached to, and removes the price tag.

Kagami panics and grabs what little cash he has in his pocket and holds it out for her to see.

“I don’t have eno—“

“Hey, no worries,” Hana smiles, gently pushing the money back into Kagami’s chest. “We’re having a huge sale today to commemorate our 5 year anniversary.”

Kagami frowns. ‘But with the discount, it’s still not enough.’

“And you look like a nice guy,” she continues, wrapping the watch carefully in paper. “I just ask that your boyfriend takes good care of it.”

“Wait a minute,” Kagami attempts to say before the watch is placed in a bag and handed it to him.

“Too late, it’s already been processed,” she gives him a triumphant grin, and comes out from behind the counter.

Kagami stares mouth-gaped wide open at the bag and then back at her, clearly at a loss for words. Suddenly, he feels a hand on his back and he whips around to see Kuroko there beside him, bowing politely at Hana.

“K-kuroko,” he stutters, looking back at the bag.

“I saw what happened,” Kuroko nods. “You haven’t thanked her for the kind gesture.”

“But—” Kagami fumbles awkwardly. He had no idea why she had performed such a generous act. He didn’t feel deserving of it and the whole act itself made him feel- in a way- ashamed. Did she take pity on him for walking into a store with items he knew he couldn’t afford?

“Kagami-kun,” his shadow nudges him in his side. “She’s waiting.”

He fixes his gaze back on Hana, who stood there expectantly, twirling the brown curls that rested neatly on her shoulder. Kagami swallows and bows, choking out a convincing, “Thank you.”

Hana giggles and waves her hand in front of her face. “No problem at all, I hope you both enjoy the rest of the afternoon.”
“You, as well.” Kuroko says. Hana asks them to return one day and gives a final wave before walking to another browsing customer.

Kuroko turns to him. “Shall we leave?”

“I can’t accept this,” Kagami mutters, looking inside the bag. “I should return it.”

“Don’t worry about such matters. Besides, she did it out of her own volition, returning it now would make her feel bad.”

“But it’s too much,” he says. “She doesn’t even know me.”

“Yes, that is true,” Kuroko admits, guiding him toward the exit. “So don’t let this random act of kindness go to waste. Do as she tells you.”

“Easier said than done.”

Kuroko chuckles. “The fact that you’re guilty for receiving an item for free just validates that you’re a nice person.”

“You’re wrong on that one,” Kagami says inaudible under the overlapping chatter, tightening his grip on the bag.

The two of them start back on the path they came, walking in relatively comfortable silence. The sky above them was a brilliant, warm mix of orange and reds that translated well into the season of fall. People at booths at the edge of the path were handing out free samples of new menu items, conjured up for the holidays approaching. The bustling movement of the crowd was a painful reminder that life was constantly moving, selfishly in the way it never waited for anyone to catch up, leaving those behind if they refused to move. Kagami knew for sure that he would’ve been one of the ones to stay behind if Aomine hadn’t pulled him along.

As they draw closer to the end of the block, the crowds of people become more disperse, and Kuroko turns to him, his mouth opening to say something but Kagami doesn’t hear it. Because the next thing he knows, a hand is on the back of his collar, yanking him hard, dragging him in the opposite direction with such force that he finds himself stumbling, a strangled gasp escaping his lips. The wide area before him blurs, narrowing down until Kagami briefly realizes he was taken into an alleyway.

Before he’s able to turn around to defend himself, a hard impact to the back of his knees causes his legs to buckle, sending him tumbling to the floor.

Kagami coughs, bringing his head up to get his bearings. Kuroko was nowhere to be found, he only sees the steam seeping through the pipes on the walls around him.

“What the--” he croaks. A crunch of a footstep is heard behind him and he turns around, eyeing the large silhouette blocking his only exit.

“To think fate allowed us to run into each other,” the voice says derisively.

Kagami freezes, recognizing the male immediately. Weeks of living with him and his sister, the ridicule he faced everyday, the physical and emotional pain he withstood, the events of his birthday party all came rushing back into him in an instant.

“Taiga,” Ichiro says, a sneer heard on his lips. “I’ve been waiting for this moment.”
Ichiro and Kagami’s confrontation has begun! Next chapter will start off Kagami’s POV as well ^^ You'll probably see what he went through during the 2-3 weeks he spent separated from Aomine (staying with Ichiro and Chai) among some other things! That might provide insight on why Kagami does the things that he does. Thanks for reading~ Comments and kudos give me motivation to continue! See you next chapter!
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait! As long as this update took, I actually wrote this and the next chapter super quick (as in, I only had time to write in early early morning so do excuse the mistakes and inaccuracies!) my beta pointed some out but I’m much too busy to correct the whole thing. This chapter will transition from past to present so hopefully it doesn't confuse you guys! Posted this really quickly since I'm supposed to be working on other essays lol. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A few weeks prior

Kagami watches helplessly from the ground as the only person he’s ever come to wholly trust, was being dragged away. His cries were ringing tenaciously in his ear, and it takes everything for him to not let the tears escape him.

“Dad,” Kagami croaks, the sting of his cheek muffling his voice. “Please. He didn’t do anything wrong.”

His father averts his gaze, his arm crossed over his chest, and his lips were drawn in a thin line. He hears Ichiro and Chai harrumph on the side, shaking their heads in his peripheral.

“Never did I realize my son associated with people like that,” his father says. The pang Kagami feels in his chest was inexorable.

“He’s not like that,” Kagami pleads, struggling out of the nurse’s grip who sat fussing over him on the floor. “I asked him to defend me, it’s not his fault.”

Ichiro produces a fake gasp, coming into clear view, allowing Kagami to see the sneer plainly written on his face. “You mean you told him to attack us?”

“No, I ju—“ Before Kagami is able to finish, he feels a gentle hand on his shoulder. He turns around to see a pair of tired, navy eyes, her hair was disheveled, and she shakes her head.

“It’s alright, Kagami-kun,” she assures, giving him a sad smile. “My son will be alright. There’s no need to defend him.”

Kagami bites his lip, recognizing the sad expression that plagued his mother’s face before her death. He feels the constricting squeeze of his heart, the pain radiating to every nook and cranny of his body that far surpassed any physical pain he’s endured throughout his life. All he manages to say is sorry. Repeating it over and over again, knowing that it’s never enough to heal whatever it is Aomine’s mother is feeling.

“No, honey, stop apologizing,” she cooes, carding her hand through his hair. “You’re the one that took the blow. I’m sorry about that.”

Kagami opens his mouth to respond when he’s hoisted, rather roughly, to his feet by the nurses. The sharp old lady nurse turns to look at Aomine’s mom.
“We need to finish relocating him,” she snaps. “This patient is no longer your responsibility.”

“I understand that, but can’t we work something out? This child clearly feels more comfortable with me.”

The older nurse shakes her head disappointingly. “You allowed your son to place direct harm on a patient and a visiting family member. I’m sorry, but rules are rules. This family requested that he would be relocated and under my supervision, specifically.”

“I can see why,” Aomine’s mother mumbles, earning a loud -hmph- from the older nurse.

“Well, say your goodbyes,” she pushes Kagami toward Aomine’s mother, and she immediately draws closer, pulling him into a tight embrace. The position a bit awkward due to their height difference.

“We’ll see each other soon, alright?” she says softly, but Kagami isn’t sure he believes her.

He nods and pulls away, offering her a dubious smile. “Thank you.”

Chai grabs his arms, patting it lightly and pulls him alongside the rest of his family. He doesn’t realize Aomine’s warmth was essential until he feels the cold tips of Chai’s fingers, hollowing out his core, leaving only the memory of Aomine’s touch to burn away in the back of his mind.

“Any water?”

Kagami shakes his head.

“Food?”

He shakes his head again, and the older nurse, who he learned was named Haruka, sighs and shakes her head.

“Then do you want some more blankets?”

Kagami remains still for a moment, and then nods. His hands were curled up underneath the thin sheets, desperately trying to warm up.

“Alright,” she says. She spins on her heels and opens a cupboard in the corner of the room and grabs one, unfolding it and drapes it over his shoulders.

“Better?”

Not really, but Kagami nods regardless.

Haruka gently probes the mark on Kagami’s cheek where Aomine accidentally struck him, and clicks her tongue in annoyance. He briefly hears her mumbling about troublesome kids and their violent nature.

“I’ll get you some ice for that,” she grumbles, straightening up. “Need anything else while I’m out?”
Kagami shakes his head and lays back down.

“Alright,” and he hears her shuffle out of the room quickly, and shuts the door.

Kagami lays there in silence, feeling nothing but the chills rushing through his veins. He surveys the room, an exact replica of his old one, but somehow it feels different.

He grabs his cell phone from the table beside him and powers it on. For some reason, Haruka doesn’t allow him to use his cell phone much, and he could only guess that it was Ichiro who was behind that stupid request.

A simple background greets him, and he turns down the brightness, feeling slight disappointment when he’s received no messages from Aomine.

A few days had passed since Aomine had gotten kicked out forcibly, and he was hoping that he could at least communicate with him electronically. He assumes the ace to be angry with him, and he knows it wouldn’t serve as much of a surprise if he were.

Kagami sighs heavily and presses on the messaging app, opening a bombardment of texts he had recently received within the past few days.

He wouldn’t be able to respond to all, deeming his time limit a formidable foe due to Haruka’s return any minute, but he taps on Aomine’s name regardless and types in a couple quick messages.

Hey.

Idk if ur phone is still ok or not but I thought I’d send somethin anyways. I hope you’re healing up well.

----

Btw, I am ok. I'm guessin u prob feel bad about punching me so just wanted 2 tell u.

Kagami reads over them briefly and hovers his thumb over the send button, contemplating whether or not it was a really good idea to text him. Suddenly, he hears the faint sound of footsteps down the corridor outside his room, and without thinking, he taps the send button and shoves the phone beneath his pillow and lays back down.

Haruka saunters in moments later with an ice pack, handing it to him and instructs him to hold it to his face for fifteen minutes. Afterward, she directs him toward the call button (for emergencies only, she says,) then promptly exits, leaving him by himself.

Kagami slumps down in his bed, resting the ice pack on his cheek for about five minutes before he tosses it on the chair beside him.

He didn’t need it.

The stinging on his cheek reminded him that he was still capable of feeling, and he would rather feel something than be completely numb.

Kagami eventually relaxes, staring outside the window from his pillow, wondering if life was still moving along. Being stuck inside a room alone blocked his mind from thinking about the outside world, essentially making him feel like time has stopped. In a sense, his hospital room was what kept time obsolete.

He’s not sure when he falls asleep. When he wakes up, the room is encased in darkness, only the faint ray of the moon peeks through his curtains. His throat is dry, screaming for some moisture.
and he turns to see if there’s water anywhere.

The ice pack on his chair was replaced by a person, and upon closer examination, he realizes it’s his father. His eyes were closed, a faint snore escaping his lips, and even in his sleep, he still had the same despondent exterior.

There were a couple water bottles placed on a table behind his father, and Kagami didn’t want to wake him up. The memory of his father on the day his mother supposedly left still burned intensely in his mind.

His father’s dead eyes were the first thing he sees waking up from a coma after the accident. The solemn tone in his voice as he announces that his mother has left them both.

He’s too afraid to see those eyes again, so he sits up quietly, trying to reach past his father’s shoulders to grab the bottles when he shifts beside him. His father’s eyes crack open, blinking to adjust to the darkness of the room and then he fixes his gaze on Kagami.

Alarmed, Kagami sits back down quickly and looks away.

His father just stares sternly at him for a minute, then he turns around to grab the one of the bottles behind him, and holds it out for Kagami to take.

“Thank you,” he says, quietly. He takes it and snaps the top off with ease and chugs it down, feeling relief when his thirst subsides.

His father watches him intently, a wistful expression on his face when Kagami twists the cap back on the water bottle and places it beside his pillow for easy access.

He clears his throat before speaking, “So, how are you feeling?”

“Ok,” he replies.

“Quite a stunt you pulled back then.”

Kagami looks at him questionably.

“The birthday party,” he clarifies.

Something in Kagami stirs at the mention. The memory was clear as day. The way he felt discovering his mother’s death, his father’s face when Kagami lunged at him, the rejection he felt when his father didn’t allow him back home, practically letting him rot like the trash he was.

He knew the anger he felt that day wasn’t justified, because he was the one that caused everything.

“I’m sorry,” was all he managed to say.

His father remains silent in response and Kagami knows it means he’s not forgiven.

“If you’re feeling sorry for anyone, it should be your mother. She had a lot of dreams, y’know,” he adds.

“I….didn’t mean for mom to die,” he says.

“What did you think would happen playing in a busy street like that?”

“I wasn’t thinking.”
“That accident was easily avoidable.”

“I know,” Kagami whispers. “I know it’s my fault, I just… I just wish you would’ve told me.”

His father turns to face him, the discontent spoken loud and clear. “It wasn’t easy telling you. For the longest time, you either spoke negatively about your mother or not at all.”

“I didn’t remember the accident at the tim—“

“You only loved your mom when you found out she died.”

“That’s not true,” Kagami says. “I’ve always loved her, I was just angry because I thought she didn’t love us anymore and left.”

His father doesn’t respond to that. He leans back in his chair and stares up at the ceiling, his hands folded in his lap.

“Dad,” Kagami calls, trying to maintain the control in his voice. “Why did you leave me?”

His father pinches the bridge of his nose, dragging his hands down his face. “You resemble your mother a lot.”

Kagami looks at him warily, waiting for him to continue.

“You’ve got her eyebrows, her smile… a lot of her little habits.”

His father sighs, running his hands through his graying hair.

“It’s why I didn’t let you come back home and it’s why I never came back to Japan to stay with you,” he explains. “Sometimes, I can’t bear to look at you, especially after what’s happened.”

Kagami takes a shaky breath, willing himself not to cry. The pang of rejection welling up inside again.

“I tried my best throughout all these years, Taiga,” his father says. “I didn’t want to blame you. I didn’t want to push you away… I know you were young at the time but I just..I couldn’t accept that your mother’s passing was something of mere fate.”

Kagami bites his lip, nodding his head. He felt frustrated that now of all times, his vocal cords decided to fail him. He wanted to fight back, to scream, to ask him more questions, to cry and beg his father for forgiveness. But he couldn’t. He knew his father was right.

“I don’t know what else to tell you. Today, you got a glimpse of just a fraction of the pain I felt when your mother passed away that day.”

His father stands up and shrugs on his jacket, avoiding eye contact.

“Wait, Dad—“

But his words fall on deaf ears. Kagami watches powerlessly as his father walks out on him again, possibly for the last time. As his back recedes, he can’t help but pray to his mom to let this nightmare end.
The first thing Kagami does when he wakes is check his phone, sliding it out from under his pillow and blocks it with his body, just in case Haruka decides to walk in. He’s not surprised when he doesn’t see any new messages, but that didn’t keep the feeling of disappointment bubbling in the pit of his stomach.

‘He’s probably mad,’ Kagami thinks. ‘Or his phone is still broken.’

Kagami chews on his lower lip, unsure if maybe the messages he sent yesterday were too casual. It was his fault Aomine was thrown out. If he possessed the strength to defend himself like Aomine wanted him to, maybe he would still be beside him.

He takes a deep breath and starts typing another message.

**Hey Aomine.**

**I wanted to apologize for what happened. It's my fault you got kicked out. I shouldn't have asked you to do that. I'm really sorry.**

---

**It was rly selfish of me. I can't stop thinking about it. I get if ur still mad. I'm sorry.**

Kagami sends the message instantly and stares at the screen, hoping to see the little chat bubble pop up. Instead, an alert reminds him to charge his phone and he shuts it off.

He’ll check again later.

A couple hours pass and Kagami is seated on the edge of his bed (due to Haruka’s instructions), and waits patiently for her to explain why. Moments later, she comes back holding a tray.

Haruka hands him a glass of water and spins back around to pick up the pill bottle. She unscrews the cap and shakes it, then turns back around.

“Take it,” she says, sharply. She places the pill in his open palm and he stares down at it, noticing that the size and shape of it was completely different than the one he was taking before.

“So..” Kagami mumbles, rolling the pill around in his hand, inspecting it.

Haruka crosses her arms and quirks an eyebrow. “What’s the problem?”

“Well,” Kagami clears his throat and holds his hand out for her to see. “I don’t think this is the right one.”

“You were prescribed a higher dosage yesterday,” Haruka explains.
“What? Why?”

Ichiro snorts. “Obviously ‘cause your mind is fucked up.”

Haruka doesn’t even spare him a glance, her stern gaze was locked on him and him only, and he knows whatever was coming next was going to give Ichiro leverage.

“Your therapist doesn’t think your old dosage is working,” she says. “There hasn’t been any improvement from your first session to your current one.”

Kagami frowns. “It hasn’t even been that long.”

“It appears she has made a mistake prescribing you a lower dosage,” Haruka was getting visibly frustrated with him. “This’ll be a bit stronger.”

“But—”

“Just take the fuckin’ pill, Taiga,” Ichiro says.

Haruka nods, waiting for Kagami to do as he’s told. He was already resistant to taking the pill in the first place and only agreed to it due to Aomine’s support. But now he’s alone, and there wasn’t any use arguing with either of them. He’s tired, he just wants to go home, he wants to sleep, and if taking the damn pill got him closer to that, then he would.

So he pops the capsule in his mouth and drowns it down.

Kagami curls up miserably in his bed. He was wracked with tremors, his already cold body was covered in goosebumps, and severe chills were accentuating the numbness he had forgotten was there.

He coughs, trying to wrap himself against his blankets. The pounding in his head torturing him relentlessly ever since he’s been taking the stronger medication. The side effects weren’t letting up, and they were hitting him hard.

Spurts of nausea hit him in waves, the sensation radiating from his stomach to his extremities, and he grips the blanket around him tighter, begging for someone to put him out of his misery.

Kagami hears the door click open, and he recognizes the tap of heels that click in synchronization with his aching head. She stops in front of his bed and shakes him, jarring him.

“It’s time for your counseling session,” she says.

Kagami shakes his head. “Not today…”

“You already missed your appointment yesterday.”

“I k-know,” he shivers. “I’m not feeling well today, either.”

Haruka sighs exasperatedly. “I’ll ask him to come to your room instead.”

“That’s fine..” Kagami whispers.
He expects her to leave instantly, but she doesn’t. She places the back of her hand on his forehead, (which he thought was odd because she had a thermometer) and walks over to the cabinet and pulls out a couple more blankets, layering them on top of each other.

A short moment later, he feels the weight of said blankets on him, and not-so-gentle hands tucking him in.

“Thank you,” he murmurs, realizing his voice was muffled by the blankets. Luckily, she hears him and nods curtly.


He nods weakly, unsure whether or not she noticed. The sound of her heels fade away after a few moments and he rubs his face into his pillow, trying his hardest not to give in to the fatigue weighing him down.

Before long, he hears footsteps returning and his door swings open. His counselor shuts the door and comes around his bed, sitting in the chair beside him. He pulls out his notebook and gazes at Kagami’s tired form.

“Meds kicking your ass?”

Kagami nods.

“I’ll make the session short today,” he says. “Hopefully, you’ll actually answer my questions.”

‘Fat chance.’

“Alright,” the counselor begins. “How’ve you been?”

“Fine,” Kagami replies meekly, stifling a cough.

“Describe ‘fine’ for me.”

“Same as always.”


“Uhmm...sad, I guess.”

The man nods, scribbling it down. “Can you tell me why you’re sad?”

“...I don’t know.”

The counselor clicks his pen impatiently. “Kagami-kun, you can't keep giving me the same answer.”

“I can’t give you anything different,” he says. “It’s the truth.”

The old man sighs, rubbing his temples with his knuckles. “Well can you elaborate on that?”

“There’s nothing to elaborate on.”

“Then just tell me when this all happened,” he says. “What were the moments like leading up to your breakdown a couple days ago? Have you always been sad? Were you just stressed?”
Kagami quiets.

He’s not sure how to answer, or rather if he wanted to answer. He couldn’t comprehend why the counselor had to know his personal business in order for him to receive help.

“I don’t know,” he says.

“You don’t know?”

“No.”

“Kagami-kun,” he takes in another heavy breath. “Do you not remember or are hiding it from me?”

“I don’t remember,” Kagami lies through his teeth. He didn’t feel remorse for it either. This man couldn’t help him and he knew that.

“On that day, you mentioned that you missed ‘her,’” his counselor says. “Who were you referring to?”

“That’s...none of your business,” he mutters.

“Pardon?”

“I said it’s none of your business,” he says, again.

“I see,” his counselor says. He closes his notebook and clicks his pen, placing it at his side. “It seems you’re uncooperative today. However, I’ll let it go since you seem to not be feeling well. I hope next session you’ll open up more.”

With that, he exits the room. Haruka walks in a few moments after, a scowl present on her face.

“Again?” she asks.

Kagami doesn’t answer.

“You need to be more aware of your current situation,” she snaps. “These people are trying to help you.”

“I’m trying my best,” he says, softly. He just didn’t want to tell them his business.

“Not enough,” Haruka says. She checks his vitals and tucks him back in again, wiping the sweat off his forehead. “Seems like you’ll be discharged soon, so get some rest.”

She flicks off the lights and draws the curtains, walking back over wipe his forehead with a damp washcloth. After she's done, she leaves without another word and shuts the door.

Kagami lays there for a moment, absorbing his thoughts. He really did try to speak his feelings. There didn’t seem to be a point anymore. He was alone now. Aomine hasn’t made the effort to come back and his father hasn’t visited him since their talk.

He pulls out his phone again and types a couple messages down, explaining to Aomine that he didn’t like the medication he was on and that therapy wasn’t going so well.

He’s sure Aomine won’t respond, and he’s rather accustomed to the silence by now— after all, he spent the majority of his time alone in America.
Kagami turns off his phone and curls up in a tighter ball. Letting the pounding in his head pull him to sleep.

“Oh?” Chai says, scouring the shelves lined up against his living room. “It’s so minimalistic.”

“And the stuff you do have is all basketball related,” Ichiro picks up a magazine and flips through it, chuckling. “How simple-minded are you?”

Kagami doesn’t respond, just turns to shuffle into his kitchen to pour himself a glass of water while Ichiro and Chai go into his things. He had been finally been discharged that morning. It was something he was initially looking forward to, until his father decided to leave him again and placed him in the care of Ichiro and Chai.

Not that he didn’t expect it.

His father had traveled back to Los Angeles without notifying anyone except Chai—who then told Ichiro, who then loudly exclaimed to Haruka, who then informed Kagami like he wasn’t in the room, listening to the same conversation.

He takes his water and treks down the hall toward his room. His hand ready on the door handle when he hears Ichiro shout from the living room.

“Where the hell are you going?”

Kagami gives him a confused look, gesturing toward his room.

“Room,” he mutters, rubbing his aching joints. Haruka had told him the side effects wouldn’t subside until another couple of weeks. ‘Be patient’, she had said. At this point, he knew whatever was coming in the next couple weeks would far surpass his medication’s side effects.

“Oh? I wanna see,” Ichiro smirks. He saunters down the hall and roughly pushes past Kagami, flinging the door open. He walks in with his hands planted on his hips, scanning his room.

Ichiro hums. “Surprisingly clean.”

Kagami briefly remembers that Aomine had cleaned it the day he slept over, and Kagami didn’t find a reason to mess it up.

Chai’s head pops in through the doorway. “Lemme take a look.”

She walks in, looking through his items on his shelf. She picks up a framed photo of Kagami and the rest of Seirin, gazing at it for a moment before he hears her make a disgusted noise and puts the photo back, face-down.

Meanwhile, Ichiro opens his closet and looks up and down, his eyes suddenly concentrating on an object in the corner. He pulls it out and opens the lid, removing an envelope that was taped poorly.

“Jackpot,” he chirps, holding the envelope out for her. “Hey Chai, I found it.”

“You did?” she walks over and crouches down, taking the letter from him.
“Wait,” Kagami calls, reaching out to take it from her, but Chai swipes her hand back and glares at him.

“It’s your father’s,” she corrects, ripping off the top and reaching into the envelope.

She pulls out the stack of bills and fans it out, mouthing silently to herself as she counts them.

“It’s for rent and food,” Kagami says, frowning. “Give it back.”

“Didn’t you hear her? It’s your old man’s money,” Ichiro scoffs. “So you’re a freeloader, huh?”

Chai sniggers, pocketing the money.

“I’m not,” Kagami says.

“You got a job?” Ichiro asks.

Kagami opens his mouth, but closes it again, shifting on his feet uncomfortably. “No.”

“So you don’t contribute whatsoever?”

“No…”

“So all you do is make bad grades and prance around a gym juggling a ball?”

“N..no.”

“Oh come on, Taiga. Your father works really hard to pay for you, y’know. He wouldn’t have to work so hard if he weren’t a single parent,” Chai rolls her eyes. “And we all know whose fault that is.”

Kagami doesn’t argue with that. He doesn’t have the patience or the will to.

“Very least you can do is give it back,” Ichiro smirks. “And don’t bother him anymore. He’s done with you. You know that.”

Ichiro pats him on the shoulder and walks out of his room with Chai following right behind him. The door is slammed shut and the sound of their laughter echoes in his ears.

Kagami laid unmoving in his bed, the light filtered softly through his curtain, allowing a little more warmth into his bedroom. He would’ve gotten up to open them, but the brightness would’ve been unbearable. The burning sensation within was already searing throughout his entire body.

He wasn’t aware he was able to feel any worse than he did then. His body’s current condition was at its lowest point, he couldn’t muster the strength to move. It wasn’t about the medication anymore. His body was giving up on him.

Kagami wasn’t exactly sure how long had passed since he’s been back home. The only indication was during the times he had his phone out, only used when he had texted Aomine.

He knew the male wouldn’t respond. He had since given up hope of being saved and was
transitioning into the mindset of just disappearing slowly. A place he hasn’t been since his immediate return from America. At this point, the texting served to prolong his sanity more than anything.

Ichiro and Chai never bothered him these days, which is something he’s rather grateful for. They told him that if he wanted food, he had to go out and buy it with his own money; a problem already in itself (and a contradictory one at that). For one, aside from his father’s money, he didn’t have any. And two— well, Ichiro and Chai wouldn’t allow him to step foot outside his room, let alone the apartment, unless he had to shit or go to his therapy appointment (which he didn’t bother going to for the past four or five days.)

‘As if we’d let a crazy person walk around,’ they had said. ‘You’ll cause more trouble if we let you out there.’

The cards were stacked against him, and all he could do was allow it. It was, like they said, the least he could do after putting his father through such a miserable life.

He coughs, hacking up whatever was left in his stomach.

He still took the antidepressants.

He wasn’t sure if he was taking them correctly since his essence of time was skewed, but he still took them.

Maybe it would be the last thing he did sorta right.

His stomach churns and he feels it building inside. The burning and sting of acidity becomes familiar in his throat, and he lets it out for the third time that morning. The bile hitting the floor and Kagami chokes a cry, clenching his abdomen through his soaked shirt when the pain crashes into him once again. The pulsating ache attacks him mercilessly over and over throughout his whole body, threatening to crack open. Once it passes, he gasps for air, trying to fill his lungs again, trying to relax his body.

He feels himself growing weaker. His legs that were the staple of his ability wouldn’t move without exerting much effort; his hands tremored constantly, making it even difficult for him to grasp a glass of water; and his eyes never stayed open long enough for them to focus.

Kagami didn’t have the strength, but he had still tried. Tried for his mom, tried for Aomine and tried for himself, but even then he couldn’t find a reason to continue trying.

‘There’s nothing here for me anymore.’

Yet he couldn’t help but remain hopeful that he would wake up from his sleep, thinking it was all just a silly nightmare. Maybe his mother and father would yell at him for sleeping in, and then he’d run to the court to find Aomine there, lazily relaxing on the bench with his usual scowl, and they’d play whilst barking at each other in a heated but intimate way.

Since the incident at the hospital, he had promised himself he wouldn’t cry. Because he knew if he allowed himself to cry, then Aomine would cry, even though Kagami had always thought the action was so out of the tanned male’s nature.

He would never forget the tears running down Aomine’s face that day.

Despite the promise that he made, he does feel the heat of something trickling down his face as he shakily pulls out his phone, tapping down a blurry message as fast as his trembling digits could
I'm really sorry.

He wishes he could type more and tell Aomine exactly the things he’s sorry about, but his vision begins to grow dark around the edges, and his breathing slows down to soft tempo, threatening to lull him to sleep. And before long, he feels himself being submerged.

For a moment he thinks he’s dead. Although he’s not sure why. He feels something shaking against him, and he thinks it’s himself before he feels wet flutters against his face and neck.

He hears a voice, whimpering and cracking, and it takes Kagami a brief second to decipher it as Aomine’s, his usual sultry voice was broken and meager.

When his vision clears, he sees Aomine above him. Snot and tears alike, staining his face, and Kagami feels like laughing for the first time in forever and tell him he looks gross, but all he can muster up is a weak excuse for appearing dead-like without meaning to.

Kagami had a revelation that day. It was a thought so clear and vivid in his mind and he knows it’s the same thought he’s been avoiding for so long, thinking it’ll make things easier. But this thought claws at him, unhinging itself bare in front of his very eyes until all he sees is Aomine and only Aomine, and he knows for certain that this’ll be the moment that will follow him for as long as he’s here.

He felt content being in his arms. Aomine had this air of comfort surrounding him, numbing both his body and mind; it was a remedy he didn’t know existed, and yet those emotions clashed with his guilt.

What was he supposed to do when he wanted to go but didn't want to part with Aomine? How was he supposed to feel knowing he still hoped for happiness despite the fact he didn’t deserve it?

Since then, there was always a constant battle rattling his mind.

‘I can’t leave him, I made a promise.

Aomine will get over me.

But he’ll cry again.

No one stays long enough anyway.

But he said he wouldn’t leave me.

I’ll ruin it all eventually.’

It always came down to that last statement.

And here he was, sitting helplessly on the concrete as Ichiro towers over him, grinning derisively, and he knows that this will end the battle within his mind.

Kagami clutches the bag containing Aomine’s gift close to his abdomen before swiftly putting it behind him.

If anything was coming out of this whole ordeal unscathed, it would be that watch.

“When I saw you walkin’ around a shopping center...I just couldn’t resist,” Ichiro says, laughing
sickly. “It’s like the universe is allowing me to indulge myself a little.”

Ichiro takes a step closer to him, stuffing his hands into his leather jacket. “A shame your friend was able to run away. It’s no problem though, my guys can catch up to him.”

Kagami tenses, curling his fingers into a ball. He had no worries about his shadow, feeling a bit at ease for Kuroko’s lack of presence so he knew he would have a chance in slipping away. However, there was a slight pang of fear creeping up on him. It was apparent that Ichiro was getting serious and if Kuroko was caught, there was no telling what would happen.

“Just leave him alone,” Kagami says, bite lacking in his tone of voice. “He’s not involved.”

“You’re right,” Ichiro says, smiling slyly. “He’s not involved at all. Aomine would’ve been a better target, huh? I could always change my—“

“No!” Kagami cries. “Leave him out of this too.”

“That’s not something I can comply with,” he shakes his head. “It’s your fault Aomine got involved. If you had just left for good on that day in America, none of this would’ve happened.”

Kagami swallows, his throat dry and sore. He knew that god damnit.

“But what do you do? You run all the way back to Japan like a fucking coward and then claim you’ve got a mental illness as an excuse,” he steps closer, and Kagami takes a cautious step backwards. “You’ve caused a big mess here, Taiga, and you still haven’t taken responsibility for it.”

“I don’t know what you expect me to do,” Kagami chokes out. “I’m—“

“You’re ruining lives here. First your mother’s, then your father’s and now mine and I’m sure you won’t stop there.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

Ichiro sucks in a sharp breath at that, taking the last remaining step toward Kagami and grabs him by his collar, roughly pulling him up and slams him against the brick wall behind him. The amount of force knocks the air out of Kagami’s lungs and he emits a strangled cry.

“There you go again, trying to act all innocent,” he seethes.

“I’m...not,” Kagami chokes out.

With one swift motion he throws Kagami toward the floor, and he crashes down, his balance failing him miserably. He winces as the floor meets his side immediately and he can feel the ache on impact as he rolls over gasping.

“Looking at you irritates the fucking hell outta me,” he hears Ichiro take a step above him. “Y’know people can’t hear you in here right? Your friend ran off somewhere, your cell is in my possession, and it looks like that Aomine dude isn’t around to protect you this time.”

Ichiro dangles the mentioned cell in front of him, the screen lights up to display all of Kagami’s past text messages sent to Aomine.

“You should’ve just kept your mouth shut.”

Kagami fumbles to his knees, and sits crouched down, his hands stretched outward, planted on the
ground. He doesn’t know what Ichiro is planning on doing, he’s not even sure what he was planning on doing.

He knew he deserved it, but he didn’t know how much he would take from him.

“Ichiro, I’m sorry,” Kagami says apologetically, the words fumbling awkwardly out of his mouth. “But I don’t know what you want me to do. I don’t know how to fix it.”

“You seriously think you can fix this?”

No. No, he doesn’t. But Kagami knows it’s either him or Ichiro that goes down, and something’s still tugging insistently at him. He’s not sure what it is.

“If I can, then—"

“Too late,” Ichiro objects, raising his right leg, only to slam it down mercilessly on Kagami’s side and he topples over.

Without given another moment, he’s yanked upward by his collar, his eyes finding Ichiro’s in close proximity and what he sees terrifies him.

Ichiro’s condescending smirk suddenly vanished and he was met with pitch black irises that held no hint of sympathy, of mercy. Those eyes fixated on him before Ichiro cocks his arm, and pauses for a moment before he swings and Kagami braces for impact, bringing his arms up to shield his face.

And then Ichiro throws his fist forward, swinging unrelentlessly at his head. He feels the pain searing instantly through his head, his torso, his arm, wherever fell victim to Ichiro’s assault, and he knows he’s powerless to stop it.

Kagami attempts to crawl forward, his cries muffled by Ichiro’s verbal slander. He feels warmth seeping down the right side of his head, down his cheekbone, on his lip, he feels his hearing receding into white noise.

He’s grabbed roughly by the hair, and thrown into the corner. He instantly curls up in order to protect his vital organs, huddling as close to the wall as he’s able.

“You know your dick of a boyfriend knows, right?”

Kagami barely hears it, the sound of Ichiro’s voice. It was like he was submerged under water.

“What?” he manages to croak out, his voice caught in his throat.

“I told him what you did,” Ichiro sneers, wiping what looked to be his blood onto his shirt. “A few days ago actually.”

'They met,' Kagami thinks. 'And he didn’t tell me.'

Kagami swallows hard, the metallic taste spreads throughout his mouth and he swallows again. Suddenly the bruise on Aomine’s face made a lot more sense.

Yet again, Aomine got hurt getting involved with him.

“Wanna know what he said?”

Kagami shakes his head, grimacing when a sharp pain at his neck disagrees with his movements.
“He said you should’ve known better at that age,” Ichiro says.

At that statement, Kagami’s body feels numb. His eyes sting and it’s brimming with tears, threatening to fall out, but he refuses to cry. Especially in front of Ichiro.

He clutches the hem of his bloodied shirt and eyes the bag, now laying crumpled up on its side, with the watch inside.

Ichiro follows his gaze, slightly irked that Kagami ignores him and walks over to it, picking it up and shakes the watch out of the bag into his hand.

Kagami watches as Ichiro eyes it, and turns it over in his palm.

“This is pretty nice, eh?”

“Give..it back,” Kagami says.

“Huh? Why?”

Kagami doesn’t respond, he moves painfully on his knees and crawls over. “Please.”

The employee was nice enough to give it to him, even though he had nothing significant to offer her, even though she didn’t know him.

Kuroko had taken time out of his day for him and supported him. He had reassured him and as much as he hated Nigou, they both watched over him diligently. And now Kuroko was most likely in harm’s way.

And this watch already meant the world to him. Given to him by special people to gift it to someone else who was special.

Kagami watches in horror as Ichiro raises the hand gripping the watch and chucks it unceremoniously on the ground, and stomps on it multiple times.

The glass shatters loudly and Ichiro kicks it toward him. Rolling until it stops in front of him.

It laid there, ugly and shattered beyond repair.

And he can’t help it.

Kagami cries. Because this was all he knew he could offer Aomine. He had nothing else. He was a burden and he knew it. He wanted to spoil Aomine like he spoiled him. He wanted to give Aomine something perfect that wasn’t him, and now it’s ruined.

Aomine would never want to keep something so broken in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Goodness, there's so much drama. The next chapter will be released in a few days since I've already finished writing it. & don’t worry about Kagami! I wonder what'll happen B’) Thanks for reading!
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

When there's a million things wrong with this chapter but you post it anyway just because you're tired of looking at it :) I apologize ahead of time for the mistakes! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“That bastard,” Aomine mutters, kicking at the trash can.

He had ran all the way to Seirin after being notified by Satsuki that Kagami would be with Kuroko after school. Sure, he might’ve looked like an idiot, but the change of plan was so damn last minute.

He eyed the gym in the distance, contemplating whether or not to ask the redhead’s teammates of his whereabouts. Since he had brought up the subject of America to Kagami, he noticed that the air around them had been rather tense.

Part of him regrets bringing up such a sensitive issue but another part doesn’t. Kagami needed to be reminded that he was still here, waiting until he was ready to open up.

He hoped Kagami didn’t view his sudden interest in the topic as a threat.

‘What if he’s planning on shutting himself out again?’ He wonders.

As much as he wanted to keep the male safe, he figured a breath of fresh air was what Kagami needed.

Still, it didn’t keep him from worrying.

“How dare he,” Aomine kicks weakly at the trash can again. “Tetsu better be keeping you safe.”

He nearly scoffs at that. Out of the two of them, he knew Kagami had a much wider chance of surviving a fist fight (if he willingly protects himself, that is.) Kuroko on the other hand— he tries not to think about it.

“Dai-chan!” A wail from behind snaps him out of his mini sulking session, and he turns to face her.

“What?”

“You can’t just run off like that!” She pouts, punching him on his arm. “Jeez! Do you know how long it took me to follow you?”

He rolls his eyes and saunters off in the direction she came from. “My bad.”

“Was running all the way here worth it?” Satsuki continues, following behind him. “You need to relax. They’re just hanging out.”

“That’s not what bothers me,” Aomine says, stuffing his hands into his pocket. “Something could
“Nothing will happen.”

Aomine takes a shaky breath in. Maybe it was the fact that he spent way too much time around Kagami that his sudden empty presence was jarring, but he knew Ichiro was out there with knowledge of finding Kagami’s whereabouts. The idea felt like a constant weight on his shoulders, and for some reason, it feels a lot heavier today.

“I feel off,” he mutters.

“Off?” Satsuki inquires, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah, like something isn’t sitting well with me,” he explains.

“That’s what you call *paranoia,*” Satsuki brushes loose strands of hair behind her ear. “Seriously, when you worry too much, that’ll happen.”

“I’m not paranoid!”

She rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “You think something bad is gonna happen every time Kagamin is out of your sight.”

Aomine bristles. Ok, sure that was true. But certain circumstances caused it.

“So? I can’t worry about my boyfriend? I would have nothing to be concerned about if Ichiro wasn’t hovering around just *waiting* for a chance to do something!”

“Dai-chan,” Satsuki sighs. “Nothing is going to happen. I’m sure he’s safe.”

“And how do you know that?”

“I don’t,” she admits, shrugging. “But if you don’t relax, you’ll never feel at ease when Kagami is with someone else beside you.”

He clicks his tongue in annoyance, rubbing at the nape of his neck. “Like I said, I’m not worried ‘cause he’s with someone else.”

“But you’re worried Tetsu-kun can’t protect Kagamin.”

“Yeah,” Aomine admits. “Tetsu is probably the least qualified person for the job. No offense to him.”

Satsuki harrumphs, tossing the hair behind her shoulder. “Tetsu-kun could protect me!”

“Against a fly, probably,” he mumbles, trying to drive away the uneasy feeling, yet again, settling in the pit of his stomach. Satsuki babbles something in response to which he tunes out by habit, and continues walking, focusing on the cracks in the sidewalk. Honestly, it was like his Kagami senses were tingling.

Satsuki follows him in silence, trotting along as she tries her best to engage him in mindless banter. On other days, he would find the action tolerable. However, his patience is nearly thinning.

“Why don’t you do something to distract yourself?” she asks, tugging at his sleeve when she realizes that Aomine’s ‘uh huh’ and ‘yeahs’ didn’t suffice.
“Like what,” the words sounding more like a statement than a question.

“Basketball?”

“By myself?” He pulls his hands out of his pocket to cross them. Huffing loudly to show Satsuki just how annoyed he was.

Satsuki looks at him quizzically. “Don’t you usually play by yourself?”

“Well…. Not lately,” he grunts, quickening his pace.

“Then c’mon. You can release some of that pent up frustration,” she encourages, pushing him from behind toward the nearest court, much to his displeasure. “And if you get hungry, I’ll treat you this time. Kay?”

Aomine feels his expression soften. He’s not going to give up the opportunity of free food, no matter how distraught he was, so he nods and lamely replies, “okay.”

He’s spent about an hour so far at the court near his house. He glances at the street every few minutes, hoping to see Kagami sauntering toward him with the slight awkward smile he’s accustomed to seeing him wear as of late (although he is graced with one of his signature goofy smiles now and again.) The disappointment he feels when there’s no one there was to be expected, and he’s not sure why he bothers to get his hopes up. Most of the time he just sees Satsuki’s smiling face as she directs him to concentrate on what he’s doing.

However, Aomine does feel somewhat grateful. He’s a little less anxious and the short workout gave him the opportunity to release some energy that just seemed to collect in his hands. Satsuki could offer conversations with actual substance if she really tried.

He wipes at the sweat collecting on his forehead and nose, feeling hot yet chilly from the cool fall air and decides to call it quits.

Aomine approaches Satsuki who seems to be busily pressing buttons on her phone. Once she’s done, she looks at him expectantly and smiles as she hands him his water bottle.

“All finished?”

He greedily chugs the water and nods.

“Great!” She says. “You hungry?”

“Hell yeah,” he shrugs on his jacket, wiping the excess sweat around his face with the hem of his shirt and throws his bag over his shoulder.

Satsuki stretches as she stands up and dusts her skirt off. “Where to?”

“Maji, obviously,” he grunts, walking out of the street court, still saddened by the fact that Kagami never showed up.
They walked in silence for the whole way there.

The closer they got to the burger joint, the more prominent the uneasy feeling in his gut grew.

‘I’m not distracted now,’ he concludes. ‘Stop worrying, he’s fine.’

They enter Maji and Satsuki reminds him that she’s paying and tells him to find them both a seat.

He nods compliantly and shuffles to the farthest booth in the corner, slumping down in his seat.

The unpleasant rock in his stomach was turning into more of a stomach ache and he tells himself it’s the hunger.

Eventually Satsuki orders their food and she walks over with their tray and sets it down, placing his drink and burgers neatly in front of him. She sits down in front of him and smiles again, rubbing her hands together.

“Let’s dig in,” she says.

Aomine mutters a thanks and unwraps a burger. For some reason, just the sight of it nauseates him. He buries any second thoughts and takes a bite into it, and swallows, watching as Satsuki mirrors his movement.

They sit in silence once more, the thick air around him accumulates as the quietness is prolonged, and he clears his throat in an attempt to banish it.

“Satsuki,” He calls, unable to handle the amount of pressure surrounding him. Call him paranoid, but he just knew that something bad was coming.

She looks up through voluminous lashes and blinks at him in question.

“Anything from Tetsu yet?” Aomine asks.

Satsuki drops her chicken nugget and grabs her bag, rummaging through it for her phone. She pulls it out and turns it on.

“Nope.”

“ Weird,” he mutters, tapping his foot. Kuroko would often send Satsuki pictures of Kagami throughout the school day, so he found it odd that he didn’t do the same here.

“I told you not to worry,” Satsuki sighs.

Aomine squirms in his seat. “M’not…”

“Dai-chan,” she says, concern imminent in her voice, and she leans in to look at him. “Would it make you feel better if I call?”

He nods and Satsuki gives him a slight smile. She presses a few buttons and hands the phone to him. Aomine grabs it and holds it to his ear, anxiously listening to it ring.

Some seconds pass and a female robotic voice almost makes him jolt out of his seat.

*I’m sorry, the number you have reached is no—*

Aomine hangs up and stares angrily at the phone. “He didn’t pick up.”
“Really?” Satsuki frowns, lowering the fry from her mouth. “That’s odd.”

“What? Why?” Aomine asks, a bit of urgency in his voice. “Why is that—?”

A loud and cheesy ringtone cuts him off and he fumbles with the phone, clicking the answer button without checking to see who was calling.

“Tetsu?” He cries.

No voice speaks on the other line. All he hears for a moment is the sound of feet running against the ground, loud rustling, and then he’s met with silence.

“Tetsu?” He calls again.

Satsuki gets out of her seat and slides in the booth next to him, leaning close to listen.

There’s a loud crack on the other end and then he hears panting, a familiar voice telling Nigou to stay still before he brings the phone up to his lips.

“Aomine-kun?”

He jumps at the sound of his name and it takes everything for him not to create a scene.

“Tetsu! What the hell was all that?” He says sharply.

“No time for me to explain everything,” Kuroko says quickly, his voice low in a whisper. There was panic evident in his tone and his voice cracked miserably. Aomine didn’t remember the last time he’s heard Kuroko like this which made it clear that whatever was happening, was serious.

“It’s Kagami-kun,” Aomine’s body freezes instantly, feeling his limbs going ice cold, feeling the uneven beat of his heart. Kuroko breathes a wobbly breath before continuing. “I think the man that took him was Ichiro.”

Satsuki gasps loudly, covering her mouth in shock as Aomine remained there speechless, letting the information sink in. The sudden urge to puke sat at the base of his throat, and he realizes this —premonition— was related to Kagami this whole time.

And he felt like a damn idiot trying to ignore it.

“He was...taken—how?! When did this happen?!” Aomine snaps, gripping the cell so tight his hands were shaking.

“About half an hour ago,” Kuroko says, attempting to keep his voice steady. “There were some guys chasing after me but I lost them.”

“And Taiga?!”

“I don’t know where he is. I couldn’t see where Ichiro was taking him,” he says. “Aomine-kun, I’m really sorry, I’ll—“

“Where are you?” He interrupts, standing up.

“I’m at the park, but I’m safe,” Kuroko assures him. “Please just find Kagami-kun. He was taken around the mall strip we visit frequently.”

Aomine doesn’t bother with a response and hangs up. He tries to bolt out of there as fast as he can,
tripping over Satsuki’s feet and he looks back at her in anger.

“I—I’ll call for help,” she says quickly, picking up the phone and dialing numbers.

He doesn’t say anything else as he sprints past others, ignoring the curses that were thrown at him because of his negligence.

Once he’s out of Maji, he looks back and forth frantically, trying to determine his whereabouts and the proximity of his location to the mall strip.

He catches sight of the fluorescent neon sign he uses often as a marker to pinpoint his direction and darts in that course, trying his best to weave through the sea of people.

Aomine calls Taiga’s name, desperate and ear-piercing and he doesn’t stop to catch his breath. He knows the fact that Ichiro sent people after Kuroko means that the male was serious when he made those threats earlier.

That meant that Kagami was in danger and he needed to get to him fast.

He knew Ichiro wouldn’t be dumb enough to take him back to the apartment, and if Satsuki did notify the police, they might’ve checked there first.

Instead, he runs into every single building, asking loudly if anyone’s seen a man his height with crimson red hair but he’s only met with confused expressions and shaking heads. Every minute that ticks by is more time Kagami spends still in harm's way, and he can’t bear the thought of that. He can’t bear the thought of breaking his promise to protect him for the second time.

Aomine sprints out of the coffee shop he was in and into the next store, opening his mouth to call once more when a female voice beside him speaks.

“Is everything alright?” She asks.

He snaps his head to his right and finds a short girl with brown curls looking up at him.

“A boy— No! a male—have you seen—he’s got red hair and he’s around my height—and he—“ he chokes out in a stammering mess, not realizing the wetness flowing delicately out of his eyes, not seeing the other customers looking his way. “Please, I cant find him— he’s missing—“

“Hey, calm down,” she cooes rubbing his arm and handing him a handkerchief from her pocket. “Red hair, you say?”

He takes the handkerchief and nods.

“Forked eyebrows?” The employee inquires farther, an anxious expression etched on her kind features.

Aomine’s heart jumps. “You’ve seen him?!“

The girl, Hana, gives him a tentative nod. “Yes, he was in here about an hour ago. He was taken?”

“Yeah, so can you tell me which direction he went?” He asks, wiping his eyes.

“He went to the right,” she points.

Aomine doesn’t loiter around any longer than he has to, so he just nods and quickly turns on his heel and runs in the route Hana had pointed to.
He keeps running until he notices that the amount of people are sparse and he stops to gather his bearings.

“Aomine!” He hears someone call and he sees someone approach him.

“Midorima?”

“Honestly, I can't believe you let something like this happen,” he mutters, running past him.

“Shut the hell up and just focus on finding him,” Aomine grunts, following behind him.

Aomine continues calling for Kagami, asking people who walk by but gaining nothing of value.

Suddenly, a faint wisp of long red hair catches his attention in his periphery and he turns toward it, feeling vague nostalgia.

The woman doesn’t stop running and for some reason, it’s like she’s pulling him along. His feet starts moving without another thought and he finds himself chasing her, and he hears Midorima’s cry for him to come back.

But he doesn’t stop. He keeps pursuing this woman because god damnit he knows her and he dodges in and out of people, around corners, going through shortcuts and twisting out of cracks in the wall until finally she stops at the entrance of a shady alleyway next to a restaurant.

The woman turns around to face him, a pleading look on her face and it’s like a glass shatters.

Before he can speak, she’s gone and all he sees in the farther distance is black and he feels himself drawn in again.

A sudden smack on his shoulder causes him to jump in his spot and he turns around to see Midorima, face fully displeased but on guard and he urges them both to continue.

Aomine takes that as silent agreement and presses forward, treading carefully down the alleyway.

As they approach the opening, they stop, Aomine looks back and forth, trying to spot the redhead.

“There’s a—“

Midorima cuts off as they both catch sight of a male slumped over by the wall. Aomine’s breath catches in his throat, and he bolts over to him, skidding to a halt on his knees.

“Wait, this is..” Aomine’s eyes widen at the male in front of him.

The male donned in black laughs weakly and winces at the same time. His face was battered and swollen, his lips were busted, and it didn’t take much to figure out his hand was broken due to the way it bent in ways it wasn’t supposed to. Despite all that, Ichiro still tried his best to give his signature shit eating smirk and Aomine sees that his teeth were chipped and bloodied.

“Where is he?” Aomine seethed.

“How the hell should I know that?” Ichiro coughed, grimacing as he adjusts his body. “He just ran off.”

“Where?”

“The only way out of here you fucking moron,” Ichiro says, but there’s no heat behind it.
Aomine clicks his tongue in annoyance, and fights the urge to sock him in the face. He stands up and faces Midorima, who’s busy punching things into his green phone, most likely updating the others.

“Watch him, I’m gonna keep looking for Taiga,” Aomine says,

Midorima looks at him, then fixes his gaze on Ichiro, and nods.

“Thanks,” Aomine spins on his heel and runs back down the alleyway, his head racing at miles a minute. He didn’t bother asking Ichiro who pummeled him senseless, or what he told the redhead. There were only two possibilities of what went down anyway: he was rescued by someone else or he did it himself. But he couldn’t know for sure unless he found him.

Aomine stopped once he got outside, ignoring the confused faces of others, feeling as lost as he did before.

And then something clicks. He doesn't know why he hadn’t thought of it before, but he hopes to god he’s right about the direction he’s going. He sprints down a familiar path, down the sidewalk where he counts the amount of cracks, where he stops to admire the flowers in secret and halts in front of the chain fence, out of breath and braces his hands on his knees.

He wipes the sweat off his forehead and looks up to find him, sitting motionless on the bench, with his back facing toward him, looking toward the sky as if the last couple hours didn’t happen. Aomine finds himself running toward him, and crashes into him, wrapping his arms around the male’s chest in order to keep him from tumbling down. The redhead yelps and squirms in his arms, trying to wiggle free.

“Ow! Shit, that hurts!” Kagami groans, and Aomine lets go, the redhead turns to face him with a scowl present on his face. Aomine clenches his jaw when he sees that the male’s face didn’t look any better than Ichiro’s.

“Taiga, are you okay? What the hell happened?! Where did you go?” Aomine blurts out, clamping his hands on the side of Kagami’s face, frowning at the dried blood along the side of his face. “You’re bleeding!”

Swatting his hands away, Kagami stands up and stuffs his hands into his pocket, before leaning in to place his head on his shoulder. “I’m fine.”

“Bullshit! You have some explaining—“

“Later,” Kagami says, into his neck. “Let’s go home.”

Aomine shuts his mouth, and instinctively encases the male into his arms, rubbing the back of his head gently. This was the first time Kagami had ever acknowledged Aomine’s house as his home, which made the request all the much harder to deny.

He had sent the redhead to the bathroom to wait while he had searched for the first aid kit. Before that, he figured that he should call Satsuki to tell her that he and Kagami were safe.

Waltzing over to the home phone, he dials her number and holds it up to his ear, grateful that he
had bothered to remember it when Satsuki nagged him months ago about how it was important to memorize her number in case something happened.

The line picks up after one ring and Satsuki is already screeching in his ear before he has a chance to say anything.

“Dai-chan?!”

“Yeah.”

“You’re home?! Are you alright?! Where’s Kagamin?”

“Obviously I’m home if I’m calling you from my home number,” he replies plainly. “I’m fine and Taiga is with me.”

He hears Satsuki take a deep breath and sighs heavily, making him feel guilty for making the poor girl worry too much. “Oh thank goodness, that’s such a relief. Where did you find him? Is he alright?”

“Basketball court, but he’s pretty beat up.”

“That’s weird, I’ve ran past the court a few times but I didn’t see him. Well— I guess that doesn’t matter now. I’m glad he’s safe,” Satsuki trips over her words. “Shouldn’t you take Kagamin to the hospital?”

"He wanted to go home. It's fine, I'll treat him."

Satsuki hums on the other end. "I guess that's fine then. Ah, Midorin called me earlier."

“Did he?”

It made sense. He had left the green haired male in charge of Ichiro, of course the news would’ve spread between their little group of friends.

“Yeah, we’re all at the hospital right now. Seems like he took Ichiro there and he’s getting treated.”

“Tch, should’ve just left the bastard there to rot,” Aomine mutters under his breath.

Satsuki catches it and chuckles lightly. “Ah, it was Akashi-kun’s idea, seems like he still has people looking for Kagamin. I should go tell him you found him. Oh right! Tetsu-kun is here as well. Seems like he’s talking to authorities.”

“I see,” Aomine says. “How is he?”

“He’s fine! He’s been worrying nonstop but he’ll be happy to hear that Kagamin is safe and sound.”

“Then that’s good, I’m sure Taiga will be relieved to hear that,” Aomine feels himself ease at the news.

“I think I have to leave now, so I’ll be hanging up first. We’ll stop by later!” Satsuki says, he could hear rustling noises in the background. “I’ll tell Auntie what happened. Take care of Kagamin, Dai-chan!”

“You don’t gotta tell me that,” Aomine mutters, and the line disconnects.
He heads to the closet down the hall and pulls out the first aid kit hidden behind rolls of toilet paper and then saunters up the stairs. Thinking he should change Kagami out of his clothes, Aomine goes into his room quickly to grab a new pair of clothes, taking a blue T-shirt and comfortable gray pajama pants then goes down the hall where Kagami was waiting.

He knocks a few times on the bathroom door before opening it, the redhead looks up from where he’s sitting on the edge of the tub, and follows Aomine’s movements as he approaches to kneel down in front of him.

“Tetsu is fine,” Aomine says, thinking it was best to rid the redhead of any worries.

“That's good...What about Ichiro?”

Aomine purses his lips at the name, wondering why Kagami had bothered asking for his well-being.

“Don’t worry about him,” he grumbles, placing the clothes on the toilet seat. He pauses to inspect Kagami’s clothing, who was stained red with blood. Kagami seems to notice and he clears his throat.

“Most of it isn’t mine.”

“Take off your jacket and shirt,” Aomine instructs, opening the kit. “Did he hurt your legs?”

Kagami nods as he shrugs off his jacket, grimacing at the way his clothes made contact on his skin.

“We’ll treat your legs too, so take your pants off.”

“Okay,” Kagami mutters.

On any other day, he would’ve been thrilled to see the male strip off his clothing. He watches intently as Kagami brings his shirt over his head, exposing the black, blues, and reds that painted his body. The scratches on his arms and the clear gash on his forehead made him regret not punching Ichiro earlier when he had the chance.

“For fucks sake,” Aomine mutters, lightly running his fingers over the bumps and bruises along the skin on his abs. Kagami flinches from the coolness of his touch and Aomine removes his hand.

“Can’t believe you let him do this to you,” he gets up to wash his hands, and then grabs a small washcloth underneath his sink and returns, leaning over him to turn on the bathtub faucet to a cool temperature.

“I’m gonna wash you.”

“I can wash myself,” Kagami says.

“Just stay quiet,” Aomine retorts, huffing.

Kagami doesn’t put up a fight and obeys when Aomine tells him to swing his legs around.

Switching the water to the shower head, Aomine brings it down and runs it over the male’s arms and legs, luckily there wasn’t as much blood as there were bruises, until he notices that one of his hands were tremoring slightly. Kagami’s knuckles were beaten, raw and skinned. Aomine grabs his palm gently and raises it higher to get a better look. The redhead bites his lip when Aomine
holds the shower head over it to clean the wound.

“How did you get this?” Aomine asks.

Kagami shifts under his scrutinizing gaze. “I missed and hit the pavement instead.”

“Missed?” Aomine frowns. It takes him a moment before he understands. “So you were the one that did that.”

Kagami doesn’t respond to which Aomine takes as silent agreement. There were a bunch of questions he needed answered, but he knew barraging the redhead wasn’t the way to get it.

Aomine grabs the washcloth and runs it under the water before placing the shower head on the floor of the tub and wrings the towel dry.

“Look up,” he mutters.

Kagami does as he’s told and tilts his head back. Aomine brushes his red locks out of his face and starts patting gently around the wound, rubbing it enough to remove dirt and debris. Kagami scrunches his eyes closed at the action and Aomine can tell the male is holding his breath.

“Sorry, it’ll sting a bit,” Aomine says.

Once he’s sure the wound is clean enough, he leans down to place a fleeting kiss on the male’s chapped lips before patting him on the back.

Kagami gasps slightly at the action, opening his eyes and swings his legs over the tub again, staying perfectly still as Aomine grabs another clean towel to dry him off.

“You’re surprisingly good at this,” Kagami mutters, observing Aomine’s careful movements.

“I was pretty reckless growing up,” Aomine says, grabbing the saline spray from the first aid kit and giving it a few shakes to mix up the contents. “Had to treat my own wounds because my mom wasn’t home much and Satsuki was too much of a wimp to do it for me.”

“Oh,” Kagami stares past his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

Aomine shakes his head and grabs Kagami’s wounded hand. “Don’t apologize for something like that.”

He sprays Kagami’s wound and the male recoils, jerking slightly away at the sudden jolt of pain, but settles when Aomine grips his hand tighter.

Aomine grabs the rolled gauze and begins dressing his wound, wrapping it slowly and tightly around his hand.

A period of silence washes over them before Kagami finally speaks, voice low and tired.

“I don’t regret it,” he says, eyes vacantly staring at his hand in Aomine’s. “But I don’t feel good about it either.”

Aomine finishes and stares up at him. “What happened?”

Kagami laughs bitterly, shaking his head and gestures toward his body. “What do you think happened?”
“You got your ass beat,” Aomine states. “But so did he. Why did you let him hurt you?”

Kagami’s lips are drawn into a thin line and his gaze breaks away. “You know why.”

“You let him mess with your brain.”

“He didn’t mess with me.”

Aomine shakes his head and leans in, squeezing the redhead’s fingers. “He made you feel guilty about something that wasn’t in your control, Taiga.”

“But it was my fault.”

“No, it’s not.”

“You don’t understand,” Kagami sighs and drags his hand down his face. “I keep screwing shit up for everybody.”

“You haven’t done anything wrong. That guy is just—“

“He hurt you,” he says, frustration dripping in his voice. “He hurt you and you didn’t tell me. You didn’t tell me you knew.”

Aomine opens his mouth to say something, but closes it again. He had a feeling that Ichiro would’ve told the male, but that didn’t make preparing for this moment any easier.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you,” is all Aomine manages to say.

Kagami shrugs it off, either too occupied with other thoughts to care or deeming it too late to make a big deal out of.

Another air of silence washes over them and Aomine stands up to dress the wound on his head. Grabbing the spray he murmurs for the male to close his eyes and he complies, squeezing his eyes shut to brace himself for the sting soon to come.

“Look, Taiga,” He sprays it quickly and leans down to grab a bandage, rustling through the kit to find one big enough. “I really am sorry I didn’t tell you I met him.”

He figured that mentioning it was a forced meeting would’ve upset the boy even more. And while he regrets not telling Kagami sooner, he decided that opting out small details would be the best unless Kagami asked for details.

Kagami blinks his eyes open and meets his gaze. “I know.”

“You’re not pissed?”

He sighs and rubs the back of his neck, looking at wall. “I don’t blame you.”

“What makes you say that?”

“You probably kept it from me because I was gonna react in a shitty way,” Kagami mutters, fingering the gauze around his knuckles. “If I were you, I would’ve kept it from me too.”

“You’re not reacting in a shitty way now.”

He shrugs again, and Aomine grabs the T-shirt and holds it up, muttering, ‘up and over,’ and
Kagami lowers his head, allowing Aomine to slip it on, carefully maneuvering around the wound.

“What made the difference?” Aomine asks, grabbing the pants.

“What?”

“What made the difference?” He repeats, slipping the redhead’s limbs through the leg of the pants and Kagami stands up momentarily for Aomine to finish putting it on. “Why did you allow him to hurt you when you were gonna hurt him? Why were you going to react shitty then, but not now?”

Kagami gives him a stern look. “Stop asking questions you know the answer to,”

“You thought you deserved it?” Aomine raises an eyebrow. “But obviously something in you snapped if you wounded him that much.”

“Well, if I knew the answer to that, I would tell you.”

“You went through all the motions without even knowing why you did them?”

Kagami doesn’t respond, only furrows his brows as he taps on the first aid kit with his foot.

“Yeah.”

“So you don’t know.”

“I don’t know why.”

“Did he piss you off?”

“....I guess.”

“So you thought you deserved it when he hit you?” Aomine asks, frowning at the contradiction. He didn’t quite understand what was going through the male’s head, but the male was opening up. He had to be conscious of his words. “But you hit him back?”

“I--,” Kagami replies, slowly. “I don’t know, Daiki. I don’t know.”

“What don’t you know?” Aomine asks, rubbing his arm.

“Everything.”

“Define everything.”

Kagami groans, burying his face into his hands. “God-- Daiki, I said I don’t know! My whole mind’s a mess, I can’t even tell what I’m thinking anymore,”

“Your mind isn’t fucked up. It’s just a lot to process,” Aomine says, trying to maintain a steady voice. He stands up to take a seat beside him.

“Easy for you to say. You only think about one thing at a time.”

“Tch, asshole. It only looks like that. I’ve got a lot on my mind,” Aomine admits, rubbing circles into Kagami’s back. “Besides, it may take a bit of organizing. You just need to sort out your emotions.”

“How?” Kagami asks, exasperatedly. “All these thoughts go way too fucking fast for me to keep up. It’s like my brain is getting way ahead of my body.”
“First off, relax. You can’t concentrate if you’re on edge all the time.”

“Like I said, I can’t.”

“You can.”

“It’s too fucking much for me. I can’t do it.”


“All of the above.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Kagami echoes, his voice raising, hands sliding off his face and he stands up, unsure of what to do with his body. “You should already know the answer to that, Daiki! Because I keep fucking up. All the damn time, I’m doing something to—”

He stops himself and paces listlessly around the room, taking deep breaths and laughing. Just fucking laughing and Aomine stands up, worried that Kagami was headed toward another mental breakdown. He realized now that the male was unleashing all his pain and thoughts he had kept to himself. Now that Aomine knew everything, Kagami was feeling liberated enough to flush out all his feelings. Before, all the redhead used to think about was basketball, but with the amount of weight on his shoulders now, Aomine is sure he was feeling overwhelmed.

“You haven’t fucked anything up,” Aomine says.

“Stop lying to me!” Kagami yells.

“I’m not lying to you, Taiga.”

Kagami inhales shakily, his fists clenching and unclenching like he didn’t know what to do with himself. “Do I have to spell it out for you?! I took my mom away, I broke up the family, my dad doesn’t even want to look at me anymore, you got into a fucking coma because of my dumbass mistake, then you get kicked out the hospital because I’m still too much of a pussy to face my dad properly, you got hurt again, I put both you and Kuroko in danger, and the whole time—”

“The whole time I was pummeling Ichiro’s face, I wanted to kill him,” Kagami says. “And I was prepared to.”

“Taiga—“

“So he was right about me, the whole goddamn time! One minute I think I deserve the worst, and the next I— I’m just so messed up, Daiki. I’m going crazy. Everyone is right, there’s something wrong with me. I know I promised you that I would try and I am, I try every single damn day but it’s so hard when I keep making mistakes. I’m just so tired. I really am,” Kagami says, eyes burning with tears brimming at the edges but Kagami doesn’t let them fall. “What’ll happen next? What if I break something else, Daiki? What’ll I do then? Just suck it up and keep moving forward? I can’t do that, I can’t live like that.”

“The only thing you’re breaking is yourself,” Aomine takes careful steps to approach Kagami. “You haven’t ruined anything.”

“Stop saying that, I’m so sick and tired of hearing it,” Kagami barks. “You and everyone else spout that bullshit because that’s what you think I wanna hear.”
“It’s true, though.”

“Are you even listening to me?!”

“I am, but I told you earlier that those things happened out of your control.”

“Well, I could’ve prevented her death. I could’ve prevented a lot of things.”

“Maybe, maybe not. Fate has its own plan,” Aomine says, and Kagami shoots him a wary look. “If your mom didn’t take the fall for you, you would’ve died. And if you weren’t alive, I wouldn’t be where I am today. I got hit by that car because I wasn’t smart enough to look before bolting in the street. You call me an idiot all the time—and you’re right about that.”

“Yeah, but—“

“I got thrown out of the hospital because of the actions I chose to take. Protecting you was what I promised myself awhile back and I went through drastic measures to keep that promise. The consequences are mine and mine alone. Not yours to bear.”

“And what Ichiro did was his choice. It’s his responsibility so don’t beat yourself up over it. Tetsu doesn’t blame you and neither do I,” Aomine smiles slightly, reaching over snake his hand down Kagami’s arm to capture his hand. “Your dad broke the family, not you. He might’ve been your mom’s husband but he’s also your dad. It’s not your problem if he doesn’t want to continue his role as one.”

Kagami doesn’t say anything, but he doesn’t have to because his exterior speaks plenty loud. He stares hard at the floor, allowing Aomine’s words to settle in his mind.

“You must be getting tired of me,” he mutters.

“Quite the opposite,” Aomine says. “I can’t get enough of you.”

Hearing that, Kagami shakes his head, sighing heavily and digging the heel of his hands into his tired eyes. Strained laughter rumbles from his chest as he falls to his knees. “God, you’re so—“

Aomine takes the few steps to join him on the floor, crouching down beside him to ruffle his hair.

“Amazing?”

“Unbelievable,” Kagami corrects.

Aomine wraps his arms around his waist and pulls him close, their noses inches apart. He grabs the male’s wrists and lowers them from his face, Aomine’s gaze unrelenting.

“I’ve said this many times and I’ll say it again,” he murmurs. “I’m not leaving you. I love you. I’ll say it as many times as it takes to get it through your little pea-sized brain.”

Kagami looks into his eyes, searching for the truth behind his words, but Aomine doesn’t falter, leaning forward to expose his intentions. Ruby irises move from his eyes down to his lips, and Kagami gets the message and initiates. The male returns the embrace and smashes his lips against his, half desperation, half gratitude as the redhead leans into the kiss, his hands slide up to grip at Aomine’s collar refusing to break just for a moment. Kagami kisses deeper, needy and insistent, until Aomine has to force himself to separate to get a breath of air, panting and dazed.

“I’m assuming that means I helped?” Aomine says, breathless and places a few more soft kisses on the male’s nose and lips.
Kagami drops his head on his shoulder, heaving shaky breaths as he tries to compose himself.

“Shut up.”

They stay that way for awhile, Kagami rubbing his head into Aomine’s neck with his arms wrapped tightly around his middle like it was his lifeline.

“Hey, Taiga,” Aomine calls, rubbing his back. “It’s okay if you’re tired.”

There’s a period of hesitation until Kagami mutters into his shoulder. “Is it?”

“Yeah,” he says. “Take things one day at a time. It always gets worse before it gets better.”

Kagami groans. “Always?”

“Usually,” Aomine corrects, massaging the nape of Kagami’s neck. “I’m sure this is the worst of it.”

“I still wanna smush his face in,” Kagami says. “For hurting you.”

Aomine laughs, “You’re not the only one who wants him in hell.”

Kagami hums softly, sniffing loudly into Aomine’s neck. “And he ruined it.”

“Hm?” Aomine hums, and Kagami detaches himself, wiping at the redness around his eyes.

“The watch.”

The redhead shuffles over to his pile of clothes and rustles through them and picks up his jacket, fishing through his pocket for an item.

He stands up and hands Aomine the so called watch, disappointment written clear as day on his face.

“I went out with Kuroko to get you this,” he explains. “Ichiro broke it.”

Kagami was right about the item being in poor shape. It’s not super pretty looking if he was being honest, it’s obviously seen better days. The glass was shattered, the silver was chipped off all around the edges, and the skin of the strap was peeling off but miraculously—it was still ticking.

“Sorry, it looks like shit,” Kagami mutters. “You don’t have to keep it, I just grabbed it ‘cause…”

“Lemme see,” Aomine says, quickly strapping it to his left wrist. Despite the tough appearance, it fit him just right. He couldn’t keep the wide grin from spreading across his face. “Not so bad, huh?”

“Wait, didn’t you hear me? I said it was broken.”

“No, look,” Aomine holds his wrist out for him to see and points to the hands still ticking away. “It still works.”

Kagami frowns and narrows his eyes at the accessory. “Still, I wouldn’t be surprised if it just stopped.”

“Don’t worry about it, these things can be repaired,” Aomine reassures him, bending over to capture his lips once more. “Thank you, Taiga. I love you.”
Kagami smiles a sad smile, but there’s a hints of gratefulness in the way he gazes almost proudly at the watch strapped securely around Aomine’s wrist. And perhaps there’s newfound strength in the way his dark eyes regain a bit of its spark when he hears Aomine call his name, when he hears only adoring words escape the lips of a man who only speaks about the important things.

So of course Aomine is taken aback when Kagami rushes back in for another kiss, hands wound tightly around his neck and eyes fluttering closed in a kiss that felt different than all the others. It was at that moment when Aomine knew he was being accepted wholeheartedly, even more so by the way the redhead separates himself enough to murmur a resounding,

“I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

So, Kagami finally let everything out ^^ Let me know if you want Kagami's PoV on what happened after Ichiro destroyed the watch (it's implied, but if you're curious I can find some place to incorporate it in the next chapter.) Anyway, I think the story will end soon! Maybe in a few chapters? I'm not sure yet. I always let stories write themselves so 9/10 times, the story always deviates from my original plan. Watch it be like 10 more chapters lol xD Hope you enjoyed it! Thank you so much for reading!

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